

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM: DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

1 PURPOSE

This paper presents a small selection of quotations which seek to define and interpret what is meant by decolonising curricula. The quotations are presented for use by academic staff and other practitioners to stimulate discussions with students, peers and colleagues about decolonising curricula. The resource has been compiled by the [All In! Regularising Ethnic Presence in the Curriculum](#) project team based at the University of Nottingham.

2 ACKNOWLEDGING COLONIALISM

2.1 “Emphasises a moral imperative for righting the wrongs of colonial domination, and an ethical stance in relation to social justice for those peoples enslaved and disempowered by persistent forms of coloniality” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 404).

2.2 “First generation colonialism was the conquering of the physical spaces and bodies of the colonised....second generation colonialism was the colonisation of the mind through disciplines, such as education, science, economics and law” (Odora-Hoppers & Richards, 2011, p. 7).

2.3 “The production of knowledge, new knowledge and transformed ‘old’ knowledge, ideas about the nature of knowledge and the validity of specific forms of knowledge, became as much commodities of colonial exploitation as other natural resources” (Smith, 1999, p. 59).

3 ACKNOWLEDGING COLONIALITY

3.1 “Decolonisation must be understood within the context of coloniality in order for it to be de-contaminated, which therefore raises the question of whether curriculum can possibly be decolonised, because it is colonial in-and-of-itself?” (Martin et al, 2020, pp. 313-314).

3.2 “Universities exist within a continued habitus of coloniality, because this is how they are formed, and they carry their colonial baggage wherever they go” (Martin et al, 2020, p. 319).

3.3 Students “are proclaiming loudly that neither South Africa nor its universities are decolonised because we are still oppressed and as such, colonised by dominant, global, racialised, capitalist, patriarchal countries from the North through coloniality” (Joseph, 2017, p. 8).

4 DECONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

4.1 “A historical narrative that resists Eurocentrism and acknowledges the contributions of colonised populations across the globe” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 404).

4.2 “It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations” (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

4.3 “Western knowledge and science are 'beneficiaries' of the colonisation of indigenous peoples. The knowledge gained through our colonisation has been used, in turn, to colonise us in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls the colonisation 'of the mind'” (Smith, 1999, p. 59).

4.4 “Postcolonial and decolonial arguments have been most successful in their challenge to the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe. This has been particularly so in the context of demonstrating the parochial character of arguments about the endogenous European origins of modernity in favour of arguments that suggest the necessity of considering the emergence of the modern world in the broader histories of colonialism, empire, and enslavement” (Bhabra, 2014, p. 115).

4.5 A typology of six distinctive intellectual strategies which include “pointing out discursive Orientalisms, deconstructing historical myths of European development, challenging Eurocentric historiographies, rearticulating subaltern subjectivities, diversifying political subjecthoods and re-imagining the social-psychological subject of world politics” (Sabaratnam, 2011, p. 781).

5 DECOLONISING CURRICULA

5.1 “Decolonisation refers to a critique of the dominance of Euro-Western language and thought, cultural and academic imperialism” (Chilisa, Major & Khudu-Petersen, 2017, p. 327).

5.2 “Decolonisation must start from a place of strength; a place that is open to other ways of knowing and being. Only there can we find meaning and belonging within our own sense of identity” (Martin et al, 2020, p. 317).

5.3 “Acknowledges the inherent power relations in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and seeks to destabilise these, allowing new forms of knowledge” (Begum & Saini, 2019, p. 198).

5.4 “Attention to the geopolitics of knowledge production to enable learners to face coloniality....and work through its unmaking” (Zembylas, 2018, p. 415).

5.5 “To decolonise is to fundamentally transform knowledge production. It means that the unquestioned value systems that govern what knowledge is, how it is produced and who is allowed to be a knowing and knowledgeable agent must be radically reshaped” (Emejulu, 2019, p. 204).

5.6 “Understanding the political economy of the Enlightenment and modernity is crucial in any process of decolonisation. We cannot and should not separate the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and colonisation from the Enlightenment” (Emejulu, 2019, p. 204).

5.7 “Using a ‘de-colonial gaze’ suggests that it is ethically imperative in post-colonial contexts to re-create curricula that will recuperate and build black student agency for integrated identity formation, deep learning and academic achievement” (Lockett, 2016, p. 424).

5.8 “Decolonising strategies, through pluralising the subjects of inquiry, offer an intellectual platform for making good the ambition of a discipline that has been trying to transcend its imperial, colonial and racist roots” (Sabaratnam, 2011, p. 794).

5.9 “Decolonisation involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not “integration” or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. It’s a culture shift to think more widely about why common knowledge is what it is, and in so doing adjusting cultural perceptions and power relations in real and significant ways” (Keele University: Manifesto for decolonising the curriculum, online).

5.10 “Whilst ‘decolonisation’ is a concept that can be understood in different ways: in our usage, it connects contemporary racialised disadvantages with wider historical processes of colonialism, seeks to expose and transform them through forms of collective reflection and action. *‘Decolonising SOAS’ therefore refers to thought and action within the university to redress forms of disadvantage associated with racism and colonialism*” (SOAS University of London: Decolonising SOAS, online).

6 SUSTAINING CHANGE

6.1 “This will require nothing less than dialogical engagement, a commitment to building an ethical community on campus and knowledge production that expands the archive and re-reads the canon in new ways” (Lockett, 2016, p. 424).

6.2 “Decolonisation must include all aspects of the university; we cannot decolonise the curriculum while the university as institution remains untouched” (Joseph, 2017, p. 6).

6.3 “It goes beyond shoehorning POC on to reading lists, but decolonising the academy itself, so social scientists not only question but challenge structural racisms and sexism rather than simply preaching the neoliberal virtues of ‘resilience’ and ‘hard work’” (Begum & Saini, 2019, p. 200).

6.4 “Decolonisation is difficult and intellectually dangerous – but it is not impossible. It only requires the political will for change” (Emejulu, 2019, p. 205).

6.5 “A critical question for me is whether the Western tradition has the intellectual resources within to transform itself and come to terms with the historical effects and traces of racism that are invested in our institutions and in our knowledge traditions” (Peters, 2015, pp. 644-645).

6.6 “The burden of academic proof for challenging these views on Empire almost always seems to fall on the predominantly female and/or POC academics who research and champion the voices of marginalised and subaltern peoples” (Begum & Saini, 2019, p. 199).

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ONLINE

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- <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/learning-teaching/toolkit-for-programme-and-module-convenors/#Decolonising SOAS A short background>