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Cross-cultural Engagement in Higher Education Classrooms: a Critical View of Dialogue

Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins

This chapter takes a critical view of the ideal of face-to-face dialogue between cultural groups in higher education classrooms. It takes as its point of discussion some New Zealand Pākehā (White) students' expressions of anger at feeling 'left out' during a course where the instructors divided the class into two groups based on their ethnicity: Pākehā students and Polynesian (in particular Indigenous Māori) students. The instructors (the authors of this paper) felt this division was in the interest of progressive teaching as well as providing learning opportunities for the students. In examining the different responses of the two groups, the authors ask higher education instructors to reconsider the ideal of cross-cultural dialogue and the fantasies on which it rests; they also offer an alternative to dialogue in postcolonial classrooms.

Introduction

Our work might be said to be both *within* and *against* the literatures in 'cross-cultural education' and critical pedagogy. On the one hand, our writing and teaching is always motivated by the ideals of cross-cultural educational engagement and of progressive social change. On the other, we are critical of the fantasies of engagement on which cross-cultural and critical pedagogy often rest. These fantasies are the focus of our chapter.

The ideal of cross-cultural engagement underpins most progressive educational work. It is recognized by liberal teachers and educators that modern democratic education systems must enable and promote dialogue and understanding across cultural differences. The ideals of 'multiculturalism', 'empathetic understanding across diversity', and 'cultural

sensitivity', which are commonly the focus of educational discourses, are often easily spoken, and easily desired. But it is possible that the sharp differences between social-cultural groups, including indigenous and colonizer peoples, and our painful – and sometimes shameful – shared histories, become sidelined as too uncomfortable as we focus on 'understanding each other'. In this chapter, we ask: What does it mean in higher education classrooms to foreground *difference* as we contemplate mutual understanding based on face-to-face engagement?

While this chapter takes a critical approach to 'empathy' and 'multiculturalism', we are optimistic about engagement across cultural differences in postcolonial higher education settings (where colonizer and indigenous groups share educational spaces). But we are not persuaded that good cross-cultural work is necessarily made possible by face-to-face dialogue or empathetic sharing in classrooms. As a result, we do not call for better communication; we do not suggest ways of listening better. Rather, we argue for three elements that offer more convincing possibilities for developing cross-cultural engagement: (a) a *reflexive* element: a critical consideration of why 'we' might desire dialogue between indigenous peoples and others in postcolonial education settings, (b) an *ignorance* element: including a recognition of the limits of knowing and an acceptance of the possibility of not knowing, and (c) a *knowledge* element: including the necessity for knowledge of our shared and differing colonial and social histories. Each of these elements (see sections below) raises difficult and discomfiting questions, but each provides opportunities to think through what is at stake in the calls for dialogue and cross-cultural engagement between differently-located groups in higher education classrooms.

Context

Because we write from New Zealand, we may need to explain the cultural context of this chapter. The authors, Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, are respectively Pākehā (with White settler ancestors) and Māori (with indigenous and White settler ancestors). For a number of years, we have taught together in New Zealand university classrooms. Although New Zealand is increasingly multiethnic, our chapter focuses on the relationship between indigenous and colonizer (Māori & Pākehā) groups in our higher education classrooms.

We are conscious of the problems of using certain concepts in writing about our students. Pākehā students are unlikely to understand themselves as 'colonizers' (because colonization, they often believe, is now in

the past). They may not even see themselves as 'Pākehā', but rather as 'European' or 'Kiwi' (the term 'White' is rarely used in New Zealand). We use the term 'Pākehā' (a commonly-used term, first coined by Māori to name the early British people in New Zealand) because in our view it better reflects those aspects of 'European' New Zealanders' identity with which we are concerned here. It also indicates a cultural difference from our White North American readers. Another problem with using simple ethnic categories is that the boundaries between 'Māori' and 'Pākehā' are blurred through inter-marriage; indeed, most Māori have Pākehā ancestors. But we persist with the troublesome terms and binaries to avoid getting bogged down in other complexities. Our use of the term 'postcolonial' in our chapter title contextualizes our work in a modern country (New Zealand) which is a product of colonization authorized 167 years ago by a Treaty between the indigenous (Māori) chiefs and the British crown. Māori now comprise almost 15 per cent of the population, compared with about 80 per cent for 'European' people (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

Literature review

Most researchers and commentators in the field of 'education and diversity' write positively about how diverse higher education settings develop attitudes and provide experiences which contribute to a more tolerant and equitable society and workforce. For instance, Bowen and Bok's (1998) large-scale, long-term study argues for ethnically diverse intakes to North American colleges and universities, indicating improved attitudes to other race groups for both Black and White students, as well as other social benefits. Chang (2003) and Millem (2003) argue similarly, that 'students who are exposed to diverse experiences, perspectives, and ways of thinking that truly reflect the multiracial and multiethnic society... will be better prepared to participate meaningfully in it' (Chang, p. 13; see McConaghy, 2000, for a good discussion of perspectives on indigenous education).

Amongst the many voices raised in praise of culturally diverse colleges, universities and classrooms, we find muted commentary from minority teachers and students about their experiences. Some of the minority voices that do speak about culture in the classroom make ambivalent or negative comments. For instance, Cheryl Johnson (1995), a North American 'black womanist intellectual professor', in an oblique and grimly humorous account, considers that the best way to avoid tensions inevitably produced by her 'black body' is to keep her

teaching 'sanitized'. She speaks of her dialogue with her white students and colleagues as 'marked by the desire for cleanliness – for no odors, no germs; it is a sanitized, deodorized, bleached (no pun intended) interaction' (p. 129). In deciding not to make her students face difference as difficult, complex and dirty, she keeps the pedagogical environment 'safe' for them – and for herself – by avoiding what she sees as the confronting aspects of cultural difference (see also Narayan, 1988). In response to the problems of some groups feeling silenced in the classroom, another university teacher, Aruna Srivastava (1997) says that 'there need to be working groups consisting of students of color, working class students' but she is 'scared' to set up such segregated groups in her university because it would 'transgress all sorts of boundaries' (p. 122). By forming separate groups based on ethnicity or cultural difference she fears antagonizing those who demand 'togetherness' and who oppose 'segregation'.

These writers suggest that the benefits of cross-cultural engagement cannot be simply assessed. The experiences and meanings of cross-cultural work may differ across the groups in higher education classrooms. We consider some of these meanings, and how interaction between diverse groups in classrooms may be problematic, especially for minority or non-White groups.

We focus on problems of classroom dialogue partly because 'dialogue across difference' has become such an uncritically accepted sentiment in critical pedagogy (see Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). Paulo Freire's (1972) model of dialogue, which is at the heart of much critical pedagogy, is one where teachers and students, and students and students, enter into reciprocal critical conversations, as opposed to monologue-based 'banking' education where the student receives the words of the teacher. Freire's original notion of dialogic education was intensely idealistic. Dialogue, he stipulated, is not a simple exchange of ideas 'consumed' by participants, nor a hostile polemical argument, nor a manipulation of one by another; it cannot be a crafty instrument for domination, nor exist in the absence of profound love and humility (p. 62). It cannot happen if one is closed to or offended by the contribution of others; it requires intense faith in others, and develops trust: 'Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between participants is the logical consequence' (p. 64). Good cross-cultural pedagogy, on this model, aspires to have diverse groups and individuals equitably share the educational space; boundaries between indigenous-colonizer, Black-White, are reduced. Or at least, the boundaries are challenged by

'border crossing' students and teachers as they expose and examine power relations between the participating groups (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; McLaren, 1995). Outcomes of such dialogue are supposed to range from 'awareness' of, or sensitivity to, the cultural values of others, to a politicized orientation to social justice (Burbules, 1993).

Our experience of attempts at cross-cultural engagement in higher education classrooms has led to our being sceptical about such claims for dialogue. Teachers' and students' desires for 'crossing borders' or 'hearing the voices' and 'sharing realities' may be heart-felt. But those desires can never stand untouched by the political, economic and cultural differences which continue to characterize most societies. These differences mean that students' experiences of dialogue, and their desire for dialogue, may not be the same at all – and may in fact be negative.

Questions

In response to our third-year undergraduate course 'Feminist Perspectives in Education', which attracted a significant number of Māori students, some Māori women argued for separate classes where they could discuss course questions in their own group. We decided the next year to run the course in two streams, with Māori and Pacific¹ students in one group, and Pākehā in another. We, the regular class teachers, each taught sections of the course, in turns, to these two parallel groups – each of which were made up of about fifty students, all women of varying ages. About one quarter of the classes were taught with the groups coming together. All the students wrote in their 'learning journals' about the pedagogy of the divided course.

We were startled by the very different reactions of the two groups of students. While most of the Māori students actively enjoyed the structure, relishing the opportunity to develop ideas alone, many of the Pākehā students were very angry and disappointed that they were separated from their Māori peers. These reactions led us, as teachers in this classroom, to some interesting questions about the ideal of cross-cultural dialogue in classrooms: Who is the 'we' that desires dialogue in higher education? What if the indigenous students do not particularly want to engage in dialogue, preferring to speak amongst themselves? To what extent can we know each other, anyway? How might our teacherly desires for cross-cultural engagement between our students (and between students and teacher) be met, or are they an impossible fantasy?

Methodology

Our separated class was an experiment, in a sense. We only did it for one year, and we did it to get a sense of how it might 'work'. We decided later that, because of the Pākehā students' strongly negative responses, divided classes were not viable in the longer term. We analysed the students' journals, with their permission, and we wrote articles about the students' responses to our separating them (Jones, 1999, 2001, 2004; Pihama & Jenkins, 2001). We build on these analyses in this chapter; our 'methodology' here is to use what we learned from our students' responses in order to address the question of 'learning and teaching across cultures'. To illustrate our argument, we take a few of the comments made by our university students about our pedagogy. We then explain our theoretical approach to the students' reactions to the divided classes – an approach we hope will assist other higher education teachers in thinking about the ideals of cross-cultural engagement. Finally, we introduce our practical responses to some of the problems of face-to-face dialogue.

The next sections of this chapter consider three elements (mentioned earlier) that we think can contribute to critical thinking about our desires for cross-cultural engagement in higher education classrooms. These are: (1) a *reflexive* element, (2) an *ignorance* element, and (3) a *knowledge* element. Each will be reviewed.

Dialogue element: a reflexive element

First, we reconsider the *desire* for cross-cultural engagement in higher education classrooms: Why do progressive teachers want cross-cultural conversations amongst students from different ethnic and cultural groups? The typical answer focuses on reducing barriers and inviting those who do not usually speak in classrooms to have their views heard. It is usually assumed that a better flow of talk may allow the interests of all to be served, and lead ultimately to a more just and democratic, and less divided, classroom and society. It is believed that if people do not connect across difference, divisions and misunderstandings are increased. Some higher education teachers may be enthusiastic for a face-to-face engagement because classrooms bring together groups who may not normally converse about the social and political questions which affect them differently.

Before we ask whether such conversations are even *possible*, let's first return to the *desire* for talking across difference – focusing now on indigenous and colonizer groups. It is rare to find calls for cross-cultural

dialogue ('we want to hear about you') coming from indigenous peoples, or other minority ethnic groups. Indigenous groups may want colonizer groups to understand indigenous peoples' histories, experiences, and feelings in order to garner political support and recognition, but do they need to engage in *dialogue* about these things? That is, do they need to *exchange* information with colonizer individuals in order to tell their own experiences? Do they need to hear the colonizers' views as part of dialogue? Surely these dominant views are the ones with which indigenous peoples are already over-familiar.

It was this ambivalence about mutual engagement that we saw in our university classroom. While the Māori students might be happy to talk with their Pākehā friends about their shared social experiences at the café or last night's party, as indigenous subjects they were generally unenthusiastic about intercultural classroom dialogue. They found it a daunting task to have to explain or justify repeatedly their culture and perspectives to those who were confused by Māori practices. How do they answer questions which already assume a particular dominant perspective? How do they reply to questions (which are more like accusations) such as 'why do you [Māori] always focus on the past?' 'Can't we just get on with the present and look to the future?'

It may be that the Māori students could explain to their Pākehā classmates that cultural difference in relation to time often creates confusion among Pākehā. Māori understand the past (*mua* = ahead) as in front of us, and the future (*muri* = behind) as coming after us. (The future cannot be seen; the past is all that is in view. Therefore it is on the basis of the accessible past that we can move into an unknown future.) This apparently logical response assumes that Pākehā students will, as a result, revise their view that Māori are 'stuck in the past', and 'backward looking'. But the Māori cultural explanation may not stop Pākehā saying: 'We know that you think the past is "in front", but that does not get us anywhere with trying to move towards to a better future!' For Māori students, such a response from Pākehā is disappointing, perplexing and hurtful.

The Māori students can be hurt in other ways. Explanation of Māori perspectives by Māori students requires that those students have such explanations available to them. The vast majority of young Māori in our classes are in the process of discovering their Māori identity, including acquiring knowledge about Māori language and meaning. These Māori students may want to articulate their own history but they are only familiar with dominant ways of thinking – including ways of thinking about time and history. In other words, one reason indigenous students

may not desire dialogue with non-indigenous peers is rooted in the effects of colonization. For many indigenous students, the mixed classroom cannot be a 'safe' place to speak as an indigenous person because they do not yet have what they see as a 'proper' indigenous voice. They may be learning their own language, history and culture; to display this lack of knowledge – to be the 'inauthentic' indigenous person – in front of one's own group is bad enough; in the company of curious outsiders it would be unbearable. Better to be silent – or seek an educational place within one's own ethnic group. Amongst indigenous peers who share the difficult process of gaining a voice in one's language and culture, there is at least more potential for growth in confidence as an indigenous self.

If indigenous groups, and individuals as indigenous subjects, generally do not prize dialogue with colonizer groups, what might be said about the enthusiasm for cross-cultural, face-to-face engagement? Jones (1999; 2001) (as well as others such as Roman, 1993; 1997) has argued that the call for classroom dialogue comes from dominant groups who seek to hear the voices of the Other² – voices not usually available to them. In a country like New Zealand where Māori and Pākehā regularly interact in their work and social lives this may sound odd, but we are not referring to casual daily interactions. Rather, we are referring to speaking *as* Māori or *as* colonizer subjects – that is, when we speak of our experience and knowledge as indigenous persons, or as Pākehā settlers. When Pākehā desire to hear indigenous voices 'first-hand' in classrooms, Māori peers are under significant pressure: first, that they exist as indigenous subjects (when many Māori students are still struggling with this) and second that as indigenous subjects they *teach* their peers who often have little real ability to comprehend difference. This demand for teacherly attention was expressed by some of our Pākehā students in their journals (Jones, 1999, p. 301):

. . . it would [have been] interesting for all the students to be able to share their unique cultural perspectives with each other. . . . I am sometimes quite ignorant and intolerant of other view points, so a wider input would have been educational.

Could we not learn from each other? Wouldn't it be valuable to share our differences in experience? . . . It is different reading about it in books, or having it taught by teachers. It is better to hear it straight from the women who are having the experience.

On the face of it, these students merely desire to 'learn' from their peers about Māori beliefs and experiences. Such confessions of need and ignorance seem to signal an 'openness to know' on the part of the colonizer individual. A confession of needing to learn is often a plea for assistance, which positions the guileless speaker as helpless, hapless, in need of sympathy, compassion and understanding, even love. 'I am not powerful,' the confession seems to say, 'not threatening, only sadly ignorant. Care for me! Teach me!' Thus an apparently benign educational request becomes a significant demand for interaction and attention, requiring the needy dominant group be taught by indigenous knowers.

When Pākehā students ask to be given the opportunity to 'learn' about others, they position themselves as open to new knowledges. It was interesting to us, therefore, to hear Pākehā students' responses to the classes where a Māori teacher (Kuni) taught the class. Many of the Pākehā students found this teaching difficult. They complained of marginalization, of being left out, of feeling unwelcome, of being disconcerted and uncomfortable (Jones, 2001, p. 282):

I felt marginalised in this class . . . As a Pākehā, I get tired of reading and hearing about how we assimilated the Māori. It is as if they want to keep making us feel guilty out of payment back. What can I as one person do now?

Of course people have different views, but I felt quite uncomfortable when I heard the *korero* [talk] about all the gods and 'spirituality' of the *marae* [meeting house],³ because as a Christian I worship only one God . . . I felt like I did not belong.

The activity⁴ in which we were asked to pick out and comment on an aspect of the meeting house made me feel extremely uncomfortable and stupid. I thought it served to emphasise rather than diminish my status as an 'outsider'. The activity assumed a prior knowledge which I did not have . . .

These Pākehā students seem to express a disappointment: their hopes for cross-cultural understanding and inclusion were not met in this class session. They had wanted empathetic engagement with their indigenous peers from whom they want to learn. But when they were taught by an indigenous teacher who spoke as such, these Pākehā students felt marginalized, offended, uncomfortable and resistant. The hope that we could all be brought together inside a shared conversation was

unfulfilled when Māori spoke *as Māori* rather than as caring friends, or empathetic teachers.

These Pākehā students' responses provide further understanding of indigenous students' resistance to dialogue with their White peers. If White students feel uncomfortable and 'left out' when indigenous people speak as such, then cross-cultural engagement is likely to be difficult. The onus comes on the indigenous speaker to maintain the 'comfort levels' and the inclusion of their classmates or students. Alternatively, 'sharing' might become for indigenous students an opportunity to defiantly 'speak back'. In either case, the focus is on the needs, feelings and concerns of the dominant group, who are enabled to define the agenda, again.

Is the desire for dialogue, then, actually only the desire of dominant groups? Do those who want dialogue recognize that the ultimate pedagogical benefits of cross-cultural engagement may lie with the dominant group, and that the key role for minority groups in cross-cultural classrooms is to educate their mainstream peers? Take, for instance, a Supreme Court argument for ethnically diverse universities. Chang (2003) reports on Supreme Court Justice Powell's view of admissions policies for the medical school at the University of California (at Davis), which reserve spaces for 'diverse' students. The judge ruled in 1978 that this policy was fair. Chang says that 'explaining this decision, Powell stated that qualified students with a background that is diverse in some way, whether it be ethnic, geographic, or economic, may bring to a professional school experiences, outlooks, and ideas that enhance the training of the student body and better equip the institution's graduates' (p. 4). Chang adds 'people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are likely to bring different experiences, perspectives, interests, and analyses to a college campus' (p. 13). Powell and Chang appear to imply that a key argument for diversity is its benefit to White students. After all, as we have already argued, Black or other minority students do not need to be exposed to the views of White students (they are already surrounded by those views). It is largely the White students who need access to the views of diverse others for their own 'enhanced' and rounded education. As Black or indigenous students are normally already very familiar with dominant White views and interests, it becomes difficult to see the direct pedagogical value for minority students in hearing White viewpoints yet again in classroom exchanges.

While we are not questioning the importance of diverse classrooms for exposing all students to the views of others, we point out that the *value* of cross-cultural engagement may differ considerably for

differently-located groups. It may be very valuable for dominant groups, but have limited value for indigenous or minority groups. We argue for an element of reflexivity for teachers seeking cross-cultural dialogue. We suggest that as higher education teachers we consider our own desires and interests in demanding cross-cultural engagement, and think carefully about whose interests may be served. It may be useful to check out our assumptions about the value of dialogue by asking groups of students to write about their views of 'talking across difference' or ethnicity, or history or any topic which is relevant to the course. Even getting 'reading responses' to a chapter such as this one may open avenues for discussion. Colleagues from several countries report that their students' responses to the possibility of ethnically-divided classes tend to reflect the patterns we identified amongst our students: the minority students are keen to meet and learn separately, at least some of the time; the White students are angry, and upset, at the idea that Black or minority students might meet in separate groups. What does this difference mean for teachers wanting to forward the interests of all our students?

Desire for dialogue element: ignorance and the other

Given these complexities, as teachers in higher education we have become curious about the *possibilities* for learning about the Other in cross-cultural classroom encounters. To consider this question in more depth, we return to comments from our Pākehā students' journals, already reproduced above from Jones (1999; 2001).

I am sometimes quite ignorant and intolerant of other view points, so a wider input would have been educational.

The activity [in a Māori context] . . . made me feel extremely uncomfortable and stupid. . . . [It] assumed a prior knowledge which I did not have . . .

Both these Pākehā students appear angry. Both seem to confess to ignorance. The first seeks to be taught by her indigenous peers (something she believes she is deprived of in the separated classes). The second finds the indigenous teaching – which she may have desired originally – unbearable. The confessions of ignorance by both of these students do not appear to be confessions of shame, humility or even curiosity; they seem to be demands for knowledge and inclusion. Their comments can be read as a desire to be saved from their ignorance by the indigenous others – who in this case are either absent peers, or disappointing teachers.

As we have already argued, in confessing their ignorance and therefore their desire to know, Pākehā students often position themselves as 'good' and 'open' students, ready to hear the voices of others. There is another possible interpretation of such confessions. While Pākehā students may profess to want to understand their peers' experiences of indigeneity, many express feelings of 'marginalization' because they want to know only on their own limited terms. The desire to 'know' others through being taught by them may be at the same time a *refusal to know* or, paradoxically, a desire for ignorance. It may be a refusal to recognize one's own implication in the racialized and colonized social order, where indigenous knowledges are submerged. And it may also be resistance to the possibility that indigenous peers may not *want* to be empathetically 'known' by their Pākehā classmates, or to teach them. These desires for ignorance sit uneasily alongside the desire to know others through dialogue in higher education.

A common teacherly impulse in multicultural higher education classrooms might be to attack this refusal to know. But Felman's (1982) now-classic work on ignorance and learning suggests teachers' refusal of students' refusal to be pointless. Through a psychoanalytic frame, Felman sees learning as proceeding (as did Kuhn in his critique of scientific progress) 'not through linear progression, but through breakthroughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions, deferred action' (p. 27). Teaching and learning, says Felman, are inevitably uncomfortable, unruly and non-rational processes. Teaching is certainly not in the happy business of ensuring an ordered and progressive 'growth of knowledge', and the increase in certainty and stability. All teaching, she suggests, whether in a progressive classroom or not, is inevitably unsatisfactory – or impossible – because it is based in the persistent pedagogical fantasy about the linear and cumulative increase in knowing. Nevertheless, as another psychoanalytic theorist Deborah Britzman (1998) puts it, education continues to offer tidy stories of 'happiness, resolution and certainty' (p. 79).

Of course, narratives of resolution and happiness are central to cross-cultural teaching and learning, based as it is on desires for improved social relations. Cross-cultural classroom engagement wants to banish ignorance about the Other. But Felman (1982) insists that ignorance is something always present in knowing. Ignorance she says, 'is less cognitive than performative . . . it is not a simple lack of information, but the incapacity – or refusal – to acknowledge one's own implication in the information' (p. 30). Teaching, then, has to deal not so much with a lack of knowledge as with resistances to knowledge. Ignorance, Felman

argues, is simply an interminable desire to ignore – or a passion for ignorance. This is where Felman's work raises interesting questions for talk about cross-cultural teaching and learning. Can we understand the Pākehā students' response to their indigenous peers and teachers in terms of a passion for ignorance? Is it that many White people in cross-cultural educational settings (unconsciously and consciously) refuse to know their implication in cultural difference and its oppressions? As a dominant group, do they have a cultural incapacity to recognise that they assume they can know (everything)?

If we follow Felman's (1982) logic, teaching by peers or teachers in multicultural higher education cannot ultimately mean giving students information they lack, or trying to get students to understand through dialogue. Filling-in-the-gaps of students' knowing so they finally understand is nothing other than an impossible fantasy of mastery (Ellsworth, 1989, 1997). This is particularly the case in classroom scenes like the one we have been discussing, where anger, defensiveness and hope all limit as well as produce the possibilities for teaching and learning. When pedagogy is so slippery and interminably difficult, and all learning is 'more or less traumatic, surprising, uncomfortable, disruptive, troubling, intolerable' (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 59), it is unsurprising perhaps that our Pākehā students resist the loss of the fantasy of knowing and its promise of unity, certainty and 'peace'.

While Felman (1982) assists in thinking through the impossibility of teaching, other philosophers have addressed directly the problem of learning about the Other. Following Levinas, Sharon Todd (2003) considers the limits of empathetic understanding of the Other (in our case, indigenous experiences, perspectives, knowledges). Her book *Learning from the Other* provides a powerful critique of teaching that tries to generate empathetic learning about the Other through listening to others' accounts (say, of the Holocaust) or through 24-hour famines (to learn about starvation in Africa). Todd recognizes that within social justice education, the notion of the Other has often come to refer to an attribute of social injustice: the Other is that which is disadvantaged, and unknown. This position implies that education may contribute to a reduction in Otherness through a togetherness/sharing/equality born of sharing ('I know how you feel'). Todd argues that we cannot learn *about* the Other, because we inevitably 'shroud' the Other with our own interpretation. We can only learn *from* the Other about our difference from others.

If we take the idea that the dominant group know others only obliquely, and that they can only learn from others about their own

experience of difference, it follows that dominant group members must develop an openness to, or acceptance of, our inevitable ignorance about others. They might need to understand that they cannot remove this ignorance by asking others to fill the gaps they find in themselves.

Desire for dialogue element: knowledge of our shared social histories

If we had been able to, we would have continued with our segregated classrooms, and used the students' written responses as a basis for teaching on the subject 'teaching and learning across cultures'. But for a range of reasons, including the negative reaction by our Pākehā students, we returned to regular classes the following year. In our subsequent classes we took a new approach to learning and teaching across diversity. Rather than 'facing each other' and sharing stories, we encouraged our students to metaphorically 'stand side by side' to consider stories of a shared past. Something that indigenous and settler peoples 'share' in a colonized society is our historical relationship. That relationship might be very differently interpreted by those on either side of it, but histories are such that the stories of the colonizers are the ones that most people (including many indigenous people) are familiar with. For Pākehā/colonizer students, a relationship in the present with indigenous peers requires recognizing and claiming one's place in the historical relationship. But for Māori teachers, such as Kuni, a goal necessarily prior to any 'cross-cultural communication' is to enable indigenous students to recognize and claim *their* histories. This is difficult to do in a setting where Pākehā and Māori students learn together – for all the reasons mentioned above about identity, knowledge and 'safety'.

Claiming one's own indigenous history presupposes claiming one's indigenous identity. This sometimes painful process occurs only in an indigenous context; hence the limitations of the shared classroom. Indeed, Kuni has more recently extended her engagement in Māori education by taking a leading position in a Whare Wānanga, a Māori higher education institution. Educational institutions such as these enact the desires of Māori for a 'learning community' outside the constant challenges of Pākehā groups and individuals,⁵ where indigenous identities and knowledges can be (re)formed and (re)claimed.

It is worth mentioning here the question we raised at the beginning about the problems of the indigenous–colonizer dualism, when the dividing lines between the categories Maori and Pakeha are often blurred by relationships, as well as by the sheer homogenizing force of colonizing education. Many Māori individuals may not wish to claim

their Māori or indigenous identity and history. We do not suggest they *must* make this claim. We are simply interested in a pedagogy, such as that below, which gives oxygen to indigenous identities and histories, at the same time recognizing that indigenous identities, knowledges and experiences are never genuinely outside colonization. In addition, we argue that to engage in learning and teaching across cultures in a postcolonial context requires the Pākehā/White/colonizer groups to recognize their own knowledge, identity and experience as shaped by colonization.

What does it mean to ‘stand side by side’ rather than face-to-face? Many possibilities for such pedagogy suggest themselves. We have taken an approach, in mixed classrooms, which requires three readings of a key event. The first reading comes from our students’ historical imagination: we ask them to imagine, in writing, certain events in the past where Māori and Pākehā interacted (such as the first sermon in New Zealand by a British missionary, or setting up the first school). The second reading comes from research where students find out what has been published in historical and fictional accounts of these events. Then, third, Kuni and Alison as teachers attempt other interpretations of these shared events. We consider these reading exercises as a form of pedagogy which does not demand face-to-face encounters between Māori and Pākehā peers, but which asks questions about the implications of different interpretations of our relationship. These interpretations potentially map on to the ways we think about current cross-cultural or postcolonial relationships.

Here is an example (from composite reconstructions of student responses), which the students share with each other:

First reading: imagined scene of the first sermon

[A Māori student imagined]: ‘A Pākehā man gave the sermon, in English, referring to the Bible. Mostly Pākehā settlers were present, and Māori were resistant to listening. Once key relationships were built, this may have changed.’

[A white student imagined]: ‘This sermon was by an English missionary in the early 1800s. It was a blessing on the land and saying that God loved everyone. Māori would have wondered what was said. They would have been confused and maybe resentful.’

Second reading: a historical story of the first sermon

The standard account of the first sermon in New Zealand tells that the English missionary Reverend Samuel Marsden preached from

St Luke: 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people' on the slopes above a beach in the north of New Zealand, on Christmas Day 1814, a few days after his arrival. This first formal mass event took place before several hundred attentive Māori people who had been assembled by the chief who had invited Marsden to his land. When Marsden had completed his sermon, the people rose in a massive *haka* [vigorous 'dance']. (Sources for historical accounts might include Belich, 1996; King, 2004; Nicholas, 1817; or Salmond, 1997)

Third reading: a Māori account of the first sermon

[*Kuni tells this story*]: Few people present would have been able to understand Marsden's sermon, so it was Ruatara, the interpreter, the young chief who had invited Marsden to New Zealand, who was the real speaker that day. Neither we nor Marsden can know what he said to his countrymen. It was unlikely that Ruatara relayed the Christian message about 'good tidings'. His interpretation of Marsden's words would have been the words he, Ruatara, wanted his people to hear. Ruatara's interpretation of the sermon would have been passionate, of necessity building on Māori knowledge of the spiritual realm. Ruatara would probably also have talked of the implications of Marsden's settler 'family' for the material possibilities for the people. Thus, on the occasion of Marsden's sermon, the people did not hear the Gospel, as such. Although Marsden would have been highly respected by Māori as a man of authority, he was, in a sense, merely Ruatara's helper during the sermon – assisting Ruatara to bring new knowledge and ideas to his people. The people heard Ruatara's words, not Marsden's, and it was to Ruatara's words they responded. The *haka* would have been an affirmation of Ruatara's authority and an emotional response to their leader who, in directing them to accept the new arrivals, was setting a new path for them.

The stories about the sermon provide a shared moment in history where Māori and Pākehā students learn about their relationship, and how it might be variously understood (see Jones & Jenkins, 2004). Kuni's story which suggests there were two, not one, speeches allows us to see the ways Māori and Pākehā are positioned in the other readings. The story of Marsden's sermon positions Māori as bemused recipients of Pākehā authority and ideas; the story of Ruatara's sermon positions Māori as actively working through and with Pākehā ideas to further their own interests. Such 'opposing' stories allow students in higher education

classrooms to consider a range of cross-cultural questions: what do we know about our historical (and contemporary) relationship – what have we learned from reading? What are the effects of different accounts of the relationship between us? Who are the actors in our mutual relationship, and how do we know?

In the side-by-side pedagogy, we still allowed Māori and Pākehā students to work in small separate groups on their interpretations. But in this less dramatic segregation, Pākehā tended not to get so anxious, and Māori students found satisfying ways to engage with their history. The Pākehā and Māori students were not required to focus on, or face each directly. They did get to hear others' interpretations, and these were taken up by the teachers as material for further interpretation. The more oblique engagement satisfied all the participants through disembodied discussion, as the text became the main focus, rather than the experience and knowledge of the members of the class.

Discussion

Drawing attention to those things we would rather overlook, our chapter considers the difficulties inherent in the ideal of cross-cultural dialogue in higher educational settings. It is in the tense and difficult places of dialogue, we believe, that the most unexpected and penetrating insights are possible. We raise questions for those seeking engagement between members of different ethnic groups, about ethnic difference (our focus is on indigenous and colonizer students). A commonsense approach to learning about others in higher education is to speak directly 'across cultures' to one another in 'safe' classroom settings. Such engagement, it has been argued, offers the possibility of improving democracy, reducing silence, and increasing knowledge and tolerance of ethnic others. We take a contrary position, and advocate for a critical consideration of allowing a separation of ethnic groups in classrooms, at least for a proportion of the course, in order to enhance the possibilities of confident, informed cross-cultural interaction. We suggest that a posture of *parallel* rather than *joint* critical inquiry into relationships between groups – particularly indigenous and colonizer groups – offers a powerful opportunity for learning 'across cultures'.

Our separation of White and indigenous students in our university course led to anger as well as celebration. Pākehā students tended to be dismayed that they were separated from their indigenous peers from whom they wanted to 'learn about other people'. Most of the indigenous

students on the other hand were delighted to have the sanctioned opportunity to debate and develop knowledge with other indigenous individuals, outside the interrogating gaze of their Pākehā classmates.

As teachers, we recognize that the Pākehā students' desire for face-to-face dialogue is also a desire to be taught by their indigenous friends, to receive 'understanding' and attention from them, and in this way be relieved – at least to some extent – of the colonizer's burden. While such attention may be positive for Pākehā students, we saw it as another case of dominant groups determining the pedagogical agenda. When dominant groups lose control of the pedagogical agenda, there is often trouble. Indigenous teachers in our classroom were not always successful with Pākehā students; these teachers' attempts to teach as indigenous subjects were criticized and resented by some Pākehā students who felt excluded when the Māori teacher referred to ideas outside their experience and knowledge.

We have considered three reflexive elements in our thinking-through of these difficulties. First we interrogated the desire for cross-cultural dialogue, which raised the question of who most benefits from face-to-face engagement in higher education classrooms. Then we ambivalently accepted our inevitable ignorance. Learning *from* the difference of the Other, instead of attempting to learn everything *about* the Other, suggests that ignorance is a feature of knowing – that openness to the Other's otherness enables an engagement, particularly by colonizer students with their indigenous peers, which is less demanding and more open. Finally, we foregrounded the pedagogical value of addressing the shared relationship between the diverse groups – in the case of indigenous and colonizer peoples, this is the relationship of colonization – and how its multiple narratives must provide quite different memories and different knowledges across cultures.

In summary, we suggest that higher education professors interested in interaction between diverse groups:

- may have to reduce their expectations of face-to-face engagement. In our experience, minority and non-dominant ethnic groups may not benefit from this form of sharing. Dialogue, we argue, is often in the interests of the dominant group only.
- may find that other forms of pedagogy, in which the ethnic groups in their classrooms are not forced into direct engagement but into a more oblique form of knowledge-production and sharing, may work better to address the relationship/s between the groups represented in the classroom.

- might consider asking (in careful ways) their minority group students whether they want to caucus or meet separately to debate and develop their own knowledge and interpretations (and then be prepared to protect those students from the possible attacks or demands of the others).
- might also ask their dominant group students to consider how their ethnicity and /or colonizing history is significant to the development of their own knowledge and stories about the past and the present.
- may, in the face of inevitable opposition to possible separation of their students into ethnic groups, need to consider in depth the logic of their own pedagogies and whose desires and interests those pedagogies express.

Reflection questions

1. When and how did face-to-face dialogue across cultures 'work' in your experience? How do you know it worked? What drawbacks might such an approach have?
2. How might students of different ethnicities or backgrounds respond to the idea of separating classes or discussion groups on the basis of their differences?
3. What written histories or stories might be useful to encourage a critical consideration of the historical or social relationship between diverse groups in your class?
4. How might you respond to the charge that separating students for study groups on the basis of ethnicity is 'racist'?

Notes

1. Although elsewhere we refer to the Pacific students as well as Maori in this classroom, for simplicity's sake in this chapter on postcolonial classrooms we refer to Maori students and White students only. We recognize that this simplification is problematic, and skates over the important complexities of the 'multicultural' nature of contemporary higher education classrooms. However, our focus in this chapter is on the possibility of a dialogic relationship between indigenous and colonizer peoples.
2. We have used the capitalized Other in the sense used by Todd (2003, p. 1): 'Social justice education has been and continues to be marked by a moral concern with those who have been "Othered" and marginalized through discriminatory relations that are seen as violent, both in symbolic and material terms. Often defined through social categories of identity, difference, and community, this figure of the "Other" occupies a special, and central, place in both theoretical and practical approaches to such pedagogical initiatives.'

3. Marae refers to the Maori carved 'meeting house' complex. The students visited the University's marae as part of their studies in this course.
4. This activity, supervised by the Maori lecturer, required the Pākehā and Maori students (in mixed groups) to talk collectively to the class in any way they wanted about their shared reactions to and knowledge about any carving in a Maori meeting house.
5. Whare Wānanga are open to enrolments from any ethnic group, but their pedagogies and knowledges are based in Maori approaches.

Resources

Boler, M. (2004) (ed.). *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence*. New York: Peter Lang.

This edited collection raises some challenging questions about dialogue and why it might be problematic, for a range of groups, including ethnic groups.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Powell, L. C., & Wong, L. M. (eds). (1997). *Off white: Readings on race, power and society*. New York: Routledge.

This useful and courageous edited collection raises some challenging questions about dialogue and why it might be problematic, with a focus on ethnicity and difference and White people's responses to ethnicity.

Smith, L. T. (2001) *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London and New York, Zed Books.

This book, written in accessible language by a leading indigenous (Māori) scholar, outlines some key issues for those engaging in research for or about indigenous people. Many of the points Smith raises are relevant to thinking-through the politics and practice of indigenous education.