

# Claiming Collective Space: Kaupapa Maori in Psychology

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From its inception, the Psychology Department at the University of Waikato has had a focus on issues of culture, particularly those of relevance for Maori, with these early foundations laid by Emeritus Professor James Ritchie, who in 1965 took up the founding chair of the Department. These foundations have continued to be built on, utilising a variety of different strategies. Drawing on a research base which has emerged primarily from within the Maori and Psychology Research Unit at Waikato University, this paper explores strategies which have served to carve out and claim space for Maori, both within the department, and within the wider discipline of psychology.

## Spaces Claimed

In 2007 the Kaupapa Maori programme in the psychology department at the University of Waikato comprised:

- A Kaupapa Maori tutorial programme
- Kaupapa Maori Student Advisor
- Kaupapa Maori Sessional Assistants
- Kaupapa Maori academic staff (x3)
- Maori & Psychology Research Unit (MPRU)
- Kaupapa Maori Management Committee
- Maori focused courses (x2)
- Te Kohikohinga Maori (dedicated Maori-focused library resource)

Supporting these elements is University and Department policy affirming the place and value of Maori students within the university and department. These multiple elements reflect the view that indigenous psychology will not be progressed by a series of unrelated and ad-hoc initiatives but requires mechanisms by which developments can be consolidated to form a visible and identifiable indigenous knowledge base on which to further build (Levy, 2007). The MPRU

explicitly recognises that the ongoing and sustainable gains sought will result from the cumulative effects of interconnected elements (Levy, 2007). It is this theme of sustainable change achieved by the consolidation of multiple and interrelated pathways and the incremental gains which result, which underpin the activities occurring in the psychology department at the University of Waikato (Levy, 2007).

## Claiming Spaces

In 1989, Linda Waimarie Nikora became the first Maori person appointed to an academic position in a psychology department. This was a pivotal appointment in that it provided for the first time the opportunity for psychology to be challenged from a Maori perspective, by a Maori psychologist, from within academia (Nikora, 1989). It marked the start of the Kaupapa Maori agenda within psychology at Waikato University. This agenda is positioned within a Maori development framework, seeking to achieve the objectives of Maori development through the core activities of teaching, research and practice. Three key elements which underpin this agenda: preventing harm; addressing student attrition; and contributing to Maori psychologies. 'Prevention' involves limiting the exposure of Maori psychology students to the risks that stem from the dominance of the Western scientific paradigm. 'Addressing student attrition' involves supporting Maori students to complete course requirements, while at the same time enhancing the relevance of the material being studied. Contributing to 'Maori psychologies' focuses on the development of knowledge bases premised upon and deriving from Maori world views. These three elements underpin the teaching, support and research strategies which combine to form the Kaupapa Maori agenda (Levy, 2007;

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Nikora, Ritchie, Ritchie, Masters, Levy, & Waitoki, 2002b).

### **Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme**

Over the past ten years there have been relatively high numbers of Maori students entering the psychology department at Waikato University at undergraduate level. However, the numbers have tended to drop sharply by third year, with few Maori students entering graduate study (Levy, 2007). The need to actively support Maori psychology students to successful outcomes has been identified as important for some time. Various factors impact on the successful participation of Maori students in tertiary education generally. These include the transition and adaptation to unfamiliar tertiary environments and tertiary study, financial barriers, and external commitments (Ministry of Education, 2001; Nikora, Levy, Henry, & Whangapirita, 2002a). It has also been noted that the complex interaction of a multitude of factors leads to poor outcomes within tertiary education (Nikora et al., 2002a). An important finding to emerge from recent research is that there are clear differences in the type of support needed at different stages of study (Ashwell, Nikora, & Levy, 2003; Levy & Williams, 2003). Maori students who experience success in their first year at university were more likely to be confident and competent in negotiating course requirements and the university environment in subsequent years (Ashwell et al., 2003; Levy & Williams, 2003). Engendering familiarity and confidence in the first year of study appeared fundamental. However, this type of support differs from what is required by students engaged at higher levels of study, with students at graduate level tending to rely directly on lecturers for support (Levy & Williams, 2003).

The strategy that has had the most success in supporting Maori students has been the Kaupapa Maori tutorial programme. Introduced in the early 1990s, and predating the introduction of Kaupapa Maori courses, the Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme was the first initiative to become embedded in the Department. The Kaupapa Maori tutorials served as a vehicle for Maori students to engage with course material, as well as to express

their thoughts about how things could be done differently, with the Maori student voice having been a major catalyst for change within the Department. Presently, the Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme operates alongside the Maori and Psychology Research Unit, providing tutorial support for students who wish to study in an environment that fosters manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, te reo Maori and tikanga Maori. Kaupapa Maori tutorials affirm to Maori students that the Department collectively supports their presence and their aspirations. Operating across the majority of undergraduate courses, Kaupapa Maori tutorials have come to be considered standard practice within the Department. Senior Maori students, or in some cases, non-Maori students, are employed as tutors to deliver tutorials tailored to the learning needs and preferences of Maori students. The 'taken for granted' mode of operation within the tutorial environment is culturally Maori, meaning that if students wish to speak Maori or use Maori concepts within the tutorial, they can and are not obliged to provide translations, explanations or justifications for their choice to do so. Kaupapa Maori tutorials seek to avoid the potentially negative experiences which can occur when Maori participate in mainstream activities as a minority. For example, Maori students who attend mainstream tutorials can feel as if they are in the spotlight especially when asked to provide 'the' Maori perspective on issues. Isolation can be another experience for Maori students in mainstream tutorials. Maori students thrive in an environment which is supportive of their world view. Much of the research undertaken nationally in relation to the recruitment and retention of Maori within psychology has been conducted by the Maori and Psychology Unit (MPRU) (see for example, Ashwell et al., 2003; Levy, 2002; Levy & Williams, 2003; Nikora et al., 2002a; Nikora, Rua, Duirs, Thompson, & Amuketi, 2004). This literature base, which continues to grow, has provided a foundation for the ongoing development of initiatives to support Maori students achieve successful outcomes in psychology.

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### **Self Sustaining Peer Support Networks: Creating Sustainable Change**

It has been earlier noted that it is a complex interaction of a multitude of factors that leads to poor outcomes within tertiary education (Nikora et al., 2002a). Consistent with this, innovative and multiple support strategies that respond to the multiple needs of students are required to support Maori students to successful outcomes (Nikora et al., 2002a). With the focus being on facilitating sustainable change, Maori staff in the psychology department at the University of Waikato seek mechanisms which contribute to the consolidation of multiple and interrelated pathways, maximising the incremental gains which have been made (Levy, 2007). The Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme provides one such consolidation mechanism, being the primary vehicle by which Maori students initially engage with psychology and by which staff, both Maori and non-Maori initially engage with students. In doing so the Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme has been the major catalyst for change in the department, creating the foundation for the development of self-sustaining peer support networks within the department. One indicator of the success of the Kaupapa Maori Tutorial Programme in supporting students to successful academic outcomes, has been the growing number of Maori students moving into graduate study (Levy, 2007). Increasing numbers of graduate students has important implications for network development, with Corey (2007) identifying that the self sustainability network is driven by graduate level students who involve themselves in the support of undergraduates. These graduate students have themselves benefited from similar experiences and implicitly expect undergraduates to progress and provide further support to those that follow. An important point is that these networks are not exclusive to Maori students only. The focus on collective success, sharing of resources, collaboration and whanaungatanga are open to all who share the kaupapa. This non-exclusivity serves to strengthen the networks which are built.

The Kaupapa Maori Tutorial programme has also been a catalyst for other Maori activities, further consolidating a presence within the Psychology

Department. This includes attendance at the annual New Zealand Psychological Society conferences. In 2004, a number of Maori students attended the NZPS conference in Wellington as members and presenters. This presence increased for Dunedin (2005), Auckland (2006) and Hamilton (2007). While staff support has been important in these events, the co-ordination, fundraising, travelling and participation at conferences is often led by students. Having committed personal time and expenditure, students take advantage of these occasions to actively develop contacts, meet potential employers or research supervisors, establish mentoring relationships, expose themselves to career pathways, gain experience in presenting to peers and potential colleagues, network with students from other institutions and so on and so forth. The experience then consolidates and strengthens one's position within the discipline and academia.

Whanaungatanga serves as the basis for the development of a self sustaining peer support network. Preparation for and attendance at the conference creates, facilitates and strengthens tuakana-teina relationships between students. The success of the KM programme during this time is also reflected in the number of NZPsS Presidents Scholarship recipients (5) from Waikato University. At each of the conferences students stay on marae, serving to develop, build, grow and strengthen relationships. Hakari for example are built into the marae stay providing additional opportunities to host psychology staff and students from all universities and members of the New Zealand Psychological Society.

### **Summary**

This has been a very brief overview of some of the activities occurring within the psychology department at Waikato University which are aimed at claiming our space. Supported by a backdrop of research identifying the differing needs of Maori students studying within psychology, the focus has been on the development of self-sustaining peer support networks. Student participation at national conferences is one activity which facilitates these networks, both within our department and beyond. It has facilitated these networks through creating

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relationships between undergraduates and graduates which aim to develop undergraduates who are driven and passionate in continuing with both the roopu and onto graduate study. But most of all it has facilitated a sense of belonging and

provided a platform by which to claim collective space within the department and the wider discipline of psychology.

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