Anti-racist education: Theory

Sharon Walker

Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge

4 November 2019

- Purpose and inherent logic of key concepts e.g. anti-racism
- Decolonising education – relevance to anti-racist work
- Decolonise Cambridge: encounters, reframing and transformation
- Group discussion

Presentation outline

Two concepts

- **Multiculturalism** – fact of societies; managing/responding to difference; elides structural racism; state control rather than change

- **Anti-racism** – tackles structural inequalities; oppositional

(Warmington, 2014; Bonnett & Carrington, 1996; Mullard, 1985)

We are reminded that in education ideology and power are negotiated, re-negotiated, struggled over - **'Educational settlement'**

(Avis, 1993)

…Two more concepts

- **Diversity** – invokes difference; managerial/marketisation speak; avoids engagement with social justice and inequalities

  (Ahmed, 2006; Benschop, 2001; Deem & Ozga, 1997)

- **Decolonisation** – reveals and dismantles colonial power; redresses past wrongs; voice to the subaltern; broad system change demands; institutional reform; epistemic justice

  (Rivzi, 2019)

Decolonise, not Diversify

- Concept of **diversity** – needs assumed neutral point from which 'others' are 'diverse'
- Most dominant neutral point is **whiteness**
- Neo-liberal speak: 'new corporatized version of **multiculturalism**'
- Do not talk about **racism** but a 'lack of diversity'
- Forgetting the past; celebrating multi-cultural presence

Bhanot (2015, December 30)

Media Diversified, Online Magazine

Whiteness

Photo © Graham Hogg (cc-by-sa/2.0)

…'the sheer weight of Whiteness' in the university… (Pilkington, 2014, p.242)

- Privileged signifier of identity and entitlement – a location of structural advantage for those perceived as white/having white skin

- Whiteness as Property – secures advantage

- Social construct – gains meaning and significance in social relations.

- Discourse - its superiority is normalised; commonsense

- Shapes subjectivities and defines objects of knowledge

(Applebaum, 2016; Roediger, 2007; Leonardo, 2002; Frankenberg, 1993)

Decolonising the university

Decolonising the curriculum

Cambridge to 'decolonise' English literature

Follow ⌄

By **Camilla Turner**, EDUCATION EDITOR
24 OCTOBER 2017 • 9:42PM

Cambridge University's English Literature professors could replace white authors with black writers, following proposals put forward by academic staff in response to student demands to "decolonise" the curriculum.

For the first time, lecturers and tutors would have to "ensure the presence" of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) writers on their course, under plans discussed by the English Faculty's Teaching Forum.

The University denies there are any plans to replace white authors with black ones.

The move follows an open letter, penned by Lola Olufemi, Cambridge University Student Union's women's officer and signed

Decolonization

'Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation of the colonies'. (Fanon, 2001, [1961]. *The Wretched of the Earth,* p.28)

Programme of complete disorder

(Rivzi, 2019; Tate & Bagguley, 2017)

Encounters

Reframing

Transformation

A closer look at Cambridge

- **Recent Race Equality Charter Survey** findings – 3,162 responses (14.5% of student population)

- 126 made reference to decolonising the curriculum

- Ethnic minority backgrounds – find curriculum Eurocentric

- Concerns that decolonisation means excluding white, male scholars from curricula

- Some feel will result in drop in standards

- Others predict positive impact on intellectual rigour, contemporary relevance and world standing

- Decolonising relates to other issues e.g. a sense of belonging

Survey responses - examples

'I think it is hugely important not to ideologically remove classical thinkers from POLIS courses. Whilst representation is important, it is unfortunately the case that the corpus of political thought happens to be dominated by dead, white men (just as every other subject). This is a historical fact. It is without question that there should be opportunities to expand the body of thought to include under-represented groups, but if we ignore the contributions of these thinkers in the name of intellectual gerrymandering, we are doing a great disservice to the university's standard of education.' **(White British)**

'I am white myself, and I would really love for the conversations, syllabus, faculty, and student base to better reflect the diversity of modern Britain and the global scholarly community. If this can be said of *anthropology* at Cambridge, then I can only imagine what the situation is like in other disciplines and faculties here.' **(White British)**

'Even when other ethnicities and races are explored the Western world remains the focal point. To what end? You send us to 'Global English' classes but you come up with the same monolithic Western liberal discourse. Even as a leftist myself I'm appalled by the lack of diversity in thought.' **(minority ethnic background)**

Decolonise Cambridge

- In what ways could a decolonising narrative of reframing make Cambridge uncomfortable?

- Do decolonising efforts risk alienating individuals or groups?

- How realistic is reframing as an outcome?

- What should we be looking to reframe and how?

- How do we strengthen/enrich/inform the decolonising narrative at Cambridge?

(Thanks to Dr Jenny K Rodriguez, Alliance Manchester Business School, and Akile Ahmet, London School of Economics)
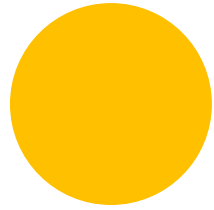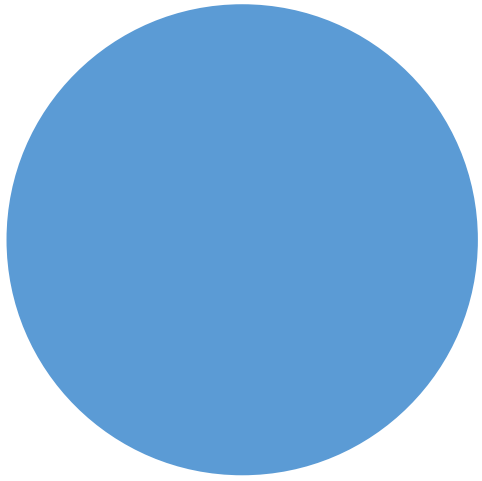
Questions

sw703@cam.ac.uk

References

- Ahmed, S. (2006). Doing Diversity Work in Higher Education in Australia. *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 38(6), pp. 745-768

- Ahmed, S. (2007). A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, *8*(2), pp. 149–168

- Applebaum, B. (2016). Critical Whiteness Studies. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Education*. USA: Oxford University Press

- Back, L. (2004). Ivory towers? The academy and racism. In I. Law, D. Phillips, and L. Turney (Eds). *Institutional racism in higher education*, pp.1–6. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

- Benschop, Y. (2001). Pride, Prejudice and Performance. International *Journal of Human Resources Management*, 12(7), pp. 1166–1181.

- Bhanot, K. (2015, December 30). Decolonise, not Diversify. Retrieved 30 October 2019, from Media Diversified website: https://mediadiversified.org/2015/12/30/is-diversity-is-only-for-white-people/

References

- Bhambra, G.K., Gebrial, D., & Nişancıoğlu, K. (2018). *Decolonising the University.* London: Pluto Press

- Bonnett, A. & Carrington, B. (1996). Constructions of Anti-racist Education in Britain and Canada. *Comparative Education*, 32(3), pp. 271-288

- Cross, S. B. (2017). Whiteness in the academy: using vignettes to move beyond safe silences. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 22(7), pp. 879-887

- Deem, R. & Ozga, J. (1997). Women Managing Diversity in a Postmodern World. In C. Marshall (Ed.), *Feminist Critical Policy Analysis.* London: Falmer

- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.

- Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (NED-New edition). University of Minnesota Press

References

- Glissant, É., (1997). *Poetics of Relation*. (Translated by Betsy Wing). Ann Arbour, MI: University of Michigan Press.

- Kehoe, J. & Mansfield, E. (1993). The limitations of multicultural education and anti-racism education. In K. Mcleod (Ed.), *Multicultural Education: the state of the art report #1*, pp. 3-7. Toronto: Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers/University of Toronto

- Leonardo, Z. (2002). The Souls of White Folk: Critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *5*(1), 29–50

- Modood, T. (1994). Political Blackness and British Asians. *Sociology,* 28(4)*,* pp. 859-876

- Mullard, C. (1985). Multiracial education in Britain: from assimilation to cultural pluralism. In M. Arnot (Ed.). *Race and Gender: equal opportunities policies in education*, pp. 39-52. Oxford: Pergamon

- Pilkington, A. (2014). The Sheer Weight of Whiteness in the Academy: A UK Case Study. In *Advancing Race and Ethnicity in Education* (pp. 193–209). Palgrave Macmillan, London

References

- Rivzi, F. (2019). Decolonisation (Lecture given at the University of Pretoria and Stellenboach University, South Africa)

- Roediger, D.R. (2007). *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class (Revised Edition).* London & New York: Verso

- Santos, B. (2014) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide.* Boulder USA: Paradigm Press

- Tate, S. & Bagguley, P. (2017). Building the anti-racist university: next steps. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(3) pp. 289-299

- Warikoo (2016). *The diversity bargain and other dilemmas of race, admissions, and meritocracy at elite universities.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

- Warmington, P. (2014). *Black British Intellectuals and Education: Multiculturalism's hidden history.* London & New York: Routledge