

Cultural Justice, Ethics and Teaching

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Cultural Justice:

Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides both a basis for cultural justice in this society and an explication of the term; each of the articles identifying a significant aspect of cultural justice. First, there is the guarantee to the Maori signatories that the Crown would protect their independence - tino rangatiratanga, (also read as authority, autonomy or self-determination) [Article II]. In Article III Maori are promised that they will also have the "Rights and Privileges of British subjects". Finally, in Article I, Maori cede to the Crown the right to govern, to make laws to protect all peoples from the evil consequences of lawlessness. The 1835 Declaration of Independence located legislative authority in the Wakaminenga (the gathered rangatira meeting in Congress); and in 1840, in the context of the Crown promises, Maori authorised the Crown to exercise that authority.

For Maori Te Tiriti specifies cultural justice for interactions between Maori and settlers in the new society. Maori are guaranteed the right to self-determination (and the economic and social resources to make that practical) in their relations with New Zealand society. They are also entitled to the same opportunities as other citizens. The latter rights, embodied in local legislation and international covenants to which we are signatory, are not alternatives to the prior right of Maori people to their (cultural) autonomy. The exercise of legislative and organisational authority must be exercised in a manner consistent with the promises which clearly requires consultation and negotiation with Maori.

Historically, this has not been true and this generation has the task of restoring the cultural justice that was denied by the colonisers and their spiritual descendants. Cultural justice embodies an understanding of justice that requires that things are tika (just, right) and not merely legal. It should not be understood in a passive or reactive sense - as a criterion for identifying or legitimating grievances - but as a positive quality reflected and enacted in all activities within society. Our professional activities as psychologists are not exempt from this. If we are not ensuring that the way in which we work is culturally just, then we are supporting a culturally unjust and destructive practice.

Ethics and Teaching:

Apart from Section 7 - Teaching and research using animals - the following is the only reference in the NZ Psychological Society Code of Ethics (1986) to teaching.

1.2 Psychologists engaged in teaching help students acquire knowledge and skill, to achieve high standards of scholarship, and to develop independent thought.

It appears unexceptionable. We would all wish students to attain knowledge and skills, to develop their capacity for independent thought and produce work - whether academic or professional - of high standard. But closer inspection shows that each term in the statement is problematic. For example, if we look critically at the idea of "knowledge" that students are to be helped "acquire", we can probably see that similar arguments could be presented for "skill", "standards", "scholarship" and "independent thought".

The OED provides several understandings of **knowledge**:

theoretical or practical understanding (of subject, language etc), certain understanding as distinct from opinion .

Uses of the term **knowledge** in other sections of the code emphasise the “certain understanding” usage. For example:

1.9 ...current knowledge of scientific, technical and professional information...

6.1d ...right to knowledge of the use to which the data may be put...

8.0 ...accurate and objective in reporting data ... have satisfactory knowledge...derived from research findings and theory.

This usage presupposes that knowledge exists in its own right, independently of the knowers or those who define it to be knowledge rather than opinion. Such an “objective” understanding of what knowledge is underlies both lay or common sense and positivist views. Yet such a view of knowledge is incompatible with the socially constructed character of knowledge demonstrated in the sociology of science (Ashmore, Mulkay & Pinch, 1989; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Mulkay, 1985). These and other researchers have described the processes by which “facts” are generated from “opinions”, how discoveries are negotiated or contested, and how dependent such processes are on the theoretical and sociocultural framework within which observations are given meaning. From this perspective all that we currently treat as knowledge, irrespective of whether there exists a core (certain) understanding of behaviour that would be accepted as such by all psychologists, should be presented within the historical, cultural and theoretical framework that we rely on to distinguish this “knowledge” from “opinion”.

If we read the Code from this perspective, the ethical requirement is akin to “truth in advertising”. The teacher must not misrepresent the contingent nature of the knowledge being presented. This becomes particularly important when we are considering teaching those who do not share significant elements of our sociocultural (read “scientific”) framework. This argument obviously raises some unwelcome questions about the authority of psychology - the accuracy of our depiction of human (or other) behaviour - and can create an alarming sense of insecurity if we acknowledge that this knowledge is our (discipline’s) interpretation of observations made within a particular framework.

The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists was born, in part out of a recognition of the “reality of a different cultural configuration” (in Canada) but, from inspection of the code, that recognition does not appear to have affected statements of teacher responsibilities (II-20, III-17, III-21). They do however introduce the notion of moral rights of individuals that is not explicit in our Code. These rights include “equal justice” and “self-determination and autonomy”, both of which are pertinent to who, what and how we teach.

Access and Participation:

Equal justice implies, as a minimum condition, equal access. This is not a new issue for the society (NZPsS) and the discipline. In 1975 Jules Older presented his conference paper Maoris and the professions with special reference to the psychological profession, at this university. In that paper he sought the Society’s support for an active recruitment of Maori students into psychology. Despite initial enthusiasm the effect of this effort was negligible. When Abbott & Durie (1987)

reported on their 1985 survey of medicine, social work and applied psychology courses they concluded that;

...applied psychology courses are probably the most monocultural, in terms of Maori representation, of all New Zealand professions.

They reported that the courses did not operate affirmative action programmes or actively seek to enlist Maori students. The primary reason given was that few Maori graduated in psychology.

There is still barely a trickle of Maori graduates in Psychology. As part of a longer term project, the National Standing Committee has been surveying first year teaching of Psychology and has found that some undergraduate courses clearly state that they operate a form of affirmative action or seek to enlist Maori students. Departments that offer courses in Colleges of Education - who may offer up to 30 of their places to Maori students - vary in the extent to which this access to a wider range of students appears to modify courses or teaching. But it is clear that some departments are taking steps both to enlist Maori students and improve their retention rates.

Access is an aspect of the "Rights and Privileges" of citizens guaranteed to Maori, the Canadian Code provides an ethical foundation for such affirmative action programmes. In our universities the Charter statements about the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi can be cited in support of such programmes, but do not appear to have compelled departments to action. I have argued that there is an ethical obligation to ensure access although I cannot justify that conviction by reference to our current Code of Ethics. In terms of cultural justice such programmes must be the fruit of negotiation between Maori and teachers/teaching departments. The importance of this negotiation is underlined by the critical voices raised by Maori within existing programmes.

Recognition:

It follows from the earlier argument that knowledge is identified as "certain understanding" within a particular sociocultural context that, as teachers of psychology in this country, we have been enculturating our students. We have empowered one set of categories, values or processes as "right" or "natural" by presenting our theories and explanations as universal truths. Rothenberg (1992) summarises this aspect of teaching;

...curriculum effectively defines its point of view as 'reality' rather than as a point of view.

This is inconsistent with the ideal of cultural justice, and, if this is not acknowledged, then Maori people who are enlisted into psychology will be subjected to a further colonisation. There is an obligation on teachers to respect the right of Maori students to their self-determination and autonomy. I feel this raises the hardest question for psychologists and the university - will they be doing psychology, or science, or medicine? Part of the difficulty arises because we have believed the universality of our own knowledge, that there is (a) psychology - the science of behaviour. Yet the evidence is that there are multiple psychologies. Not only do psychologists, in the universalised sense, find it difficult to agree, but also understandings arising within different sociocultural contexts will constitute different psychologies.

Theorists like Kim (1990, p145) argue this position strongly, particularly for indigenous psychology which is defined;

Indigenous psychological knowledge is that which is native, i.e., not transported from another region, and it is designed for its people. It is an understanding that is rooted in a particular sociocultural context.

Sociocultural contexts have played little part in psychological theorising but it is becoming increasingly clear that our individualised, universal understandings of human behaviour lead to practice that is irrelevant if not oppressive.

At last year's conference Marewa Glover (1993) looked critically at psychology teaching. She identified the ongoing colonisation, the spiritual deprivation and loss of identity, that followed from the assumption that our knowledge was authoritative and relevant to Maori. From her reading of our Code of Ethics she issued three challenges:

1. Assuming they [psychologists] recognise such differences [between Maori and other students], then before working with Maori they will "*obtain training, experience or advice to ensure competent service ..*" (Code of Ethics, Section 1.5).
2. Assuming the psychologist has not accessed [such support].. Does he or she subsequently decide they have reached "*the boundaries of their own competence*" (Code of Ethics, Section 2.1).
3. ...do they conclude that under the particular circumstances" .. they will use "the most effective intervention" regardless of "all known undesirable side-effects" (Code of Ethics, Section 2.2).

I suspect that the majority of us have barely begun to think about the first challenge. The NSCBI cannot claim to have surveyed all teachers, but the impression we have from the data obtained to date is that few departments have assimilated the evidence of undesirable side-effects being provided by Maori people. While some individuals or programmes have begun to take the evidence seriously institutional practice shows much less change. Clearly we need to get over our own hang-ups and become involved in negotiation of a planned implementation of a more appropriate teaching of psychology. It is a necessary step to cultural justice.

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