

Having Policy means taking action

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In 1992, after many years of lobbying, the Psychology Department at Auckland University introduced Maori Psychology as a component of 32.108; a first year psychology paper. Supporters had hoped that the introduction of this component would lead to greater cross-cultural awareness amongst psychology students. Alas, that was not to be.

Many of the Pakeha students left during the Mihi at the beginning of the section, and the complaints about Maori Psychology had begun.

As a result of the many complaints that it received, the department decided to double chance the term's test based around the Maori section. Students were to be awarded two marks, one that included the Maori section and one that excluded it. Whichever mark was the higher would be the mark that would be awarded for the purposes of coursework assessment. Many students who supported the inclusion of Maori Psychology objected, and a debate was started in the student newspaper about the merits or demerits of the departmental decision.

This article is about the racist nature of part of that debate. Beyond that, it is also about the moral responsibility of Universities in replying to student racism.

As a 43 year old Maori Gay man, I have encountered bigotry and prejudice so often that it has become as much a facet of my life as the length of my hair, or the colour of my skin. That is not to say that I have come to accept it as right or just; merely that there is not an argument or an insult that I have not heard at least a dozen times. Never, however, have I found myself in the position where the offending behaviour has been (in my opinion) aggravated by the actions of a supposedly caring and responsible professional body that has then proceeded to sit back and ignore the overtly racist attitudes that it has helped to create and reinforce.

This article is not an attempt at an academic head-trip about racism. It is meant to serve two functions. Firstly, it is an honest attempt to express my anger at three particular letters to the Editor of Craccum. Secondly, it is an attempt to provide a response to these students, that I believe would have more appropriately come from the Psychology department itself.

Before I start on the response proper I would like to say to the Psychology Department that it is all right to have a policy on affirmative action and the Treaty of Waitangi. That position has become almost compulsory in academic circles these days. Honouring that position, however, occasionally means doing or saying something, that may well prove to be less popular than the mere holding of somewhat esoteric principles.

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Ko te koura kei te uupoko te tuatae
The crayfish has excrement in its head

or as Timoti Karetu has explained it, "*the crayfish makes itself out to be a fine fellow because its red clothing is like that of a chief, but its head is full of filth*".

References

- Older, J. (1978) *The Pakeha Papers*, John McIndoe: Dunedin.
Smith, G. H. (1992) *Tane-nui-a-rangi's Legacy, Propping up the Sky: Kaupapa Maori as Resistance and Intervention*, Paper presented at NZARE/AARE Joint Conference, Deakin University.

I remember my Grandmother telling me not to get too angry with bigots. At least you know which side they're on. *All three letters discussed appear in the appendix, numbered 1 to 3.*

Letter number one argues that the inclusion of Maori Psychology is in itself racist because we were not given any section labelled Pakeha Psychology. If this were not such a serious issue, this letter would be almost humorous. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I recall 32.108 as an endless procession of the theories of white men (and the occasional woman). While it is certainly true that there was a liberal sprinkling of Semitic ancestry, nowhere do I recall the inclusion of black women and men talking about the traditional applications of psychology within their own cultures. Nobody had to label the rest of 108 Pakeha Psychology, it did that for itself by excluding significant black experience.

We were often told that there was a lack of cross-cultural studies within certain areas. I don't believe that is a sufficient excuse any more. Within most indigenous cultures there exists a rich and rewarding tapestry of beliefs, knowledge and learning that has somehow managed to elude the understanding of many pakeha academics. Many of my ancestors believed that the Pakeha was an intellectually inferior race who did not have the ability to understand or respect any experience other than their own. Maybe there is more truth in that belief than I have ever thought about.

Letter number two does not bother to argue about the validity or otherwise of Maori Psychology itself. Instead it launches in to a personal attack on Kim (a Pakeha student who had taken a stand defending Maori Psychology) by implying that she is ignorant, stupid and one-eyed. It then proceeds to list supposedly major sins of organization.

Again no discussion of the basic philosophy underpinning Maori Psychology. Somehow, this then translates into the old argument about the Pakeha right to ignore the Maori belief system. Can you imagine the furore if any Maori student said that they didn't want to learn about Freudian theory and dismissed him as simply "an experienced con-man who invented psycho-analysis largely as a means of preying on the weaknesses of wealthy Viennese widows in order to get into both their wallets and their knickers". Basically this is the same line of attack. It ignores the positive contri-

butions of Freud in order to concentrate on and magnify allegations about his lifestyle and treatment methods.

I had rather hoped that the sensitive new age awareness of the nineties would mean that Pakeha academics could stand alongside traditional Maori knowledge in a spirit of understanding and exchange that would result in benefits to both races in an atmosphere of respect. I, and many like me, are sick of responding to the same old invalid arguments. We have heard them so many times we could quote you chapter, book, verse and page number.

Letter number three appears to be more of the same. Attack the personalities and then the side issues, maybe no-one will notice that you didn't debate the crux of the matter. Who knows? Maybe these students are aiming for a career in politics. They certainly appear to have learnt the politician's art of taking a long time to say nothing about the issue at hand.

Having got all that off my chest, I want to say something about the effect of this debate on me as an individual.

Within this whole debate my culture has been mocked, knocked and ignored; and many liberal Pakeha seem to believe that it's a storm in a teacup. Well, let me tell you, that teacup was full of boiling water and some of it spilled on me and my friends. I want to tell you to jam your liberal view-point and deal with the racism of these students. I want to tell you to keep your plastic smiles and your synthetic sympathy, that I would much rather you came down from your comfortable perches on the fence of academic reason and at least said that you think these students are wrong. I want to tell you these are Pakeha students. Why should Maori have to deal with this? And I want to applaud Kim for finding the courage that many Pakeha academics apparently lacked.

At 43, I remember the seventies and the build-up to the He Taua incident. I have never approved of the use of violence as a solution to a problem, but right now, I understand the desire for it. It should be remembered that one afternoon of violence brought to an abrupt halt a long tradition within the Engineering School of mocking the Haka.

I would also like to point out that violence

takes many forms. I personally regard the outpouring of student racism as a violent attack upon my culture. Further, I regard the non-action by the department as condoning that violence. More than anything else this incident has made me ashamed that I even want to belong to this institution. Maybe, in the final analysis, that is how you keep so many of us out.

No matter how you tinker with your system in

order to ensure that more of us are allowed entry through the servants entrance, no academic institution will ever be able to cater for us while excluding the serious study of traditional Maori knowledge.

If you cannot or will not provide that for us then at least admit to your racism. An honest bigot is so much easier to deal with. Come the revolution, I want to know who's on my side.

Appendix: Letters to Craccum

1. Craccum Issue 18, 3 August 1992, p.7.

Paakeha Psychology

Dear Kim,

Racist? I'll give you racist:

Sure the Psych Department have decreased the importance of the now Maaori Psychology Section in the 32.108 test, but hey! Who's idea was it to have a Maaori section in the first place? Why didn't they also introduce a Paakeha Psychology Section? In my opinion, THIS is blatant racism.

Yours,

Post 108 student

2. Craccum Issue 17, 27 July 1992, p.4.

Maaori Psych: Different Story

Dear Kim,

Are you ignorant, stupid, or do you just wish to voice whichever side of the story you see fit to?

You're right: the Psychology Dept were trying to make an effort by including a Maaori Psychology section (five lectures in fact!) in this year's course. However, these facts you neglected to mention:

1. Handouts meant to be organised and distributed on time in the lectures (by the Maaori tutors) did not arrive on time (we were told that the photocopier had broken down. Is there only one photocopier in the University?)

2. As a result of this organisational muddle, the Dept and the Maaori tutors organised a special tutorial for the week before the test which the Maaori tutors were supposed to attend. I went, even the lecturers who weren't directly involved with the Maaori section went. But did the Maaori tutors turn up? NO! They forgot/ couldn't be bothered/piked out etc etc.

After this fiasco, the Department rightly decided (after much concern was expressed by students!) that indeed most of the class had really no idea what Maaori psychology was about. This was of course due to being let down twice by the Maaori tutors. THIS was the reason why there was a double chance in the test, not because Maaori psych(?!?) was not worth studying.

About the actual Maaori questions on the test: 13 out of 20 were straight translation questions, five were remotely relevant, and the other two were about the Treaty, including (in effect) 'what happened on Feb 6, 1840 with some really stupid options!

So, to anybody who really cares, I hope this balances the view of one-sided storytellers like Kim.

If Kim really wants equal representation in all subject matter then maybe we should have a whole stage I Maaori psychology paper. We'd both be happy then because she'd go to it, and I WOULDN'T.

Paul Simon

3. Craccum Issue 17, 27 July 1992, p.4.

Insult was Bad Teaching

Dear Kim,

Who the hell asked for your insignificant opinion anyway? Do you really take 32.108? We think not! If you did, you would realise how ill-taught the Maaori Psychology section was. Then again, maybe this is the insight into Maaori Psychology we should have picked up.

Look at the test. Those questions not to do with Maaori vocabulary were general knowledge and a joke eg: 'What happened on 6 February 1840?'

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