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Developing Social Policy in a Multi-Cultural Setting: the Role of Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology

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How should public policies respond to the dynamics of the multicultural setting? This chapter illustrates how cross-cultural psychology was used to provide tangible intellectual support to help develop and frame a policy response in the multicultural setting. Over the past twenty years, New Zealand has changed from a bicultural to multicultural society competing in the global economy. This chapter identifies policy issues and challenges the transition to a diverse, multicultural society has created, the type of response that was developed and its outcome. These are informed by the author's personal reflections in developing and promoting *Ethnic Perspectives in Policy*, a government policy framework and resource guide for public servants. A survey of all departments after two years has indicated that *Ethnic Perspectives in Policy* affected positive institutional change and provided an impetus to develop more specific policies to address the intercultural setting. The potential for further applied research is discussed in the context of contemporary social policy issues related to settlement, social cohesion and national identity.

The aim of this chapter¹ is to help foster a conversation between researchers and policymakers on the increasingly diverse communities that feature in modern western societies. The thesis is that emerging policy questions around diverse pluralistic communities are now more likely to benefit from cross-cultural psychology research and literature. Few people today would question the far-reaching impacts of immigration on both the host and migrant communities in many countries. These population changes have created policy issues that are diverse, complex and dynamic. What should be the policy towards minority ethnic communities? Should there be special treatment?

The establishment team for the Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA) was responsible for developing public policies within such a dynamic, complex multicultural² environment. This chapter reflects on the author's experience developing and promoting a government policy framework in the New Zealand setting. This was called *Ethnic Perspectives in Policy* (OEA, 2002). The chapter follows the critical incident case approach to encourage discussion by describing the situation, tasks, actions and the initial results achieved after two years.

Acculturation and related literature

The policy implications of diversity were based around broad social policy issues such as settlement, community cohesion³ and identity⁴. These issues center on understanding groups who can be identified on the basis of their identity or culture. Cross-cultural psychology and acculturation literature provided a way of framing the behaviours, perceptions and responses of various groups, and inter-group comparisons, by examining the ways that individuals, families, communities and societies react to inter-cultural contact (Rudmin, 2003). Several models have been developed to accommodate the research data.

Berry, Evans and Rawlinson (1972) developed a popular model for adaptation strategies of minority groups in dominant cultures based on their reaction to three questions: how important is it to me to retain my own 'minority' culture, how important is it to fit in with the dominant 'host' society culture, and how much control do I have over social institutions? From a policy perspective, the model provides a frame for issues such as integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalisation or alienation. The approach has been refined to accommodate various dimensions of both the migrant and host communities. For example, Berry (2001) included responses to societal institutions; Triandis, Kashima, Shimada and Villareal (1986)

considered the accommodation of the minority by the majority host group, including the impact of identity and stereotypes and the more complex patterns of adaptation in relation to components such as language and music, and Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh (2001) examined marginalisation and multiculturalism expressed through language and music. In addition, there was also research examining the acculturation process in more detail. For example, Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) developed the ABC model of affect, behaviour and cognition to better examine the interactions between sojourners, non-sojourning migrants and the host communities.

The acculturation literature provided ways to understand the interplay between individuals when exposed to different cultures. Underpinning the acculturation literature was a range of related cross-cultural research that could help officials to navigate unfamiliar intercultural contexts. Generally this literature was not familiar to policy makers. The distinction between culture specific (emic) traits and culture general (etic) traits originally developed by Pike (1967) but generally associated with Berry (1989) was critical in helping to frame a policy response; and through the application of intercultural communications and training literature, identified the critical importance of intercultural competence.

It is axiomatic that cultures are socially constructed as a group phenomenon, language is an important means of cultural transmission and each culture has its own world view or lived in reality that needs to be understood. As Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) have noted “the ethnocentrism of Western psychology makes it necessary to take other viewpoints on human behaviour into account” (p. 384). This worldview encompasses attitudes, beliefs, assumptions or attributions about the material and immaterial world, social roles and institutions. The acculturation literature was supported by an intercultural competence approach based on: developing and awareness of ones own culture, developing an understanding of other cultures and from this building a cultural bridge (e.g. Bennett, 1998).

The New Zealand Situation

Since the mid-1980's New Zealand's skill based immigration policy has been essential for its economic well-being, with the New Zealand's population growing markedly in size and complexity⁵. The 2006 Population Census recorded over 23% of the population was born overseas, and over 200 ethnic groups, with the largest being Maori, Chinese, Samoan, and Indian. At 10% the ethnic sector⁶ had doubled in size in the decade to 2001, and by 2003 almost half of the births in New Zealand were to families with at least one parent from a minority ethnic group (Boston, Callister & Wolf, 2006). These changes mean that by 2021 the ethnic sector could make up 18% of the population, alongside 17% Maori and 9% Pacific peoples (OEA, 2005).

With this population shift was evidence of policies not meeting their expected outcomes for ethnic groups, and being difficult to access, when compared with the majority of New Zealanders. For example, new skilled ethnic migrant groups, whom it was expected would be easily employed, were experiencing unemployment rates twice or more that of the New Zealand European group (OEA, 2002, p. 13). Better quality ethnicity data was needed, as minority ethnic groups tend to disappear in broad-brush measures such as national averages.

There was a growing expectation of public participation in policymaking to empower communities to address issues affecting them. Ethnic communities were also expressing concerns about government policy² being fragmented and unresponsive. They wanted greater involvement, to feel included and valued, and fair and equal access to social services. They also expressed a strong desire to fit in with other New Zealanders but to retain aspects of heritage, language and culture –which was similar to the acculturation concept of integration. This desire to retain heritage culture mirrored the resurgence of Maori and Pacific cultures.

In terms of Berry's acculturation theory (1989, 2001), this could be interpreted as a strong desire for integration, concern about alienation, and a rejection of assimilation. Ethnic

communities indicated they wanted to participate fully in all aspects of New Zealand life, and more responsive and co-ordinated public policy and services. The key areas were education, employment, housing, health, policing, settlement, welfare, better information, and language support.

Challenges for policy development

As part of the population change, the OEA was established in 2001 to provide a voice in government for ethnic communities and to promote the advantages of ethnic diversity for New Zealand. This complemented 'population-based' agencies for Maori and Pacific peoples. The OEA first policy objective was to develop a framework for government agencies to assess and respond to diverse communities. The development process involved reviewing literature, sector policy data and research, consulting with communities, other key stakeholders and officials. The literature showed that the acculturation process affects both public servants (as agents for the host community) and migrant communities.

Public policy approaches to diversity were traditionally based on economic or social justice paradigms, targeting areas such as human rights and reducing socio-economic disparities between groups with employment as a key indicator. Policies tended to take a 'one size fits all' approach, and assumed all groups behave the same. The influence of dominant policy values and predominant frameworks on the policy process had been well established (Scott, 2003). Predominantly middle class and European, policy makers' views and values tended to be quite different from those of most minority ethnic groups. While New Zealand had developed culture specific public policies to address the needs of Maori and Pacific communities, there were questions about how to respond to over 200 distinct ethnic groups.

Ethnic Perspectives in Policy

A key difference between this policy response and previous policy approaches was to place the traditional economic and social justice paradigms into the intercultural setting. The policy framework was based on assessing communities' views and needs, as noted above. It set out core values to guide the policy development process (acceptance, participation, access, responsiveness and equity) and strategic outcomes to be achieved (based on social inclusion⁷, economic development, education, settlement, health and housing). It was process oriented so it could be tailored to different ethnic groups, providing a general rather than culture specific approach. To complement the framework additional information was provided about the situation and views of ethnic communities (summarized from the work to date). Included was a set of guidelines for agencies. These provided tools to develop an understanding of communities and their worldviews⁸ by providing for cultural self-awareness, cultural literacy and cultural bridge building. For example, describing the use of people skilled in both cultures as cultural brokers, and translated materials to bridge the communications gap.

The implication for policymaking was the need for officials to develop better intercultural competence, become more aware of their own cultural views and its influence on the policy process, and to consider the different perspectives that ethnic groups⁹ may have on the policy question. Understanding such cultural differences and similarities is essential to develop effective responses to achieve policy goals and positive outcomes. The final component of the framework was to promote good quality data about diverse ethnic groups, as there was very little good quality data available. This was critical to inform policy and also to empower ethnic communities themselves. From late 2002, *Ethnic Perspectives in Policy* was widely promoted as a resource guide to all departments and made freely available. To support this work, the OEA provided additional advice, training and guidance to government agencies, targeting first the key agencies responsible for the outcomes identified in the framework.

Results

In 2004, all 36 public service departments and 6 Crown agencies were independently surveyed using a self report questionnaire and their published documents to identify how they had adapted their policies and practices (based on the guidelines in *Ethnic Perspectives*). While the self-report method has limitations, the data was interpreted as indicative of broad patterns and trends. Agencies identified progress compared with 2001, however this varied, both between departments and within some departments. About 33% (14) agencies could identify ethnic sector data in strategic planning documents and annual reports, and a similar number identified ethnic sector groups being included in major policy consultation. Also several new strategic policies had been developed to address needs identified in *Ethnic Perspectives in Policy*. For example: the National Settlement Strategy, the National Housing Strategy, the Police Ethnic Responsiveness Plan and Refugee Health Handbook. Overall the pattern suggested that there had been an increase in service responsiveness in the key outcome areas noted in the framework. Compared with 2001, 48% (20) of agencies reported that they now had translated materials and/or regularly used interpreters. While ethnic research and monitoring information was improving, progress was slow and this was interpreted as a key gap.

The results were interpreted with cautious optimism. Ethnic communities consulted during this time still expressed concerns similar to those noted earlier, but there was also noticeable progress over the two years in agencies' responsiveness to ethnic communities. An interesting result was that 42% (18) of agencies surveyed asked for more support and advice on how to work more effectively with ethnic groups.

Discussion

Ethnic Perspectives in Policy was the start of a new set of public policies to address diversity in New Zealand. There are now several initiatives¹⁰ to support settlement, strengthen community cohesion and relations between its diverse communities. The rich tapestry of cultures is celebrated, with the Government hosting receptions for Chinese Lunar New Year, Eide and Diwali. New Zealanders value this diversity as a strength, with 88% agreeing it is a good thing for society to be made up of diverse races religions and cultures (Ward & Masgoret, 2004). But this diversity is not without its tensions. Ward and Lin (2005) have found integration is conducive to well being, but the recent experiences in London, Paris and Sydney suggest traditional assumptions about integration and settlement may not hold when community boundaries are defined by ethnicity, culture or faith.

As Prime Minister Clark stated "The New Zealand way must be to build unity in diversity, to avoid marginalisation, to practise inclusion in the national interest, and to encourage all those who want to be part of the building of New Zealand" (Clark, 2005, p. 5). This raises policy questions about the relationship between host and migrant communities. For example: How to foster inclusion and trust? What indicators of social cohesion are valid? What factors influence marginalisation and alienation? What is the impact across generations, identities and values? Is acculturation reversible, as the cultural renaissance of Maori and other ethnic groups in New Zealand suggests? How will these factors affect the evolution of inter- and intra- group values, community well-being and national identity? These questions and issues require new, innovative policy paradigms supported by quality research.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural psychology and acculturation literature can be a valuable resource to policy advisors, to alert and inform the policy context, and to help understand and resolve policy issues. In New Zealand it has helped to frame and develop a policy response to diversity, and develop tools for government agencies to use in the multicultural setting. The resulting policy resource '*Ethnic Perspectives in Policy*' (OEA, 2002) has enabled departments to identify and respond to the needs of ethnic communities, and provided tools to help the host

community. A review of Ethnic Perspectives in Policy has shown positive changes in the performance of institutions following its implementation. Yet many questions remain.

As societies become more culturally diverse, the field of acculturation, and cross-cultural psychology of which it is part, has a valuable role to inform on future policy considerations. Future dialogue between academics, researchers and policy makers is encouraged to address these complex and emerging policy issues that experience suggests are not likely to be resolved by more traditional policy approaches alone.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The views expressed in this chapter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Office of Ethnic Affairs or the New Zealand Government.
- ² Multicultural refers to the demographic trait of several distinct population groups who can be defined by characteristics such as race, ethnicity, culture or religion. Multiculturalism refers to policies that promote the value of multiple cultures.
- ³ Commonly a cohesive society is one with a climate of collaboration where all groups have a sense of 'belonging, inclusion, recognition and, legitimacy' (adapted from Jenson, 1998). Other definitions extend this to include a sense of shared values and opportunities and appreciation of other cultures e.g. British Home Office (Home Office, 2005).
- ⁴ The identity landscape and ethnic contours in New Zealand are dynamic and changing (Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh, and Teawia, 2005) (Spoonley, MacPherson, and Pearson, 2004).
- ⁵ New Zealand is one of the highest migrant receiving countries in the OECD, at over 1% of the total population. Combined with temporary residents including those on work visas and students, there was an influx of new or temporary migrants equivalent to about 5% of the population.
- ⁶ The ethnic sector is a term used to identify the minority ethnic groups that the OEA primarily focuses on. Ethnicity in New Zealand is self-determined. It is a broad concept of group affiliation based on elements of race, language, religion, customs, heritage and tradition as well as geographic, tribal or national identity. For administrative reasons, the OEA primarily focuses on people who identify with ethnic groups originating from Asia, Africa, Continental Europe, the Middle East and Central and South America; and includes refugees and migrants as well as people born in New Zealand who identify with these ethnic groups (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005 "*Briefing For Incoming Minister – Ethnic Affairs*", page 7).
- ⁷ For example, Ethnic Perspectives in Policy defines the policy outcome of an inclusive society as 'the value of ethnic diversity is affirmed, and ethnicity is not a barrier that divides society, in opportunities, access, or participation. The cultural richness of New Zealand society is enhanced through the free expression of heritage and traditions of diverse cultures, languages and religious beliefs. Human rights education helps to overcome any discriminatory attitudes'. It also provides a list of indicators to monitor this. A similar approach was provided to the other identified outcomes (OEA, 2002, pp. 15-18).
- ⁸ For example, the policy act of defining a problem or evaluating options is largely dependant on participants point of view. It follows that understanding the views of other people affected will help to better define or reframe the issue and better assess options and their impacts.
- ⁹ A better understanding of potential different views would be useful in formulating an effective response. For example, the problem for an agency may be seen as one of resource allocation, with too many different groups to respond to individually, whereas a community's point of view may be that the government services are fragmented, unresponsive or exclusionary. Further discussion about communities' views and issues can be found in Ethnic Perspectives in Policy (OEA, 2002).
- ¹⁰ OEA activities now include: intercultural competence training for public servants, publications to raise awareness, a telephone interpreting service (Language Line), targeted community development, promoting quality research and 'strength in diversity', to celebrate the value of ethnic communities' contributions.