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into an undergraduate psychology course:
Experience at Curtin University of Technology*

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RUNNING HEAD: INDIGENOUS AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

Incorporating Indigenous and cross-cultural issues into an undergraduate psychology course:
Experience at Curtin University of Technology¹

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Abstract

There has been a clear expression of the need to incorporate Indigenous and cross-cultural issues into psychology curricula and for the development of models to guide the process. This paper outlines the process of developing an Indigenous and cross-cultural psychology unit at Curtin University of Technology. A conceptual framework that includes foundational, professional, and socially responsive knowledge, which has guided the development and implementation of the unit, is presented. A description of the course content and processes of delivery follow this. Observations based on informal evaluation of the unit and our perceptions of what it is achieving and where it may need to be modified are offered. For example, the ways in which the unit helped to validate the experiences of members of different social and cultural groups are highlighted. Finally, some recommendations are made and challenges in dealing with increasing cultural diversification in tertiary education are discussed.

Keywords: Indigenous issues, socially responsive knowledge, cross-cultural psychology, education

Incorporating Indigenous and cross-cultural issues into an undergraduate psychology course:
Experience at Curtin University of Technology

Reactions to the task of incorporating and implementing Indigenous and cross-cultural studies into undergraduate psychology curricula have been varied, and the process of incorporating concerns into psychology curricula has been characterised by trials and triumphs, difficulties and successes. In this paper we describe our experiences so far in developing and delivering a unit that attempts to deal with both Indigenous psychology and cross-cultural psychology, highlighting the history, guiding framework, content of the unit and evaluation plans and strategies. After three years of teaching a unit of Indigenous and cross-cultural psychology, we continue to experience our fair share of ups and downs. While it is tempting to focus solely on the successes (and there have been many), we intend to share our experience of the difficulties and questions that developing and delivering the unit have posed. Indeed, it has been our confrontation by these questions that has fuelled the revision and reworking of the unit, and to a large extent, our own development as facilitators in this process.

Identifying the Need for Indigenous and Cross-cultural curricula

Factors related to developing a unit in psychology courses

The expressed need for such a unit derives from several sources. Internationally, authors have raised questions about the cultural assumptions that underlie mainstream and cross-cultural approaches to psychology (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997; Sampson, 1989; Shweder, 1992; Sinha, & Kao, 1997) and have argued for indigenising psychology (Sinha, 1997). Locally and historically, the practice, approach and assumptions underlying the involvement of Australian psychology with Indigenous people, has attracted criticism (e. g., Kearins, 1986; Davidson, 1993; Bolton, 1994; Henry & Brabham, 1994; Reser, 1994). Critiques have highlighted a deficit in practical information imparted via training and have

sent out a call for revisiting theoretical bases in relation to their relevance to Indigenous persons (e. g., Dudgeon, Collard & Pickett, 1998; Garvey; 1996, Miller, 1994; Riley, 1997). Recent reflections on psychology training in Australia from persons from Asia and the Middle East brought to the fore different issues including cultural exclusion, differences in epistemology and worldview, the relevance of psychological knowledge across different groups, the challenges of acculturation, and the impacts of racism on everyday functioning (Ghafa-Tabrizi, 1998; Han, 1998).

Some authors have identified the need to improve the education of psychologists in terms of understanding cultural issues in Australia (Davidson, 1992, 1993; Healy & Franklin, 1998; Kearins, 1986) as has been the case abroad (American Psychological Association, Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic and Culturally Diverse Populations, 1993). Davidson (1993) stated that there seems to have been “a complete lack of regard for knowledge about the cultural context of professional practice and the attendant skills that might be expected of a professional psychologist who aims to work effectively and efficiently in an increasingly multicultural community...” (p. 55). Australia is in its infancy in considering cultural and Indigenous issues in psychology (e. g., Reser, 1991; 1994). This is not to say that there is not a knowledge base that has explored cultural and contextual factors that influence human functioning. There is such a knowledge base and it can inform a psychology that values human diversity (e. g., Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990; Sinha & Kao; 1997; Lonner & Malpass, 1994; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1994; Marsella, 1998).

To its credit, the Australian Psychological Society (APS) has begun to address these deficits in such publications as the Guidelines for the Provision of Psychological Services for and the Conduct of Psychological Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People of Australia (APS, 1996) and the APS position paper on prejudice and racism (Sanson, et al.,

1998). In the section relating to Education and Training, the Guidelines recommend that in order to ensure that there are psychological services that meet the needs of Indigenous people, education and training in psychology should include a segment on Indigenous studies (p.6). Furthermore, it was strongly recommended that:

- Indigenous studies segments in psychology education and training be developed in consultation with local Indigenous groups; where possible, such education and training should be directed and provided by Indigenous people with appropriate training and experience.
- the teaching of Indigenous knowledge and customs, the history of contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and Indigenous policy initiatives be undertaken and directed by Indigenous people themselves (p.7).

Operationalising these recommendations has proved to be a challenge. Our approach has not been to reject all preceding psychological endeavours relating to Indigenous peoples, instead to encourage the critical evaluation of practices – past, present and future. This approach allows us to distill the lessons from previous experiences and to identify what requires change and further investigation. The need for roles for psychology and psychologists working with Indigenous people and across cultures has been questioned and it is the nature of that involvement which is seen as requiring attention.

Institutional and organisational enabling

It has taken more than collective needs and departmental support to ensure the emergence of a unit on Indigenous and cross-cultural psychology at Curtin University. A variety of factors outside the discipline have enabled its development. Reports have shown inequities in health standards and appropriateness of services for Aboriginal people (e.g., Raphael, 1995; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991). These issues

strike at the heart of education and training of Australian psychologists as we are implicated in the provision of these services and their administration.

At a university level, Curtin University of Technology (1998) has made clear its commitment to cultural diversity and respect for Indigenous people in its mission statement and statement of reconciliation. Curtin has developed an affirmative action employment policy aiming to have 2.6% of the staff of Indigenous descent by 2000 (Curtin University, 1996). In 1998, it also publicly committed itself to working towards reconciliation. Together, broader and local movements have been supportive of our endeavours.

The Curtin Unit

Guiding framework: Foundational, professional and socially responsive knowledge

The development of the unit sits within this broader context and has also been shaped by our belief that psychology can play a meaningful and significant role in not only understanding human potential, but positively contributing to the making of contexts that would foster human potential and development. A generative role for psychology, one where psychologists are actively engaged in positive social change to enhance quality of life, has been articulated elsewhere (e.g., Albee, 1998; Dokecki, 1992; Gergen, 1988; Moghaddam, 1990; Sampson, 1981; Sarason, 1981; Sloan, 1996; Syme & Bishop, 1993; Thomas & Veno, 1996). Also, we have drawn on the conceptual framework for higher education articulated by Altman (1996) as a guide for structuring the cross-cultural and Indigenous psychology unit. He argued for socially responsive knowledge to be paired with foundational and professional knowledge in the training of psychologists. Schön (1983) differentiated professional knowledge from foundational knowledge. The latter is standard fare for psychology courses, while the former is more likely to be addressed in professional courses. Schön developed a framework for understanding professional knowledge based on reflection on action. This

process is less amenable to direct instruction and requires the development of tacit knowledge and its conversion to theory, through reflection on experience. In addition to the conceptual and skills based knowledge imparted through foundational and professional knowledge, socially responsive knowledge is a values driven aspect of knowledge. It requires that we attend to the social issues of a community, and provide students with opportunities to experience at first-hand social issues and problems, so that they can develop skills to address them. Thus, the concept of socially responsive knowledge “means linking the curriculum to community needs and engaging students in direct, academically based problem solving on social issues” (Altman, 1996, p. 374).

A recent Heads of Schools conference held at Curtin University of Technology and co-sponsored by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (Curtin University), the School of Psychology, and the APS, explored the challenges of incorporating Indigenous issues into psychology curricula. An array of political, practical, and strategic issues were identified that made the activity challenging were identified. Among these was the lack of curricula, and thus the lack of models to guide the development of curricula in a sensitive and collaborative manner.

In other countries similar concerns have stimulated efforts to incorporate psychological knowledge into programs to educate about multiculturalism, anti-racism and social change. In New Zealand, for example, some education programs have been developed that concentrate on developing culturally safe practitioners (Tamasese, & Waldegrave, 1993). Cultural safety means practice that promotes, empowers, and strengthen identities rather than demeans and dilutes them (Ramsden, 1993). The New Zealand models are impressive in that they go beyond teaching generic multicultural skills, and emphasise the importance of self and cultural knowledge in the process of developing culturally safe practitioners. According to Ramsden, teaching generic cross-cultural skills does not require students to examine their

own cultural assumptions and this can be damaging. In fact, this has been the predominant model for teaching cross-cultural awareness (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Singelis, 1998).

Instead, Ramsden promotes a model that teaches students to reflect on their own cultural reality and place in the world and to understand “the poverty cycle and the various histories and socio-political conditions which maintain it” (p. 8). This approach takes the focus away from a superficial understanding of other cultures to a deeper understanding of one’s own culture in relation to other cultural groups. In a sense this is akin to Freire’s (1970, 1972) process of consciousness raising for increased cultural sensitivity.

In relation to developing other knowledge bases, it needs to be recognised that the unit is part of a broader course in which analytical skills have been developed. These analytical skills both inhibit and aid the development of professional and socially responsive knowledge. Analytical skills have been associated with foundational knowledge development. As such, they can help to develop a positivistic world view. This creates problems when students are asked to use more intuitive approaches involved in the development of professional and socially responsive knowledge. Once students’ intuitive skills have been developed somewhat, the analytic ability allows intuition to be grounded. Intuitive approaches to psychology have been criticised in the past. We would suggest that a combination of intuition and analytic skills is necessary to be able to develop in all three knowledge areas (foundational, professional, socially responsive), and that analytic skills can be useful in bounding intuition. Such an approach is akin to James’ (1907/1991) suggestion that psychologists need to be both “tough-minded” and “tender-minded” (concepts which have been distorted since James first wrote them last century).

Implementing Indigenous and cross-cultural issues: Objectives and techniques

The focus on context, socially responsive knowledge, and critical awareness provided

the basis for developing course objectives. The core objectives for the unit are for students to:

- 1) be familiar with frameworks for understanding and working with people from different cultural backgrounds;
- 2) have an understanding of the interplay between social, cultural, and sociopolitical factors, in our own and other people's experiences of psychological reality in different contexts;
- 3) be sensitive to the attitudes and values of people from differing cultures; and
- 4) have increased awareness about their own cultural values.

These objectives are not exhaustive and will continue to be developed in the future. They do, however, focus on implementing the three forms of knowledge into the unit's content, teaching practice and learning experience.

A range of teaching and learning processes are used including lectures, seminars, videos, small group discussions and set readings. In line with Ramsden's (1993) ideas, a central feature of the teaching and learning process has been to move beyond generic multicultural skills training to emphasise the importance of self and cultural knowledge in the process of developing culturally sensitive practitioner's ideas. In order to encourage the process of critical reflection, aspects of the learning tasks were designed to provide students with opportunities to examine their own cultural assumptions and biases, and their place in the world.

Lectures. The lecture series is designed to provide students with conceptual and theoretical knowledge and to sensitise them to the debates and issues in the area. Rather than teach cross-cultural psychology, we have, over a period of three years, developed content that exposes students to foundational and conceptual knowledge from cross-cultural and cultural psychology that provides a basis for framing Indigenous issues in the Australian context. Students are encouraged to be critical consumers of the information provided and to start thinking of how to localise or indigenise (Sinha, 1997) imported concepts and models. The unit is structured into three blocks.

The first block begins by describing the Australian context as culturally plural and highlights some of the implications of diversity. In providing the historical context for Indigenous and crosscultural issues we introduce the histories of colonisation and immigration. This is followed by lectures on various theoretical and methodological frameworks and issues in cross-cultural, cultural and Indigenous psychology. The session essentially provides a comparative analysis of the assumptions, units of analysis, and limitations of these different approaches to culture and psychology. The session is followed by a lecture that explores indigenising psychology and the levels at which the process has been discussed. Cheng's (1990, 1991) work on understanding East Asian personality is introduced as an example of an effort to look at psychology from a local perspective. He argued that psychological inquiring into East Asian personality had been biased and based on the standards of middle class white society. In order to understand East Asian people one would need to start with the epistemologies, ideologies and belief systems (e.g., Confucianism and Buddhism) that underpin social organisation and inform behaviour in those communities. Thus, Cheng's study represents an effort to develop an understanding of East Asian personality in terms of cultural knowledge and frameworks of that community. Many of the students in the unit had completed a compulsory introductory unit that focussed on Aboriginal history, systems of knowledge, and other topics that provided a basis for participation in this unit.

The second block introduces foundational knowledge emerging from intercultural group contact, colonisation and migration. These concepts are offered as ways of understanding intergroup issues in the local context. The focus has, to some extent, been on identity development in the context of oppression and acculturation experiences. Staff from the Centre for Aboriginal Studies delivered lecture topics on colonisation, racism, and identity. Typically the content of these sessions were conveyed through stories reflecting the

reality of the storyteller and often a broader reality of the challenges facing Aboriginal people. Other sessions delivered by Aboriginal lecturers focussed on the historical and current contexts of Indigenous people including the legacy of policies such as the 1905 Act, the stolen generation, the relations between psychology and Indigenous people, and Aboriginal worldviews, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. We explored challenges of migration-adaptation using Berry's (1997) acculturation framework and the impact of various policies on Aboriginal identity. In two lectures a video was used to explore the challenges of migration and to apply Berry's framework.

The last block explores professional knowledge. What does cultural sensitivity mean and what does this mean for our future roles in this domain? For these topics we emphasize process and draw on the Guidelines for the Provision of Psychological Services for and the Conduct of Psychological Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People of Australia (APS, 1997). For example, videos depicting different scenarios of Indigenous people interacting with non-Indigenous people in health service settings are used to explore effective and ineffective crosscultural communication.

Seminars. Seminars provide an opportunity for students to draw on substantive information and personal experiences to develop an awareness about culture, racism and identity. Bringing students' experiences, stories, and histories into conversation with the literature allows for key notions to be made meaningful and relevant. Again, the aim is to engender socially responsive knowledge. Staff facilitators run the first two seminars that give students the opportunity to explore their cultural values and identities. In later seminars, racism and oppression are explored. For the remaining sessions students work in groups to develop workshops that they present. They are required to scope the issues in their particular area before they draw on the literature. In this way students are encouraged to develop an understanding of the issues as they are experienced in everyday living before referring to the

conceptual knowledge base. Some topics have included the refugee experience and information about the services and challenges faced by specialist organisations such as the Association for Services to Survivors of Torture or Trauma (ASSETS), the meaning and importance of cultural identity, why multiculturalism, different lived experiences of racism and oppression, and ethnic conflict in the Middle East. Topics have also included explorations of Aboriginal notions of community, the diversity of Aboriginal identity, and experiences of the stolen generation.

Assessment. Students complete three assessment tasks including a written report, group presentation, and an examination. The written report is based on an interview. The interview requires students to gain an understanding of an issue from the perspective of another person. Students are instructed that they will be required to do life story research. “Life story research aims to investigate the subjective meanings of lives as they are told in the narratives of participants” (Plummer, 1995, p. 50). Students may select a person on the basis of theoretical or methodological criteria or for pragmatic reasons. The only set criterion is that the person be an immigrant, a member of an ethnic group, or an Indigenous Australian. The aim is for students to engage the narratives or stories that people tell to get an understanding of the social and psychological realities of immigration, transition, or about being an Indigenous Australian. As part of the written report, students are also required to include their reflections on the whole process. These reflections promote self-examination as part of everyday interactions.

Reflections on the Implementation of the Unit

The model of curriculum development used for the unit was based on McKernan's (1991) notions of action research in incremental planning, reflection, evaluation and change. This model focuses on reflection in action and the need to use experience in further

curriculum development. Some of the observations made are presented here.

As this unit has been running only three years a formal evaluation has not been completed. Currently some evaluation is planned through a content analysis of the life stories submitted this year. The form of a more substantial evaluation has yet to be decided. Wicker (1989) has argued strongly for understanding the substantive domain before developing research procedures. It is this understanding process that we are undertaking at the moment. An informal formative evaluation has been conducted using information collected from individual and group interviews with students, the life story papers, and staff reflections on the content and processes that characterises the unit.

While systematic observations have not yet been undertaken, there is a considerable number of comments that provide the basis for beginning to develop an evaluation strategy that reflects the philosophy and objectives of the unit. Some of these observations are presented here as “working hypotheses”, “claims to be doubted” (Pepper, 1942), or “assertoric knowledge” (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Student reactions to socially responsive knowledge

In this section we focus on student reactions to the introduction of socially responsive knowledge. There seem to be two pivotal aspects to the development of socially responsive knowledge in this course. These are the seminar presentations and the life history, with the lecture stream providing a framework. The seminars offer considerable opportunity to develop concepts of what the students gain from the unit. One observation is that the format of the student seminars has changed over the two years. There is a progression during the year and between the years. In 1998, presentations became less dependent on didactic presentations and more experiential. For example, the first student seminar consisted of students engaging in activities exploring cultural identity followed by a discussion of the

importance of cultural identity in everyday functioning. The last presentation consisted of the use of two video segments, two presentations of theoretical material and a class discussion. The theoretical presentations included many examples and the use of the personal diary of one of the presenters who was a migrant.

The most obvious change is the self-perception of the majority of the students. The perception of staff and students is that whereas the majority has been seen as 'white middle class', through the process reflection on the life histories and in seminars, the diversity of cultural backgrounds has emerged. Whereas the students previously regarded themselves as being two groups, by and large, the white Australian and Asian overseas students, the group is now diverse with people of Polish, Greek, Italian, Irish, English, Singaporean, Malay and Indonesian origin.

The following excerpt from one student's story illustrates the extent to which students become reflective of their own experiences and cultural histories:

Originally, this life story was to centre upon the life and experience of (name), Australian Chinese, who has spent the last 25 years in Australia. However, upon revising the notes and the taped interview, it struck me that my experiences of immigration and Australia differed vastly from hers. This one thought opened a vault of memories that came flooding back, distant and faded black and white pictures, snapshots and a mixture of feelings and emotions that slowly untangled.

There appears to be a change in balance of student power. Asian students are stereotypically seen as being reverential towards staff, quiet and somewhat rigid in their thinking. In this unit Asian students' experiences are validated through the nature of the topics. Their demeanour changes considerably. They often become as assertive and outspoken as any of the other students. For example, two students from Indonesia for whom English is a second or third language have become as outspoken in their seminar group as any other member. In one presentation, one of these two students was describing the sojourner experience in terms of culture shock. She shared her feelings as recorded in her diary to give examples of the stages

of adaptation. During this presentation there was barely a sound. Even though she spoke with a strong accent, the audience was captivated by her experience. This led to considerable discussion by other students who had been internal or external migrants, or had visited another place for an extended period of time. There was recognition that what they had taken as personal issues were common and a function of the change in social conditions. Internal migrants, for example, were able to recognise the factors involved in migration and to extend their experiences to be able to identify with the broader range of problems facing cross national migrants.

Some examples of how change occurs include the following observations. One student who had previously made racist comments, was expressing concern over the levels of the crime amongst Aboriginal people saying that she had to be careful not to leave her belongings in the car when she parked at sports training. She asserted that the local Aboriginal youths were notorious for stealing from cars. While this created considerable debate, she then went on justify her position on the basis that her parents had migrated from Italy and had experienced considerable discrimination. The tutor observed that she appeared to suddenly become aware of the contradiction in her statements. She did not say anything for the remainder of the session and displayed considerable unease.

In one seminar group, a discussion on the nature of oppression had been stimulated by the viewing of Jane Elliot's video "Blue eyed" (Denkmal-Film, 1996). The vigorous discussion had centred on gender discrimination. The group was comprised of 12 Caucasians, two people from Indonesia, one from Singapore and a woman from Africa. The discussion became quite vigorous and at one point the African-Australian pointed out that there were other forms of discrimination and that as a person of colour, she experienced discrimination every day. For example, she would frequently be served last in a shop, even though others had come in after her. The group responded that she may be overly sensitive and

misinterpreting the situations. The group then returned to the discussion of sexism. After a period of about five minutes the tutor reflected upon the fact that the group had behaved to the African-Australian in the very fashion about which she had complained. The action of the group was discriminatory. The dynamics of what followed are indicative of the emergence of a reflective process. Group members were initially shocked. They then became defensive, arguing that their actions had been misinterpreted. They did not direct their responses to the tutor, nor the African-Australian. A general air of resignation fell over the group. At this point, the African-Australian student was able to explain her feelings about the incident. She said her immediate reaction was to discount her own feelings and accept that she may have been overly sensitive. Her explanation did not allow the group to fail to recognise that they had been discriminatory towards her. The tutor was able then to debrief the group, pointing to the value of the experience and how even when the issue of discrimination is maximally salient, we can still perpetrate injustice. The reflective process continued and was raised in other forums outside that seminar group.

Another example of the reflective process and its role in developing socially responsive knowledge occurred when a group of students presented a seminar on prejudice and discrimination. The first task they had the class do was to discuss the difference between prejudice and discrimination. They then introduced the results of a small survey they had undertaken at a nearby shopping complex. They had asked interviewees to differentiate between discrimination and prejudice, to describe any discrimination they had experienced and whether they had perpetrated discrimination. The seminar presenters had transcribed the responses and gave each class member a person's responses to read aloud in class. There was little race based discrimination reported, considerable sexism and class and age discrimination. Each respondent was able to relate some experience of discrimination, although very few indicated they had been the perpetrators of discrimination. Students

typically have considerable difficulty in describing where they have been discriminated against, but after this exercise they were able to relate their own experiences and to frame them in theoretical terms.

Resisting socially responsive knowledge

Not all has been smooth sailing. One of the key challenges for us has been in dealing with student backlash and resistance. An example of resistance can be seen in challenges from those who acknowledge their own racism and try to discount the unit. In a sense it is good that they acknowledge this; one even said that he had changed a little but was still racist. For us the major challenge is to ensure that what we do is not discredited and devalued by student reactions. One student, for example, continually drew on myths about migrants and Aboriginal people taking the jobs of others and receiving government benefits, respectively, in his suggestion that the unit is “politically correct” and does deal with the facts. This student was challenged robustly by other students. In one seminar the exchange was heated. While the staff felt that there was little need to intervene, one of the more vocal of the people who had voiced anti-racist sentiments spoke to the tutor after the seminar arguing that it is the staff’s role to “control the racists”. This presents the staff with a dilemma. This seminar was obviously painful for a number of students whose own ethnic backgrounds led to emotional vulnerability. At what point do the staff need to intervene and to what extent do students need to take responsibility is a difficult issue. We are still working on this issue.

Conclusion

With regards to implementing new courses into already prescriptive psychology curricula, “It is one thing to get the foot in the door, another to have it remain there, and yet

another to then communicate and interact with those on the other side” (Smith, 1998, personal communication). Along these lines, this unit can be seen as the result of effort at all stages of the design and implementation process, from its beginnings as an idea, the establishment of a guiding framework and the construction of lectures and tutorials. We have been fortunate that we have been able to utilise the opportunities and resources given by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies for developing and delivering a joint unit. As the unit develops and different cultural voices gain prominence a key challenge will be to ensure that Indigenous issues remain a priority within the delivery of psychology courses. One of the few Indigenous students who participated in the unit said that the unit challenged her views of psychology. She had come to view psychology as only relevant to the mainstream. The unit, however, challenged that perception through critically looking at psychology in cultural context, and by doing this legitimized different cultural voices. This, she said, made her feel comfortable with doing psychology.

Naturally, and in line with our guiding framework, the unit goes beyond focussing on one cultural group to promote a multicultural focus. This has been very important because of the diverse student body and because of the many international students who participate in higher education in Australia. Although we have a multicultural focus, one that validates and legitimates the experiences and stories of different cultural groups, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. For example, the recent social upheaval in Indonesia has had a dramatic impact on students from that country. It has raised questions about our responsibilities and obligations to them. How do they cope with the issues and images and what are the implications for us? How do we incorporate their experiences into our courses and how do we address feelings and perceptions that we do not really understand, or how do we care about what happens to them and what they are experiencing. These are important challenges for us and, based on our experiences to date, it is essential that we develop ways

to incorporate issues of diversity into our courses. This unit seems to be one way of legitimating and validating the different life experiences of people who participate in psychology courses and sensitising psychology to cultural and social phenomena.

Some early recommendations

We recognise that there are stages in moving towards a more egalitarian approach (Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Tatum, 1992), but there has to be a recognition that oppression still exists and that tensions will continue until there has been substantial social change. Part of this involves our growth of awareness of our roles in an ethnically oppressive and structurally unequal society. For example, the white staff often feel the irony in teaching about oppression from a position of white privilege (Hage, 1998). On the other hand, the staff from non-dominant groups recognise the benefits of presenting personal experiences, but this can be at an emotional cost. The tension should provide the motivation for continued refinement of our working models. In this context, we offer some suggestions based on our work and experiences to date to others planning to incorporate cultural and Indigenous issues into their courses.

Foundation building

Establishing a mutual relationship between staff and students and engaging in a process of making explicit our interests, agendas, and values were central to constructing a foundation from which to develop the unit. This, in turn, informed and directed the practical considerations of development and implementation including gaining school or departmental commitment, and exploring the questions ‘why do you wish to engage’, and ‘what do you hope to achieve and impart by engaging in this domain’. In this paper we have addressed, to some extent, the questions ‘What do we want to do?’, ‘Who are we in this domain?’ and

‘What do we want to achieve in this unit?’. These are important questions that provided the initial basis for the unit and informed the direction of development and a useful starting point.

Resources

Partnership. In developing the course, we have tried to work collaboratively and draw on the expertise, knowledge and experience of those involved. We would encourage utilising local staff such as health professionals and leaders in communities that can offer local expertise. This means considering inviting people to come and share experiences of migrant settlement, Indigenous people’s experiences of removal or contact with mainstream mental health services and so on. Alternatively, this might mean students seeking out members of community, as with the life story assignment.

Teaching and learning. We encourage moving beyond traditional forms of assessment and creating opportunities for students to engage in experiential ways in this domain. A practical assignment might involve the development of a directory or resource book containing the local, regional, national or international resources relating to diversity. There are a host of resources that we have found useful in providing material for the course including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Clearinghouse, ASeTTS, the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia, and Aboriginal Medical Services.

Staffing. We recommend that staff participate in courses such as the Ways of Working with Aboriginal People course (CAS, 1991) or undertake a course in cross-cultural communication training. The Ways of Working package goes beyond the recipe-driven model of awareness training, to sensitising participants to the realities of Indigenous people through exploring their historical, social, and psychological realities. There are at least two reasons for this recommendation. Firstly, university staff must be aware of their own cultural biases and value bases. Even those very aware of their ‘situatedness’ can become blind to the

values that drive and inform their work and practice because of the distance between academic settings and communities. These courses provide an opportunity to highlight those assumptions, bringing them to the fore with a view to considering their impact on what we do. Secondly, these courses also provide novel and practical strategies for teaching and learning activities.

We also feel that it is important that members of the dominant group participate in the delivery of cross-cultural and Indigenous units. By doing this they provide some form of modelling for other members of the dominant group. Still, it is of greater importance to make the space for Indigenous people and other minorities to present their realities and experiences in such units. Yet, we should be careful not to marginalise these units by making them the domain of only minority group members.

At this point in the development of our curriculum, we find ourselves continually returning to the need to integrate socially responsive knowledge with foundational knowledge and professional knowledge. This is a reasonable expectation of a course in psychology, because that is what the psychological professional must do. The psychologist will need time to incorporate new sensitivities into the study of the discipline and its practices. By starting in the undergraduate years, our approach begins the task of bringing Indigenous and cross-cultural issues into the forefront of psychological thinking. We began by claiming that psychology and Indigenous and cross-cultural issues have been related for two hundred years in Australia. Our curriculum philosophy and development is aimed at improving that relationship.

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