

bicultural issues

. . . from the NSCBI

The Society's **National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues** is preparing a regular column for the *Bulletin*. In these we will seek to inform members about particular bicultural issues, explaining their implications for the activities of psychologists and for the practices and policies of the Society.

An interview with Linda Waimarie Nikora, out-going convenor of the NSCBI

Q: Linda, reflecting on your time as convenor of the NSCBI since its conception, what are some of the changes that you have seen over this time?

A: Kia ora Heather, there have been numerous changes. When the committee was first established in 1991 at the AGM at Massey University, inclusiveness was paramount. The majority of Maori participants were students, but others included those who worked in areas that drew upon psychological information, skills and techniques, or worked in some capacity alongside psychologists. If we restricted membership to the committee on the basis of people being members of the Society, then there would have been no Maori on the committee at all - so much for Biculturalism! Since 1991 there are a few more Maori psychologists, but it still remains their choice to be

members of the Society. I guess it boils down to being able to recognise something within the Society of value to them.

In 1991, we put together a mission statement that also served as a 'terms of reference' for the committee and gave us some structured direction. Prior to this time actions to move the Society towards a more bicultural position were rather ad hoc. In developing a consistent approach to activities as well as a core of supportive people within the Society, NSCBI goals have been more effectively achieved.

A bouquet must be given to the Society for their acceptance of Rule 3 which departs quite radically from previous positions taken by Society members. This is a good start. Lets just hope that the implementation of the same goes smoothly.

Q: What have been some of the difficulties for the NSCBI and for you as convenor over this time?

A: Perhaps the major difficulty has been the geographical dispersion of NSCBI members. This has meant that we are not able to meet as frequently as I would like and have relied on email and faxes to maintain communication and decision-making. We haven't yet tried telephone conferencing but this may need to be considered. At present most members live in the Auckland/Hamilton region, but if more people start coming on board from the southern regions then we'll have to re-think things.

Another aspect that I find difficult is the expectation that a Maori Psychology will develop and be in place over night. Sure, there are various psychological practices and phenomena peculiar to Maori people, however, when matched against the time and opportunity that Western psychology has had to develop and train people within its discipline, it is not a 'just' position to expect that a Maori Psychology, practice and practitioners can be available immediately. This is best illustrated in the lack of applicants for academic psychology positions.

At Waikato University we advertised unsuccessfully for a Maori clinician. In contrast, Justice Psychological Services seem to be approaching things in a more realistic fashion. Their bursars programme for training Maori clinicians seems to be making inroads into this situation. Although things are moving slowly,

they are moving. Its just a matter of time.

Q: What have been the positives over this time?

A: The fact that this committee has been able to see a number of its initiatives and activities through to completion has been a major victory. For example, the NSCBI's contribution through having Ray Nairn participate in the Review of the Psychologist's Act. Although the amendments to the Act have yet to be formally recognised, the fact that consideration has been given to the inclusion of the Treaty of Waitangi and to accreditation issues is a major accomplishment.

Working alongside other committees of the Society has also been rewarding, particularly the work of the Ethical Issues Committee looking at how the Code of Ethics might be improved to develop cultural safety requirements. NSCBI involvement in various symposia at Annual Conferences has been important for disseminating information and getting feedback on issues.

The most satisfying achievements are the publications that the NSCBI has produced, namely the Treaty issue of the Bulletin, and the proceedings of the Cultural Justice and Ethics symposium. These are extremely valuable documents to inform debate and practice and are a useful teaching resource.

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Bulletin sales demonstrate that even now, almost 2 years down the track, this publication is still in demand. I suspect **that the same** will be true of the Cultural Justice and Ethics publication.

Q: What do you see as future directions for the NSCBI ?

A: A very important task is to participate in the current review of the Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics consists of value statements describing a moral ground where psychologists should position themselves. Value positions change over time, which means that reviews should be an ongoing part of maintaining a Code of Ethics. The extent to which Psychologists ignore the cultural context in which they work and of the 'clients', participants or communities with whom they work is worrisome. Although some psychologists admit to being ill equipped to work effectively with Maori people, I still wonder where they are getting training necessary for delivering an effective service. The Code of Ethics is one area of importance, however, the more important area of focus is how psychologists learn ethical standards and how these standards are monitored.

Resources to inform psychologists are still lacking. We need more and across a much broader spectrum than is currently available. Information produced in this area will be determined by the research being conducted. Both the NSCBI and the

Society generally need to encourage more research. If this means putting pressure on Universities or on psychological agencies with some research brief, or if it means tapping financial research sources for funds to conduct research, then this is what we should be doing.

Over the past few years there has been a steady increase in the number of Maori people entering into psychological training at the undergraduate level. Some universities are doing well to support these students through to more specialised training. One thing that students are increasingly having to deal with is how they are to finance at least 5-6 years of university training. The Society, NSCBI and universities can help through encouraging psychological agencies to provide paid work experience; form scholarship schemes or provide work as research assistants, tutors and the like.

Ultimately I would like to see the need for the NSCBI disappear. The committee came into existence as a result of recognising that a bicultural approach to psychology was not being taken, and that many Maori people were being 'hurt' in some way. If we are able to change this situation and maintain those changes, then the need for the NSCBI will be no more.

