

Applying the Treaty — Te Tiriti in (professional) organisations

Ray Nairn

Dr Raymond Nairn, the immediate past president of the NZ Psychological Society, has been a member of its National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues (NSCBI) since its establishment in 1991. He has represented NSCBI on working party that developed the current Code of Ethics (2002).

The workshop was structured around three questions:

- What is the standing of Te Tiriti in the organisation, how entrenched is it?
- How do members learn about and become involved in the work?
- How is Te Tiriti commitment realised in the public face and activities of the organisation?

I drew on my experience with the New Zealand Psychological Society. I told stories about the Society's journey that raised and suggested possible answers to participants' questions.

What is the New Zealand Psychological Society?

It is the pre-eminent professional organisation for psychologists — practitioners and academics — in New Zealand, providing professional support and development through conferences, workshops and publications. The Society works closely with the Psychologists Board which is the 'responsible authority' under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act (HPCAA). The Board is responsible for protecting the public by setting standards and assessing competence to practice, accrediting training programmes and hearing some complaints against practitioners.

The Treaty story for the New Zealand Psychological Society began with a hui in 1989 from which a remit was brought to the Society AGM that year. As a compromise at that meeting a working party was formed to report to the 1990 AGM and the following year the AGM passed the remit that established the National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues (NSCBI as it is mostly called). The inaugural committee with both Māori and Pākehā members met later that year at Waikato University. That and subsequent meetings have been open to Society members and others who support the kaupapa. As there are few Māori psychologists who are members of the Society, NSCBI and the Society have relied heavily on the contributions of those, like Linda Waimarie Nikora the first convenor, who are committed to the kaupapa expressed in the Bicultural Commitment (a.k.a. Rule 3, see below).

From the start NSCBI wished to engage members in discussion about the ways in which Te Tiriti related to the discipline and practice of psychology and we talked of including Te Tiriti in the objectives of the Society. Witnessing a debate about the ordering of the objectives (1992) convinced us that we needed a different approach and, at the 1993 AGM the Society members voted for a new Rule 3 – Implementation of Objects:

In giving effect to the objects for which the Society is established, the Society shall encourage policies and practices that reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity and shall, in particular, have due regard to the provisions of, and to the spirit and intent of, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi).

From late 2008 the rule has been renamed the Bicultural Commitment and has a prominent place on the Society's website and in other public documents.

As the implications of the Bicultural Commitment for a science-based discipline were not immediately obvious there had to be opportunities for members, especially those responsible for the policy and growth of the organisation, to learn, discuss and plan appropriately. Initially Treaty days were run for members of the executive and, more recently, these have been bicultural planning days, usually with an outside facilitator.

Early consequences of the bicultural commitment were the reconstitution of Society governance in which two of the six directors (executive members) are Bicultural Directors nominated by NSCBI. Further, Society contributions to working parties, on revision of the Psychologists Act 1981 (1992-4), and development of the new Code of Ethics for Psychologists (1995-2002) always included a representative of NSCBI.

Consequently the *Code of Ethics for psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2002) has a Preamble that states:

In giving effect to the Principles and Values of the Code of Ethics there shall be due regard for New Zealand's cultural diversity and in particular for the provisions of, and the spirit and intent of, the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Code is built upon four principles:

1. Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples

2. Responsible caring
3. Integrity in relationships
4. Social justice and responsibility to Society

and the statement of each principle includes te Tiriti, for example: the final sentence of Principle 1 is:

In New Zealand, the basis for respect between the indigenous people (tangata whenua – those who are Māori) and others (those who are not Māori) is set out in the Treaty of Waitangi.

In parallel with such work NSCBI has organised symposia at annual conferences and kept a flow of informative and educative items and columns in Society publications. Currently numbering about 50, these reports, columns and longer articles about Te Tiriti, psychology and the Society are an important resource for members, teachers, students, and practitioners. The first symposium, “Cultural Justice and Ethics” at the 1993 conference followed immediately after keynote addresses by Charles Wldegrave (Pākehā), Kiwi Tamasese (Samoan), and Donna Awatrere-Huata (Māori) and connected cultural justice, Te Tiriti, and ethics to practice, teaching, research, and professional training. Other keynote addresses followed and from 2000 there has been agreement that there will be two bicultural keynotes at each annual conference.

As well as symposia at conferences the Society has organised workshops to help members engage with Te Tiriti and, more recently, cultural competence as part of their professional development. In the same spirit the recently published:

Professional practice of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand, Ian M Evans, Julia J Rucklidge, & Mike O’Driscoll (eds.), Wellington: The New Zealand Psychological Society, (2007)

has a strong emphasis throughout on New Zealand conditions and the importance of working sensitively and effectively with all persons and peoples. The authors all received guidelines prepared by NSCBI to help them recognise the cultural bases from which they and psychology approached the matters of which they wrote — an initiative of the editors.

Viewed from different angles these developments can seem like massive changes, especially when we find many psychologists now regard them very highly, or as very limited responses to urgent need. It was great to have the opportunity to share the Psychological Society’s journey with people for whom the changes seemed to make sense.

In closing a salutation to all who have been part of important this work. He mihi nui ki a koutou, nga toa o te kaupapa nei, nga wahine me nga tane. He mahi takitini tenei, ehara i te mahi takitahi. Kia ora tatou katoa.