Co-conspiring for Change

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Ako Mātātupu: Teach First NZ

In Aotearoa, the Covid-19 crisis has called to arms our team of five million. We locked our borders and worked hard to protect our people. Now we are working to grow our economy. The problem is that many of us were living in crisis for a long time before Coronavirus hit our shores.

Aligned with the theme Te Reo Tāketake me Ngā Tikanga Tāketake – Thriving Indigenous languages and cultures, this research in social justice and education explores the importance of co-conspiracy. Indigenous researchers often identify Pakeha allies who advocate for and amplify their work, however, inherent in the notion of co-conspiracy is the imperative for not only advocacy, but action, and the importance of taking indigenous-led action together.

In this session we begin with a discussion of crisis and agency in Aotearoa with the critical understanding that what happens in the classroom every day is a matter of life and death for our young brown scholars. As scholar-activist Ann Milne says – many of us have been praying for this interruption to our education system for a long time – and yet, what we have consistently seen in our secondary schools post-lockdown is the quick dismissal of hauora-focused interventions and the ready return to credit-mongering.

Over the last 18 months, the authors have co-conspired with indigenous communities to design an initial teacher education programme rooted in Mana Tangata and a driven by a re-indigenised curriculum. In this work we have actively positioned Te Reo Māori and Te Ao Māori at the forefront of teacher education and encouraged the use of indigenous Māori and Pacific knowledges, languages, customs and values within the programme and in the classrooms beyond.

We understand the importance of growing teachers to serve in communities made vulnerable by systemic inequities and comprised largely of Māori and Pacific Peoples. We are determined to grow and support indigenous teachers, but also co-conspirators who have the heart for our young people and who will work urgently towards equity in education. Graduates of this programme will be critical and purposive agents for change, deeply committed to making a long-term difference in the lives of individuals and communities through education.

We tend to think of the world using certain frameworks, and by taking as given certain facts about the way the world is and ought to be structured, which means that we tend to replicate some social facts, including many of the inequalities that we externally espouse to abhor. The authors argue for the importance of co-conspiracy, especially as we navigate these Covid times. They are now working to create research settings and a community of action that will disrupt the pernicious and pervasive inequities that exist, mostly invisibly, throughout our lives, to achieve this end.
Biography of presenting author

Michelle Johansson

Michelle is a Tongan educator, theatre-maker, mother and former high school dropout. She serves as Kāuru Kura|Head of School at Ako Mātātupu: Teach First NZ, growing exceptional people to teach in low-decile schools. She is the Creative Director of the Black Friars, Polynesian performers who are determined to hold courageous performance and leadership spaces for South Auckland. The company works to re-story Pasifika in the largest Polynesian city in the world, to activate our heritage literacies, to grow future leaders and to hold courageous spaces for our young people to walk tall in both of their worlds.