

JENKINS, Kuni

BIO

Professor Kuni Jenkins is Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi in Whakatane. She has published internationally and locally in the field of the politics of Maori education, particularly Maori girls' education. She is co-presenting a paper at the conference with Alison Jones.

JONES, Alison

BIO

Alison Jones is Associate Professor of Education at the University of Auckland. She has published internationally solely and with Dr Kuni Jenkins in the field of cross-cultural pedagogy. She is co-presenting a paper at the conference with Kuni Jenkins.

ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural Literacy: Knowledge and Ignorance in Post-colonial Classrooms

Dialogue between Māori and Pakeha is a pedagogical ideal in schools and classrooms. Ideally, it leads to increased understanding of the other, and therefore improved social cohesion. We argue that cross-cultural dialogue is contaminated with the very impulses it seeks to combat. We maintain that unequally positioned ethnic groups (in particular Māori and Pakeha in New Zealand) come to cross-cultural dialogue in education with different, and incompatible, sets of interests. Calls for dialogue by the Pakeha are largely unconscious romantic desires for absolution and redemption – which are experienced when the Other gives attention to assertions that ‘I want to understand’. Such an impetus can be read as imperialist, in that the imagined unity-through-dialogue requires the Other to “love me! teach me!” and to open up their ‘territory’ of experience and knowledge to the scrutiny of the coloniser group yet again.

In the interests of ‘cross-cultural literacy’ – understood as competence in ‘reading’ the other – we suggest a possibility for cross-cultural work in classrooms. We focus the gaze of both indigenous and Pakeha students in New Zealand on moments in the groups’ mutual historical engagement – in the early engagements between Māori and Pakeha in the early 1800s. Most of the engagements (such as Marsden’s sermon) are reasonably well-known by New Zealanders, at least in the most general terms. The re-readings we offer are interpretations by Kuni Jenkins, a Māori academic, who, in reading the historical accounts with Alison Jones (a Pakeha colleague), and in the absence of written Māori interpretations of these moments, provides an indigenous view of the events described in the archival accounts of early missionaries – accounts which are often repeated uncritically in contemporary publications.

In doing this work, we argue that stories told in historical texts always have significant implications for today. That is, the texts and their (re-)readings provide the *terms* of contemporary possibilities for cross-cultural dialogue or ‘understanding’, and provide the possibilities for today’s relationships.