

Opening Address

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From ‘Making a Difference’ to ‘Claiming Spaces’

In 2002, the Māori and Psychology Research Unit at the University of Waikato made a valuable contribution to the teaching and practice of psychology in Aotearoa, via the Māori Graduates of Psychology Symposium. The symposium in 2002, with its theme of “Making a Difference” was designed to: provide an opportunity for exposure to role models; bring together Māori graduates of psychology to network and share information; and through the publication and dissemination of the Symposium proceedings provide a resource for teaching and practice in psychology. With over 100 delegates and 30 presentations, the 2002 symposium was widely acknowledged as a success. It resulted in the compilation of proceedings which have become a valuable resource in psychology.

While there have been informal gatherings and ongoing networking over the past five years, there have been no formal gatherings since that time. We at the Māori and Psychology Research Unit consider it timely in 2007, five years on, to convene another Symposium. Our conversations with Pacific psychologists and recognition of the ties which exist between us as Pacific nations, saw our focus expand to include Pacific psychologists and psychologies.

In many ways the 2002 symposium was an attempt to see if we could actually do it. Although we knew that as Māori psychologists we were making a difference, a greater question was - had our critical mass increased to the point

where we could fill a programme over one and half days comprised only of Māori focused material? The answer was an overwhelming YES. Yes - we could do it. Yes - our critical mass had increased to this point.

But what do we actually mean when we talk about this concept of critical mass? Critical mass is often used when talking about Māori and Pacific psychologist workforce development. Although often discussed, it is not necessarily that well defined and explained. In many cases it is assumed to simply mean increasing our numbers to a certain point. But actually the concept of critical mass encompasses more than just a focus on numbers.

The concept of critical mass theory actually has its origins in the field of physics where it is defined as the ‘minimum amount of fissile material needed to maintain a nuclear chain reaction’ (Compact Oxford Online Dictionary, n.d.). So nuclear chain reactions are actually the origins of our workforce development strategies! Building on this, another writer talks about detonating the critical mass explosion, talking about prime movers and change masters - the leaders who are required to contribute to critical mass development (Kanter, cited in Greed, 2000). As evidenced by the programme over the next two days, we have Māori and Pacific leadership within psychology. Māori and Pacific psychologists are engaged in research, teaching and practice activities which are relevant to the realisation of Māori and Pacific aspirations.

Behind the goal of realizing a critical mass, sits the idea that when a particular number is reached, sometimes described as the ‘tipping point’, accelerated and transformative change occurs

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(Gladwell, 2000; Studlar & McAllister, 2002). However, achieving a critical mass or reaching that tipping point is more than just reaching a certain number of Māori and Pacific psychologists. It is about reaching the point where we have moved from the margins to the ordinary (Childs & Krook, 2006). It is about claiming our space. Over the next two days we claim that space; a space in which Māori and Pacific worldviews, knowledge bases and aspirations are central.

It would be naive to say that there is not resistance to this idea of us claiming our space within psychology. As Catherine Love and Waikaremoana Waitoki comment, the dominance of Western psychological practices, processes and assumptions has supported the marginalization of indigenous and non-Western psychologies and epistemologies (Love & Waitoki, 2007).

Being aware that the discipline of psychology is a place where Māori and Pacific peoples do succeed is important. More often than not we are spread out across Aotearoa and the Pacific, and it is only when we come together like this, do we constitute a visible and powerful mass. The consolidation and drawing together of all our strengths underpin this symposium and are fundamental to claiming our space (Levy, 2007).

Māori and Pacific psychology is strengthened by knowledge bases that are shared across the world. Knowledge is not disregarded or rejected solely because it has Western origins. However, what a kaupapa Māori and Pacific agenda does is to position Māori and Pacific knowledge bases and world views as central; as the norm for Māori and Pacific peoples. Over the next two days we have the opportunity to better understand what science, culture and practice means when Māori and Pacific worldviews are prioritised, are positioned as central and viewed as the norm.

Graham Smith talks about mechanisms which enable theoretical conversations to be captured, curriculums controlled, and definitions of

inclusion and exclusion maintained (Smith, 1996). The exclusion of Māori and Pacific knowledge bases from psychology has enabled the theoretical conversation in psychology to remain undisturbed, the curriculum controlled, and definitions of inclusion and exclusion maintained (Levy, 2007).

A key way we can challenge this is to claim our space within the literature base. Those presenting in the symposium, agreed to prepare a paper for publication in the proceedings. Those proceedings are central to the kaupapa of the symposium. The goals over the next two days are to move from the margins, to claim our space within the literature base, to claim our space within the theoretical conversations, and to control our own definitions of inclusion and exclusion.

This symposium, although centred in the self determined aspirations of Māori and Pacific peoples, is deliberately open to all. It is open to all in recognition that it is the collective responsibility of all to address this resistance. Our journey will be made easier with the support of others.

Claiming Spaces, the theme for this symposium, reflects that the time has come for Māori and Pacific Psychologies to claim our legitimate space within the discipline of psychology. Here in Aotearoa we have the potential to be pioneers in the development of psychologies relevant and applicable to Māori and Pacific Peoples. We have the potential to be pioneers and lead the world in understanding what science, culture and practice mean when indigenous and cultural worldviews are prioritised.

Looking Back

The space that we currently occupy within psychology is very different to that of 15 years ago. If you cast your memory back to that time when Māori and Pacific registered practitioners of psychology were less than 1% of the total numbers; much of the information we could draw upon was from offshore; and Māori and Pacific students embarking on graduate study were few. Our communities were calling for help, but were skeptical of the help we could offer. The impact of early research processes on indigenous communities has

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had long lasting effects, to the extent that the statement made by Linda Smith in 1999 that “research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous vocabulary” (Smith, 1999, p.1) still holds true for many communities today.

Change is a slow process. While there is a strong desire to grow the number of practitioners, academics, researchers, advocates, trainers and policy makers; the numbers of Māori and Pacific students continuing on to graduate study are still low. The few Māori and Pacific staff who are within the university are strong magnets attracting students to them. However, their effectiveness is lessened by the lack of a local literature base (Stewart, 1997). Progress is hampered by training programmes that are derived from models foreign to our social systems and practices. Staff and students are working hard to encourage change within the university system, while also further developing their skills, exploring research that challenges the nature of psychology, contributing to the growth of a local literature base, and upskilling themselves to attain academic aspirations.

The push back from the community has been strong. While shifting attitudes of the psychological research fraternity has been a hard and slow process, the work of those researchers whose contributions place our relatives and their aspirations at the centre has created the space for us to explore for ourselves the needs of our whanau. Theories are being presented by researchers that place Māori and Pacific research processes and agenda at the forefront.

There is a need to recognise the many types of support we have received. Such assistance from those colleagues who have been willing to mentor research projects, be challenged by our philosophy and run ‘defense’ with others who were less than accepting of our developing methodologies and frameworks. Often their help involved carrying our teaching load when a break was needed, but one of the most important ways that they were able to help us was to step aside to let us take the lead on furthering our own aspirations. Given the dearth of our people

in the positions of power, acknowledgement of the assistance that has and continues to come from our colleagues is necessary.

Within Waikato, our position has always been somewhat different from the other academic psychology departments. The number of Māori and Pacific students enrolled in psychology has tended to waiver around 20% of all enrolments; their presence and numbers acting as a catalyst for change in teaching content and creating an environment where more students want to participate. This in turn has encouraged students to take on leadership roles and become mentors to those following them.

My own experience reflects this. Along with my colleague, Dr Michelle Levy, we undertook an evaluation of the psychology department at Waikato in 1995 and in that found that students wanted to engage with Māori research topics but weren’t confident there were staff knowledgeable or experienced enough to assist them adequately (Masters & Levy, 1995). As for staff, there was a willingness to support students, but a lack of confidence and experience was noted by them. After careful planning and negotiation, the Māori & Psychology Research Unit (MPRU) in the psychology department at the University of Waikato was launched in 1997.

The Māori & Psychology Research Unit

The discipline of psychology continues to lack a literature and research base that has been informed by Māori focused research or which supports prevention and change strategies aimed at Māori (Nikora, 1998). As a people, we continue to express concerns about conventional forms of research into our lives (Gibbs, 2001) and we are dissatisfied by the experiences of being researched by non-Māori and the methodologies used by them (Walker, Eketone, & Gibbs, 2006).

The MPRU is a response to these frustrations and it attempts to provide support structures encouraging the development of culturally appropriate research models, collaborations, partnerships and projects; in short, facilitating Māori focused research in psychology to actually happen. Reorienting research

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practices this way can provide space and opportunity that develops research initiatives which draw upon New Zealand based literature; exposes Māori students in particular to information and positive models of research; and provides a support structure that incorporates Māori material within psychology courses (Nikora, 1998). Overall the teaching of psychology within the department will be further enhanced by the availability of and access to Māori focused research experience and products.

Exposing all teaching staff to Māori focused research, literature or experience in conducting appropriate research with Māori is important. There is a glaring lack of research about issues of interest to Māori that might support Māori well-being and development. With the ever increasing number of Māori students enrolling into psychology, it is the responsibility of all teaching staff, not just Māori, to respond to this presence by enhancing the availability of Māori focused research material in psychology courses.

Having research resources available and accessible allows teaching staff and students a greater chance of challenging Western research paradigms and critically examining the university's role as an institution that 'owns' and 'defines' knowledge as well as controlling how it's distributed (Henry & Pene, 2001). The MPRU has a specific goal in providing these resources to psychology courses, as these courses then become 'places' for 'decolonization' to occur and sites for developing 'counter-hegemonies' to the dominant Western based paradigms. This occurs across our first, second, third year and graduate courses, as well as our more specialized programmes such as the Community and Clinical Post Graduate Diplomas.

MPRU also has a central role in promoting research initiatives and providing support to undergraduate and graduate psychology students. As scholarly pursuit and the development of students is part of the University's core business, the MPRU, through winning grants and awards, helps to provide options for students to

supplement their income, and more importantly, further their academic development. For the MPRU this means providing a wider training experience for student researchers through involvement in Māori focused research, planning and management, and professional development activities too.

Students are linked with experienced researchers within and outside the discipline of psychology, both nationally and internationally. This can be likened to a coaching/mentoring role. The creation of this research environment for students ensures meaningful participation, providing actual and real opportunities to influence outcomes, directions and priorities in a given context (Levy, 2002). By aligning students with Māori and non-Māori researchers, we attempt to provide multiple forms of support including financial, social, cultural and academic support. A priority of the MPRU is to facilitate resources and physical support for students to participate in locally organized events like today (Nikora, 1998), as well as international forums. Students are also involved in the writing and publication of peer reviewed articles as a form of professional and technical development.

The MPRU has a focus on the professional development of Māori researchers and the continued development of future leaders in Māori focused research and kaupapa Māori psychology, separate yet intrinsically intertwined elements. The professional development of Māori researchers, defined here as someone with Māori whakapapa, can often bring a deeper and more comprehensive view as insiders. An insiders perspective is important for indigenous settings, as outsiders may operate from their own cultural perspective and not accurately reflect the views or reality of the researched (Walker et al., 2006). Walker et al (2006) also claim that Māori researchers should be more than insiders, but competent in things Māori, have some knowledge of te reo (Māori language) and capable of high quality research. This skill base and insider knowledge can help interpret and understand subtleties, nuances and sometimes the significance of things that take place within the Māori world (Walker et al., 2006). This is supported by Henry & Pene (2001) who recognize and claim that knowledge is 'situated' within contexts and insiders are better placed to recognize

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this than outsiders (Henry & Pene, 2001). The MPRU recognise the limited capacity of the Māori and Pacific psychology research workforce and is keen to assist with the development of future leaders in Māori and Pacific psychologies. There are multiple ways in which we do this, drawing on all potential resources available to us. Those resources are not limited to only Māori and Pacific peoples, but we engage with non-Māori colleagues in and across institutions. When engaging in these relationships, we are however cognizant of retaining our ability to ensure that our priorities are not subsumed by the agendas of others. Seeking our own self determined aspirations requires retaining our ability to define and control.

E kore au e ngaro, he kakano i ruia mai i Rangiātea

I will not be lost, as I am one of the seeds scattered from Rangiātea.

Cultural cognitions begin as seeds and are nurtured by environmental conditions, opportunities and experiences, and through our social interactions. If properly tended to, our cultural cognitions provide continuity with our pasts and a foundation upon which to negotiate and construct our future selves.

In navigating the Pacific my tīpuna arrived to New Zealand with what they had. These included some material items like tools, sails, boats, clothing and containers. However, the most invaluable were their cultural cognitive resources; ways of organising, discovering, harnessing, adapting, thinking, interpreting and knowing.

These were the seeds for Māori survival in Aotearoa and they continue as seeds for survival in the new encounters and new worlds we continue to find ourselves a part of. Continuing the idea of ngā kakano, of seeds from Rangiātea ... there were many reasons why my tipuna ventured forth from Rangiātea. And, if we think about it, those reasons are probably not too different from those that young people have

today. Things like a want for independence, a chance to explore the world, a chance to find themselves, a chance to prove themselves, a chance to escape negative circumstance, a chance for work, for education, and for some, a chance for love. These are but a few reasons.

Whatever reasons my tipuna had for leaving Rangiātea, ngā kakano i ruia mai continue to spread, to grow and bear fruit across the Pacific, to Aotearoa, to the world. And the fruits are interesting too. Ngā kakano i ruia mai i Rangiātea grow rugby and netball players, movie stars, comedians, television stars, politicians, general practitioners, policy analysts ...the list is endless, and not surprising, they also grow psychologists.

Seeds develop differently. There are many contributing factors. We are all familiar with the search for genetic explanations, as we are with nature/ nurture debates. While I err on the nurture side of the debate there is a continuing nagging idea that whakapapa plays a major part in our pasts and futures. Whakapapa records events, relationships and relatedness, records hopes, aspirations and potentials. The seeds were spread from Rangiātea and today we see these seeds coming together. We see our whakapapa, our pasts and futures overlapping to create new potentials and new futures. And this whakapapa will be noted. It will be recorded. *E kore au e ngaro. He kakano i ruia mai i Rangiātea ...so we will never be lost, for we are the seeds spread from Rangiātea.*

Tēnā koutou

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