

The Australian Psychological Society has a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

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Ray is a social psychologist with many years experience in community education and action around Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi). A Pākehā New Zealander of Scots and English descent he was a foundation member of NSCBI (1991). His current research with Kupu Taea, analysing the ways in which mainstream media tell Māori stories and stories about Māori, grew out of his earlier analyses of how Pākehā speakers construct Māori and Māori-Pākehā relations in their talk. He retired from Auckland University in 2005, was President of the Society (2006- 2008), and has worked as a research and education consultant (media meanings) since then. He became a Fellow of the Society in 2012.

Over the last couple of years the Australian Psychological Society (APS) has developed and is now implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) that is intended “to build mutually respectful relations between indigenous and other Australians as part of the national effort to close the 17-year gap in life expectancy” (<http://www.psychology.org.au/reconciliation>). So: what is a RAP? What is the APS undertaking to do? And why might New Zealand psychologists give a toss?

What is a RAP?

Under sustained, courageous, goading by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island (ASTI) political leaders a growing number of Australians want to redress past injustices done to the indigenous peoples. There are articles, such as Gridley, Davidson, Dudgeon, Pickett & Sanson (2000) that document responses of the APS and psychologists to emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives and to the wider sea change in Australia and the profession. Nationally, pressure on the Government to apologise and offer redress for past policies and practices grew substantially following the bicentennial of European settlement in Australia in 1988. One outcome of that pressure was the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that recommended establishment of a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation which was done by unanimous vote in the Commonwealth Parliament. In 2001 that council set up Reconciliation Australia (RA) (<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans/what-is-a-rap->) as a national body with responsibility for focusing and aiding steps to reconciliation. In performing that role

RA foregrounds: the need for other Australians to: “develop relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities”, the importance of organisations demonstrating their respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the benefits that accrue from creating “mutually beneficial opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities and the RAP organisation [members], staff and stakeholders” (FAQs on RA site).

The Reconciliation Action Plan programme, running since 2006, encourages and assists organisations to develop and implement their own RAP. It is a key strategy of RA because the programme aims to turn “good intentions into actions”. [Quotes in this outline of the RAP programme are from the FAQs resource at the RA site.] Each organisation’s RAP is guided by its vision for the future and the organisation’s context - “Who you are, what you do, staff, and location”. A business, NGO, professional association (APS is one), local body, etc. deciding to develop a RAP, is recommended to appoint a ‘champion’ who can ensure the development and implementation don’t get sidelined, and is encouraged to enable everyone in the organisation to be part of the process. Not a simple task when you have 20,000 members, more than 100 staff, and numerous sub-groups and interested parties. Obviously, as RAPs are about reconciliation, the organisation must relate in appropriate and effective ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, spokespersons, and leaders to ensure their perspectives and understandings help shape the RAP. As noted above: three elements underpin RA thinking

about reconciliation: developing and maintaining relations between other Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities, demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and creating “mutually beneficial opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities and the RAP organisation [members], staff and stakeholders”. For APS, the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA) is their primary Indigenous partner.

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Having agreed to develop a RAP the APS formed a working group: co-chaired by the then presidents of the Society and chair of AIPA and including APS Board members, senior staff, chairs (or representatives) of relevant member groups, and other Indigenous and non-indigenous members, as well as Indigenous community members. Consistent with the spirit and intent of the Memorandum of Understanding between APS and NZPsS, Associate Professor Linda Waimarie Nikora and I were invited participants expected to contribute on the basis of our NZ experiences. The APS bases its vision on the challenge issued by Rob Riley “an inspirational justice activist” in the first indigenous keynote given to an APS conference (1995) (http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/RAP-Booklet_Final_WEB.pdf):

“It is your responsibility [as psychologists] to seek that knowledge and understanding [of Aboriginal

people] now, and to ensure that it is available for future generations of psychologists, in psychological training and education programs.”

To quote from the RAP:

“Reconciliation is central to our response to Rob Riley’s challenge to us all. It involves building mutually respectful relationships between indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone’s best interests.”

In October 2011 APS publicly stated its commitment to developing a RAP, identifying seven areas for action:

- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists,
- enriching psychology by incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives,
- facilitating psychologists’ competence to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,
- reviewing APS governance structures and policies,
- developing and embedding cultural protocols for APS meetings and events,
- reviewing ethical guidelines for provision of psychological services to and conduct of research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,
- facilitating research in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

What is the APS undertaking to do?

For this to work, like every other RAP, to work it has to be an integral part of the life of the organisation and all who sail (or work) in it. So, rather than a shopping list of desirable activities

the APS RAP organises the actions (all with timelines, individuals or groups responsible, and measurable targets) into five sections of which No. 1 is “Respectful relationships”. (<http://www.psychology.org.au/reconciliation>). The other specific areas are, as listed: Governance, Cultural competence, Indigenous education and employment, and Tracking progress and reporting. In Respectful relations, actions include: [ensuring] Branches are aware of the RAP and are linking with local Indigenous organisations and psychologists, sharing stories of successful partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous psychologists/communities, developing Cultural Protocols and implementing them across APS business, and, as a mark of respect, recognising/celebrating key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates each year. A necessary resource for the last action, a calendar of those dates with brief explanations of each, already exists in draft form. Among the Cultural Protocols currently implemented by APS is Welcome to Country, as I understand it, this is akin to a mihitau, where the people of the particular territory welcome those present to their Country. If, as at an APS Board meeting, there is no host person present, an Acknowledgement of Country recognises that nation’s mana.

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From the APS Home page (<http://www.psychology.org.au>) you reach the Society’s Acknowledgement of Country through the link marked

by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags (lower right).

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri and the Boonwerrung people, the traditional custodians of the land on which our national office is situated, and pays respect to elders both past and present of the Kulin nations. The APS is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous psychologists and communities to meet the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

These protocols are expected to be observed at conferences, meetings and other APS events.

Area No. 2 - Governance has APS talking about and to those responsible for setting policy making it vital for the health of the entire RAP programme. Actions include: strengthening the APS – AIPA relationship, ensuring members in leadership roles - such as the Board of directors - understand the importance of respect for Indigenous people, culture, land and history for APS and the members, ensuring governance structures have Indigenous representation wherever possible and incorporate views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, respect and facilitate AIPA decisions about prioritising commitments of Indigenous psychologists. The last commits APS to working with AIPA to obtain whatever Indigenous input is needed at the convenience of the Indigenous group or stakeholders rather than, as is the wont of NZ governments, at the behest of the colonial organisation.

Area No. 3 – Cultural competence - and No. 4 – Indigenous education and employment – require APS both as an

organisation and through its members to engage with a host of other bodies and people. I am hoping they succeed in bettering the goals currently set as I see change in both areas as essential if we (psychologists) are to ensure our knowledge and practices benefit rather than harm non-culture-defining peoples (Black & Huygens, 2007) individually or collectively. With respect to Cultural competence, APS actions include: increase the amount and quality of Indigenous content in the psychology curriculum, update and promote ethical guidelines for research and practice with Indigenous people, increase understanding of Aboriginal culture history and contemporary issues among members, Board and staff, share up-to-date research and culturally informed practice with members, facilitate processes ensuring assessment tools are developed with/by and for Indigenous peoples, establish and support a group to increase Indigenous psychology student enrolments and student retention. These APS actions commit them to standing alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and mental health workers who, for many years, have been encouraging university departments to include Indigenous content in psychology courses, particularly those leading to professional registration. That has begun to happen and will become an accepted part of psychology although, if New Zealand universities are any guide, some universities will respond positively while others will remain committed to the psychology of the metropole (Connell, 2007, Nikora, 2012). Having been involved with a similar, Māori and Pacific, affirmative action scheme I believe that setting up an Indigenous Education Reference Group with responsibility for both increasing Indigenous student numbers and Indigenous content in psychology should mean

that participating departments will be able to benefit from each other's experiences to ensure critical issues are recognised early and addressed effectively.

“Reconciliation is central to our response to Rob Riley’s challenge to us all. It involves building mutually respectful relationships between indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone’s best interests.” (RAP)

For area No. 4 – Indigenous education and employment – the actions commit APS to support Indigenous psychology students by working with Heads of Departments and universities’ Indigenous Student Support Services, develop reciprocal mentoring for Indigenous psychology students, recent graduates and interested non-Indigenous psychologists through partnership with the APS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Psychology Interest Group (ATSIPP), contribute to national debates and policies impacting on Indigenous psychology workforce, support mechanisms for increasing employment of Indigenous people particularly psychologists, facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being able to self-identify by language group in all data collection, increase numbers of Indigenous psychology students, retain and support Indigenous students and graduates in the profession, explore possibilities for developing professional development academic and research programme for and with Indigenous psychologists. These actions constitute a more elaborate and focused effort to create a substantial, well-qualified Indigenous psychology workforce than that Professor Jules Older proposed for New Zealand in the 1970s, a scheme NZPS did not support at the time.

While the RAP actions are obviously directed to having more Indigenous participants in psychology, New Zealand has found that similar actions have made it possible to move towards a more Māori psychology (Durie, 2012).

Why might New Zealand psychologists give a toss?

First, there's self-interest. There is increasingly close integration of psychological practice and practitioners across the two countries and an increasing number of practitioners will work in Australia at some point in their career. When you cross the Tasman you will need to be up-to-date with these changes as they will (or should) affect your ability to obtain an annual practice certificate.

Second, there's the urge or need to ensure you remain up-to-date in at least your own practice areas. Efforts to improve psychology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists and clients will affect both the practice and the discipline of psychology and those changes will not be confined to Australia. Indeed, issues resulting from similar efforts to improve psychology for Māori clients and practitioners have already been noted (for example: Herbert, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012; Nairn & Hyde, 2010). To give three examples: differing understandings of the nature of knowledge, recognising that people's actions are grounded in their culture-based interpretations of their world (Tau, 2012), and the growing pressure to grant spirituality an appropriate place in psychology's models of healthy human living. Differences in how knowledge is understood in different epistemologies are of particular importance to a discipline whose currency is knowledge: so how should psychologists practise if they are to respect people who see knowledge as lacking validity when divorced

from the relationships within which it was generated? That issue, like the necessity of recognising that people's worlds are shaped by their cultures, are foundational for efforts to practise in a culturally competent manner (Love & Waitoki, 2007).

The APS RAP places respect for the histories, culture and special contributions of the Indigenous

I think it would help if, especially in relation to Te Tiriti, psychologists here were to assertively communicate to all the importance of living and practising by the principles of: Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, Responsible caring, Integrity in relationships, and Social Justice and responsibility to society.

peoples at the centre of the restoration of respectful relationships so we can expect to see increasing numbers of psychologists seeking ways in which the dominant psychology can work with these different knowledge systems. In his 2003 keynote address to the NZPsS Conference, Mason Durie (2012) identified the interface between different knowledge systems as the place where creative developments occur: something those who attended the National Māori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium (2007) or the Indigenous psychologies: Our past, present and future conference (2012) will have seen very clearly. I hope I have made it clear that I expect the APS RAP and comparable efforts here to shift the conceptual centre of gravity of psychology and, as that shift occurs, anyone who has not been following, or has resisted developments may find they are struggling to adapt their practice.

My reflections

Involvement in the RAP process has pushed me to think about reconciliation and the centrality of the Treaty in parallel efforts by NZPsS. My initial reactions to 'reconciliation' were prejudiced by many films, books and other stories

in which non-dominant people(s) are required to acquiesce in or become reconciled to their subservient state. In contrast to that 'We won, you lost, get used to it' meaning, Reconciliation Australia and the RAP working group understood reconciliation as: "making friendly again after an estrangement" (Oxford Reference Dictionary). Indeed reconciliation between settlers

and Indigenous Australians has become Australia's preferred path to a genuinely post-colonial nation. That's similar to Canada and South Africa where, as a necessary step to more just and equal relations, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions were established to enable (relatively) unvarnished accounts of events in their colonial history to be told. While I have some reservations about 'reconciliation' as the path to a culturally just society, I hope I have been clear that the RA programmes do enable diverse people to work together on the basis of their commitment to "build mutually respectful relations between Indigenous and other Australians".

In New Zealand we do not and have not talked of reconciliation between the indigenous and settler peoples either as part of professional practice or more generally. Instead, and I would not have it otherwise, efforts to achieve culturally just relationships have centred on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Each principle of the Aotearoa/New Zealand Code of Ethics (2002) is locally grounded in the Treaty which is also at the heart of the NZPsS Bicultural Commitment (<http://www.>

psychology.org.nz/cms_display.php?sn=47&st=1&pg=3383). Yet outside and sometimes within NZPsS talk of the Treaty often leads to animosity and people taking or supporting anti-Māori positions, particularly in relation to Treaty settlements. In a large part that is a consequence of generations of settler talk that misrepresents the Treaty (McCreanor, 2012), denies Māori perspectives (as a counter see *Ngāpuhi Speaks*, 2012, reviewed in this issue), and takes for granted the rightness of imposed colonial structures and practices. That talk supports attitudes that recycle the talk and sustain an adversarial, zero-sum game understanding in which fear that Māori might win over masters desire to create a culturally just society that respects the dignity of persons and peoples. I think it would help if, especially in relation to Te Tiriti, psychologists here were to assertively communicate to all the importance of living and practising by the principles of: Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, Responsible caring, Integrity in relationships, and Social Justice and responsibility to society.

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NZPsS Professional Development events coming up

Drug Treatment of Mental Disorders

presented by Assoc Prof David Menkes
A half day workshop on Saturday 9.00am - 12.30pm
Wellington 15 June 2013, Victoria University
Auckland 6 July 2013, Auckland University-Tamaki Campus

Symptom Validity Assessment - Where have we come from; where are we now and where are we going?

presented by Dr Jon Nuth
a full day workshop - Auckland 14 June 2013

The Use of Practice-based Evidence in Supervision

Presented by Dr David Green, UK
Auckland 24 July, Wellington 29 July,
Dunedin 2 August, Christchurch 5 August

Living Beyond Your Pain: ACT for Pain Management

presented by Prof JoAnne Dahl, Sweden
two-day workshop
17 & 18 October Auckland
21 & 22 October Christchurch

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