Developing community and social psychology for Aotearoa: Experiences from a New Zealand programme of indigenization

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Abstract

Experiences related to developing an indigenous community and social psychology in the teaching of psychology at the University of Waikato in Aotearoa/New Zealand are described. The process of *localization* emphasizes the need to interpret "universal" concepts in terms of local cultural patterns and to elaborate psychological concepts derived from the cultures of indigenous peoples. The localization of psychology in New Zealand involves: (a) differences between the dominant United States cultural pattern, in which much English-language psychology is embedded, and New Zealand cultural patterns; and (b) differences between the dominant Pakeha (Anglo-New Zealander) cultural patterns and the cultural patterns of indigenous Maori peoples. These cultural differences involve contrasts between individualistic and collective conceptions of self-identities and social identities, and alternative conceptions of community needs.

Three processes relevant to localization are outlined: socio-cultural contextualization, agenda-setting, and knowledge of cultural styles. Socio-cultural contextualization refers to the relevance of psychological knowledge, taught in dominant national institutions, to local social, cultural and political systems. Agenda-setting focuses on how the dominant themes in teaching and research within psychology are selected, and the relevance of these themes to community needs. Knowledge of local cultural styles is required to describe and teach professional roles that are congruent with such cultural styles.

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Experiences from a New Zealand Programme of Indigenization

Introduction

The purpose of the present paper is to share ideas about localising psychology so that the process of indigenization can be facilitated. The process of *localization* refers to the need to re-interpret concepts assumed to be "universal," so such concepts are consistent with "local" cultural patterns. Localization is also used here to refer to the process of elaborating psychological concepts derived from the cultures of indigenous peoples and non-dominant peoples whose conceptions of psychological processes are usually invisible to the dominant groups in their societies. Clearly some psychological conceptions readily transfer across locations and cultures and others do not. A truly "universal" psychology is best developed through the recognition of diverse "indigenous" psychologies and the incorporation of these psychologies into an international pluralistic psychology that reflects the social and psychological processes relevant to all cultures and societies.

Three processes are identified as particularly relevant to the localization of psychology.
*   *Socio-cultural contextualization*: Linking psychological knowledge, taught in dominant national educational institutions, to local social and political systems and cultural and ethnic groups.
*   *Agenda-setting*:   This refers to the topics given priority and elaboration in teaching and research within psychology.
*   *Knowledge about cultural styles*: Including knowledge about local cultural styles and social processes in teaching psychology, and training for professional roles in psychology.

Localising psychology in Aotearoa (the name used by the indigenous Maori peoples in New Zealand) involves the exploration of: (a) differences between the dominant United States cultural patterns, in which much English-language psychology is embedded, and New Zealand cultural patterns; and (b) differences between the dominant Pakeha (Anglo-New Zealander) cultural patterns and the cultural patterns of indigenous Maori peoples. These cultural differences involve contrasts between individualistic and collective conceptions of self and social identities, different ways of categorizing behaviour, and alternative conceptions of community needs.

Examples in the paper are drawn primarily from the areas of individual, social and community psychology. Given the spectrum of subdisciplines within psychology, ranging from neuropsychology and physiological psychology to social and community psychology, different analyses and examples may be required for different subdisciplines within psychology. Also social and community psychology are among the most important areas within psychology to localise.

Psychology at the University of Waikato

The University of Waikato was established in 1966. Psychology was a foundation subject in the School of Social Sciences. In 1994 the Psychology Department consists of 25 teaching staff, more than 100 graduate students and offers specialisation in several areas of Psychology including; social, community, industrial-organisational, physiological, cross_cultural and clinical and gender psychology. An early emphasis in the Psychology Department was making teaching and research relevant to the regional and national context of the University (James Ritchie, personal communication, March 1994). The University of Waikato is located in a region where about 20% of the population are indigenous Maori people. Staff and students have continuing involvement in applied research with several Maori organisations.

Within the Department, the graduate programme in Community Psychology was established in 1980. The programme has developed a pattern of collaborating with community organisations in areas such as evaluation, policy_related research, organisational development, and community needs surveys. Teaching staff, particularly those who contribute to the programme, have close ties with several community organisations within the University region (central North Island of New Zealand).

Cultural perspectives on individual and social behaviour

Within psychological literature published in English, much research literature makes no acknowledgement of, or reference to, the cultural context the ideas presented (assumed universalism). Only few literature sources acknowledge the potential or actual cultural boundaries of the information presented. All psychological concepts or processes are specific to the culture in which they originated unless there is specific evidence that the concepts are valid in more than one culture. Given the dominance of scientific information about psychology published in books and journals from the United States, "American psychology" is often critiqued, no doubt largely because it is the most widely disseminated source of ideas in English language psychology.

Sampson (1977) has made a broad criticism of American psychology. Much of this psychology assumes that "self_contained individualism" is the best style of personal adaptation and functioning. Sampson described self_contained individualism as: ".... an individualistic social arrangement in which persons wish to be self_contained and self_sufficient in order to be successful" (1977, p. 774). Much psychological research shows a bias towards autonomy (independence) needs rather than affiliation and sense of community (Fox, 1985).

In a later paper, Sampson (1985) described the way in which cultures differ in conceptions of the person (i.e. ego, selfhood, personal identity).

> The peculiar feature of the Western view is its search for an autonomous, fully integrated entity in itself, defined by its separateness and distinctiveness from other people and the rest of nature. (1985, p. 1204)

He contrasts this with other views of the self. Among Japanese, for example:

> The concept of a self completely independent from the environment is very foreign .... the Japanese do not think of themselves as exerting control over an environment that is utterly divorced from the self, nor over a self that stands apart from the environment (Kojima, quoted in Sampson, 1985, p. 1204).

Polynesian societies, such as New Zealand Maori, tend to place emphasis on identities associated with membership in family and other groups (i.e. "social" identities). These social identities can be contrasted with "self-identities" derived primarily from individual characteristics and accomplishments. Giving primacy to the development of a self-identity is consistent with valuing self_contained individualism as the preferred pattern of personal adaptation. Placing a high value on self_contained individualism has disadvantages. Recent literature on social isolation in the United States shows that large numbers of people living in cities experience extreme loneliness and social isolation (Rook, 1984). An overemphasis on the nuclear family, and a high priority on personal privacy are associated with higher rates of depression, suicide and feelings of meaninglessness in everyday life (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). A psychology appropriate for bicultural and multicultural societies would give social identities derived from membership in groups as much respect as social identities derived from individual characteristics.

The processes of categorising and labelling of individual and social behaviours need assessing for cultural bias. For example a great deal of psychological research has investigated "conformity." Generally a negative value is associated with conformity, and a positive value with "independence." A review of research on "conformity" in several societies, in which experimental "confederates" were used to create group pressure for measuring conformity, reached the following conclusion:

> The problem of maladaptive conformity and independence has been of central interest to cross_cultural researchers since the classic work of Asch . . . the disconcerting level of conformity found by Asch is quite widespread. (Mann, 1980, p. 164)

If conforming behaviour had been given a positive label, such as "prosolidarity" behaviour (cf. Sampson, 1977), and "independence" given a negative label, such as "inability to form close relationships with others," there may well have been a whole series of cross_cultural studies pointing out the positive attributes of "prosolidarity" behaviour. The issue here is that the labels chosen for behaviours being studied often reflect underlying value judgements about the desirability of those behaviours.

A contrast between conceptions of appropriate styles of social behaviour can be seen between Maori and Pakeha (Anglo-New Zealanders) in New Zealand. While assertiveness, speaking out in class and asking questions of teachers are often valued attributes among Pakeha students, Maori students may have different conceptions of such behaviours. In the Maori language; *whakahihi* is used disparagingly to refer to behaviour that draws attention to oneself or sets a person apart from his or her peers, *whakaiti* refers to the down_grading of oneself or

showing humbleness, *whakama* refers to not wishing to draw attention to oneself, or wanting to withdraw from too much attention (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1989, p. 117).

Social and community needs

An early psychological theorist, Maslow, developed a framework that has become known as the *hierarchy of needs*. An assumption is that the human needs identified form a hierarchy that ranged at the bottom from physiological and safety needs, through belonging and love and esteem needs to the highest level labelled self-actualization needs. Some assumed that, unless lower or more basic needs, such as physiological needs and safety are satisfied, needs which are higher up in the hierarchy do not become important. Although Maslow's needs hierarchy was criticised from several perspectives it is still widely used and quoted as a basis for identifying human needs which are often assumed to be "universal." One criticism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that some people strive to satisfy needs in the upper levels of the hierarchy even if lower needs are not satisfied. Another criticism is that needs such as "esteem" and "self -actualization" may reflect conceptualisations that are specific to individualistic cultures.

The author has developed a different conceptualisation of individual and community needs for use within the community psychology programme at the University of Waikato (Thomas, 1993). These needs are used as a basis for analyses and understanding of community processes and "problem" patterns of behaviour, and for designing effective community interventions.

1. Social identity
Opportunities for social identities that are acknowledged and accepted by significant others in the community.

2. Meaning in life
Beliefs systems that give meaning to ones life (e.g., spirituality, religion, ideology). Opportunities for participation in rituals and performances and enactment of competencies, which are consistent with belief systems.

3. Supportive social environment
A social environment that allows some degree of cohesion and support among its members, and links or "connectedness" among community groups. Labonte (1993) labels this aspect as "conviviality," which he describes as "having the quality of caring and sharing" (p. 5).

4. Social participation and stimulation
Opportunities for participation in activities with people in one's community and to experience levels of stimulation that maintain or restore satisfying mood states.

5. Sense of control
A feeling that one has some control over important aspects or domains of one's life. Coping with stressful events and situations is important for developing or maintaining a sense of control.

6. Self-efficacy
Opportunities to develop specific skills and a general sense of competence in carrying out activities that are personally or socially important. Bandura (1982) has described self-efficacy as "people's sense of personal efficacy to produce and regulate events in their lives" (p. 122).

The list of six "needs" described above cannot at this stage claim to be any more "universal" than the five needs that Maslow identified. However, if psychologists and other social scientists in different locations around the world develop lists of basic needs that are most relevant to their locations, cultural perspectives and purposes, then there may be some basis for exploring commonalities that occur across different societies and cultures.

Dominance and decentralisation of information flows

A distinction can be made between nations and communities at the *centre* (such as industrialized, wealthy nations that dominate the flow of information among countries) and communities and nations at the *periphery*, such as "developing" and small countries (Vassaf, 1983). Nations at the centre (such as the United States and United Kingdom among English_speaking nations) tend to set political and social agendas, and the creation and dissemination of information and fashion. Nations at the periphery are usually recipients of information laden with agendas, values and lifestyles emanating from the centre. Such information is conveyed through both popular media (e.g., films, radio, television, newspapers, magazines) and more specialist publications (e.g., books, journals, electronic databases). Thus nations at the periphery are at risk of having local ideas, concerns and cultural patterns submerged by information from "centre" nations.

To decentralise information sources, opportunities for international networking need to be developed. These opportunities require both centre_periphery and periphery_periphery two_way communication. With current telecommunications technologies (such as electronic mail and facsimile) it is becoming easier to participate in international networking. Such technologies allow direct communication between psychologists at the centre and periphery, and among psychologists and other applied social scientists living in countries outside the centre.

The establishment of links among peripheral communities and nations can lead to a network of communities sharing information, resources, experience and expertise (Vassaf, 1983). As well, central nations, such as those in North America and Europe, can learn from the development of psychological perspectives that have been developed in other countries. Countries that have both centre and periphery roles (such as Malaysia and Singapore) may be particularly suited to contribute innovations to the development of psychology.

Ideas for the localization of psychology

Some ideas about ways in which psychology can be localized are set out below. Some examples of how these ideas have been used in the teaching of community and social psychology at the University of Waikato are given. The author welcomes comments on these ideas. It is intended to share suggestions among psychologists working in nations that are underrepresented in psychological literature and among psychologists developing alternative conceptions to mainstream views.

1. *Developing psychological literature based on local research.*
An important step is developing a local research literature that provides information about local cultural patterns gives status to local research and provides access to local research knowledge.

2. *Identifying local social-psychological processes*
As part of the agenda-setting process, research should identify social-psychological processes evident in the attributions, values and behaviour patterns in local communities. The identification of such processes is particularly important among indigenous peoples who are typically under-represented or invisible in mainstream psychological research literature.

At the University of Waikato, community development for indigenous peoples living in a society dominated by other ethnic groups is highlighted. The focus on psychology and indigenous peoples leads to the elaboration of topics such as: ethnic minority status as a stressor, provision of social support for Maori people in institutions run by dominant groups, provision of services (e.g., nursing, clinical psychology) that are culturally safe for Maori clients, and developing a "Maori psychology."

3. *Use of local literature and media in the teaching of psychology*
Given the gradual decentralization of publishing and media production facilities it is increasingly possible to teach psychology using locally produced resources such as research literature, magazine reports and video films.

Within New Zealand there is a growing literature based on research and commentary on topics relevant to New Zealand psychology. For example the writings of Jane and James Ritchie document various aspects of social behaviour within New Zealand (Ritchie, 1992; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1990). Differences between Maori and Pakeha (Anglo-New Zealander) cultural styles are explored. The need for teaching and research in psychology to develop bicultural perspectives is also being discussed (Cram & Nairn, 1993)

Use can be made of locally compiled textbooks and collections of readings that allow inclusion of both local and international literature sources (e.g., Thomas and Veno, 1992). Collections of readings can include reports of research completed by students where these reports are of a suitable standard. These collections can be readily compiled when photocopying services are available.

4. *Emphasising involvement of students in local research*
Students benefit from involvement in research requested by local communities and organizations. Such research needs to be adequately supervised by experienced staff. Teaching patterns can be based around involvement of students in community-based research projects. Good quality graduate research can be published in locally produced research collections. Such research collections expand localized teaching resources.

Within the Community Psychology Programme at the University of Waikato, students have access to a considerable range of community organisations throughout the region, such as alcohol treatment services, family counselling services, community houses, women's refuges, women's health centres, local government planning and community development sections, regional health authorities, and the central government departments of Justice, Social Welfare, Education and Conservation. A particular emphasis in the Programme is graduate participation in evaluation research requested by community organizations. The evaluation reports are made available for other students (Thomas & Robertson, 1989).

5. *Setting up networks to exchange information*
Networks can be established with psychologists and social science researchers in other areas, using electronic mail and fax for example, to exchange information directly with people involved innovative developments in psychological theory and research. An example is the electronic mail network based at La Trobe University in Australia to exchange information about qualitative research.

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