

The BERA Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum



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The BERA Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum

Equity and Inclusion in Educational Research
and Practice

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

Decolonising the Curriculum: Fostering Praxis for Equity and Inclusion

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Welcome, readers, to the *BERA Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum: Equity and Inclusion in Educational Research and Practice*. The motivation of this BERA guide is to share examples of impactful decolonial research-informed teaching and learning in early childhood education and care, primary education, secondary and tertiary education, and higher education so that this praxis can be fostered more widely. The chapters in this guide offer insight into a broad range of decolonial theories, and methodological approaches applied in research for teaching and learning through expert early childhood practitioners, primary and secondary school teachers, further and higher education lecturers, educational consultants, teacher-educators, and experienced academic researchers. This unique collective of contributors shares research from across the four UK nations of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and through international comparative educational contexts and perspectives from the USA, Canada, Burundi, Trinidad and Tobago, and South Africa.

Background

In the introduction to this BERA guide, it is important to recognise the power of public activism in championing racial, social, and educational justice. The Black Lives Matter anti-racism public protests of 2020 in the UK, raised awareness and support for a decolonised national history curriculum (Moncrieffe, 2020; Moncrieffe & Harris, 2020; Weale et al., 2020), and influenced multiple public petitions to UK Parliament demanding government accountability, debate, and action for change (see Moncrieffe, 2023). For example, ‘Teach Britain’s colonial past as part of the UK’s compulsory curriculum’ was supported by 268,722 signatories ([UK Government and Parliament Petitions, 2020](#)). Before these events, in 2014, the call for a decolonised education had been raised to public attention by students at the University College London through their ‘Why is my Curriculum White Campaign?’ ([Peters, 2015](#)). Outside of the UK, public activism with aims to decolonise education had been occurring in settler colonial states such as Canada and South Africa. The ‘Idle No More’ movement led by indigenous peoples across Canada challenged the federal conservative government, in demanding education for the revitalisation of indigenous peoples through awareness and empowerment ([Tupper, 2014](#)). In South Africa, students at the University of Cape triggered the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement in 2015, leading to wider movements across South Africa to decolonise education ([Hlophe, 2015](#)). This wave of influence was captured by the decolonising movement led by students at the University of Oxford in the UK ([Chantiluke et al., 2018](#); [Sabaratnam, 2017](#)). Here, student complaints and demands pointed to what [Peters \(2015, p. 641\)](#) described as ‘the lack of awareness that the curriculum is comprised of “White ideas” by “White authors” and is a result of colonialism that has normalised Whiteness and made Blackness invisible’.

What Is Meant by ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’?

Modern society is based upon the hierarchies of Eurocentrism in which the creation of anti-Blackness is essential ([Andrews,](#)

2018) to maintaining the European (white) projection of its own self-image above all others (Moncrieffe, 2020). Where curriculum for teaching and learning is an official selection that structures knowledge in ways that privilege a particular construction of knowledge and the history of knowledge (Peters, 2015) such as Eurocentrism, Anglocentrism, and whiteness, then to decolonise the curriculum is to expose, disrupt, and dismantle the ongoing processes of western (neo) colonialism and the uncritical cultural reproduction of epistemic power that is fuelled by racism (Moncrieffe, 2020, 2022; Le Grange, 2023). To decolonise a curriculum as such is an anti-racist venture. Bhambra et al. (2018, p. 1) provide a succinct two-step definition of decolonising as:

thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire, and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view. Second, it purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis.

This relates closely to Arshad's (2020) definition of decolonising education as being:

an approach involving a critical analysis of how colonial forms of knowledge, pedagogical strategies and research methodologies have shaped what we know, what we recognise, and how we reward such knowledge accordingly. (Arshad, 2020)

According to Walsh and Mignolo (2018, p. 381), 'decoloniality' is 'neither a field of study, nor a discipline, but a way of being in the world, interrogating the structures of knowledge and of knowing that have thrown us'. Thus, while the motivations in education to decolonise colonialism, empire, and racism in the curriculum may stem from the same origins of oppression, the route to achieving this outcome comes by different pathways due to the 'heterogeneity of viewpoints, approaches, political projects, and normative concerns' (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 1).

Arresting Epistemic Violence

This BERA guide presents a broad range of pathways of creativity taken in action to decolonise the curriculum, sharing on the impact achieved in this through several definitions, interpretations, aims, and research strategies. A significant action of motivation to transform education opportunities for all, for the better, given by contributors across this BERA guide is through disrupting and arresting the epistemic violence (Moncrieffe, 2020; Spivak, 1999) of anti-Blackness produced by educational policies, curriculum guidance aims, and contents dominated by whiteness across all educational phases. In talking about whiteness, this BERA guide does not point to white people, but to the social and educational ideologies which empower people racialised as white over other people (Peters, 2015; Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2023). Thus, the target of this disrupting and arresting of epistemic violence is also aimed at innate and often unconscious cultural and knowledge biases brought to education by uncritical practitioners during curriculum teaching and learning processes (Harris, 2013; Lander, 2011, 2014; Moncrieffe, 2020). The rich evidence generated by this BERA guide through the data, testimonies, and the arguments given across the chapters shows that by applying decolonial thinking in pursuit of equity and inclusion in education, this can heighten opportunities in knowledge acquisition through a broader and generally neglected range of non-Eurocentric epistemologies, thus advancing teaching and learning for all as epistemic justice. To a greater extent, this BERA guide sees decolonisation operating synchronously as anti-racist action, particularly when tackled at the intersection of universities and schools (Le Grange, 2023). Decolonising the curriculum and anti-racist pedagogy can strengthen continued professional development, where practitioner training in developing equity and inclusion of marginalised knowledges can be taught for implementation. Fostering decolonial praxis in teacher practitioners can be the route to this goal.

Fostering Decolonial Praxis

Freire (1996, p. 52) discusses praxis as ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’. Praxis is given by this

BERA guide as an enlightened route to conceptualising practice (Crouch & Pearce, 2013, p. 40). Praxis is the conscious and intentional approach to research, teaching, and learning through theories and lenses of decoloniality, applied in analysis and critique of coloniality. Decolonial praxis, therefore, makes visible, opens up, and advances radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that can displace Western rationality as the only framework of knowledge (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). In aiming to foster decolonial praxis that is potent and transformative, this BERA guide provides critical and theoretically informed research, teaching, and learning for challenging and decentering the dominant focus in education given to Eurocentrism, Anglocentrism, and whiteness. Aligned to educational values of equity and inclusion, the decolonial praxis shared in this BERA guide means that attention to knowledge acquisition and educational development comes by the rich value of ‘alternative’ or non-white, non-Anglocentric, and non-Eurocentric cultural ways of knowing and being. The educational challenge in this means unlearning the taken-for-granted ways by which we in the contemporary Western world come to know, understand, and perceive reality through the influence of formal educational institutions, the state, religious institutions, and the media and through informal influences such as families, communities, and public opinion. Decolonial praxis manifested by contributors to this BERA guide offers broad examples of critical unlearning for re-learning in aiming for the genuine conveyance of equity and inclusion in teaching and learning.

Equity and Inclusion

In relation to decoloniality, equity is the starting point for devising strategies and initiatives for inclusion in practice. This approach recognises the impact of historical injustices on current-day manifestations of inequalities pertaining to ethnic and racial differences. To mitigate these structural disadvantages, there is a need to recognise that people have different starting points and needs. This differentiates equity from equality, which assumes that everyone should be treated equally. It is important to restate that the conflation of equality and equity merits a

rethink, as the former remains a term used by educational institutions in describing their inclusion policy, which includes racial inclusiveness. While recognising the importance of nomenclature, the enactment of equity and inclusion goes beyond words, and this BERA guide highlights some of the challenges faced in different national and global contexts in embedding in equitable practice to foster inclusion. The main challenge echoes the construct of pedagogy of discomfort ([Zembylas, 2015](#)). This BERA guide goes further with examples of decolonial praxis that demonstrates teachers' reflexivity on their positionality as they seek to foster equity and inclusion in practice. This alludes to the potential benefits inherent in an inclusive internationalised classroom where staff and students from different cultural backgrounds have opportunities to learn together ([Fakunle et al., 2022](#)), as a microcosm of the global society where equity and inclusion remain a worthy goal, and work in progress.

Objective and Aims

The objective of this BERA guide is to present examples of impactful decolonial research-informed teaching and learning in early childhood and primary education, secondary and tertiary education, and higher education so that decolonial praxis can be fostered more widely and further advanced. The key aims of the guide are to:

- Provide an overview of action being taken to decolonise the curriculum across key phases of compulsory and non-compulsory education in the UK.
- Provide contextual international comparative approaches to decolonising the curriculum.
- Share a wide range of decolonial theories and methodological approaches for decolonising the curriculum.
- Provide insights on the positive impact generated by teaching and learning a decolonised curriculum.
- Share on next steps for advancing decolonial praxis across key phases of compulsory and non-compulsory education.