

Identifying and addressing evidence of neo-colonialism in course curricula

Rowan Murray
Head of English Language
for MVM and STEM





THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Centre for Open Learning
English Language Education



Overview

- Background
- Guiding questions
- Findings from the study
- Addressing neo-colonialism in English Language Education (ELE)



The university is a site of knowledge production and, most crucially, consecration; it has the power to decide which histories, knowledges and intellectual contributions are considered valuable and worthy of further critical attention and dissemination”

(Gebrial, 2018, p. 19).

“The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge”

(Smith, 2012, p. 125).

Decolonisation

HEIs have:

- Power over knowledge: Production and reproduction
- Power through curriculum: What we include and disregard
- Power through pedagogy: How we teach

(Bhambra et al., 2018; Gebrial, 2018; Reviere, 2001)

"critical reflections need to begin with taking a look at our own identities and practices"

(Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 17).



Background to the investigation

- Document evaluation of a course already under review
- Literature-informed guiding questions for analysis
- Focus on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) but can be transferred to other courses and subject areas



The guiding questions

1. Whose knowledge and values are represented?
2. Is there a hidden curriculum of Eurocentric norms and values?
3. Which research methodologies and genres are promoted?
4. Who has control over the themes and topics covered?
5. Is there evidence of Othering?
6. Is there evidence of Eurocentric discipline norms?



Q1: Whose knowledge and values are represented?

- Knowledge disseminated from Western universities from a hegemonic Eurocentric perspective
- Curricula does not represent the worldviews of indigenous or minority groups
- ‘Arrogant ignorance’ (Icaza & Vazquez, 2018, p. 112)



Q2: Is there a hidden curriculum of Eurocentric norms and values?

- Hidden curriculum: The norms, cultural values, and views of social order embedded within curriculum content
- Unintended learning and hidden ideology of institutional values and dominant culture
- Labelling students according to ability, race, class & culture

(Apple, 1993; Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Brown, 2009; de Lissovoy, 2012)



Q3: Which research methodologies and genres are promoted?

- Methodological imperialism: Eurocentric values of objectivity, reliability and validity
- Data analysis influenced by European views of phenomena
- Curricula that does not include alternative research methodologies and does not recognise Indigenous ways of knowing and experiencing the world



Q4: Who has control over the themes and topics covered?

- Lack of evidence of the justification for inclusion and exclusion of materials
- Need to democratise decision-making
- Lack of student-generated themes
- Students viewed as passive recipients rather than active participants



Q5: Is there evidence of Othering?

- Positioning Indigenous peoples, women or those in nations with non-dominant epistememes or worldviews as Other.
- Lack of attention to the language we use in materials and the prominence we place on Western worldviews and discursive practice



Q6: Is there evidence of Eurocentric discipline norms?

- Who is setting underlying expectations in the disciplines and whose interest do they serve?
- Standardisation of genres
- Disciplinary boundaries
- Interrogating disciplinary texts from local perspectives?



Findings

- The prevalence of Eurocentric or Western perspectives
- Evidence of Othering
- The reproduction of discipline norms



Findings:

Insights from the following guiding question:

Whose knowledge and values are represented?

Positives:

- Materials that encourage reflection on and comparison of academic norms in home country and UK
- Reading list for the written assignment included varied perspectives on the topic



Findings: The prevalence of Eurocentric or Western perspectives

Areas to address:

- Reading list lacking representation from Global South and indigenous worldviews
- Restricted genres: theoretical overviews and data-driven reports based on Eurocentric methodological values
- A hidden curriculum that promotes European knowledge production, Western voices, and a narrow set of epistemologies and methodologies?



Findings: The prevalence of Eurocentric or Western perspectives

Insights from the following guiding questions:

Which research methodologies and genres are promoted?

Who has control over the themes and topics covered?

Positives:

- Agency in the assessed presentation through choice of topic and freedom of choice over data collection and analysis.



Findings: The prevalence of Eurocentric or Western perspectives

Areas to address:

- The thesis-led written assessment did not allow student choice of knowledge generation
- A set question and genre for written assessment reduced opportunity to engage with non-Western methodologies and alternative genres of writing

Findings: Evidence of Othering

Insights from the following guiding questions:

Is there evidence of Othering?

Is there a hidden curriculum of Eurocentric norms and values?

Areas to address:

- 'We' and the unsaid 'you'

*In spoken English **we** often use...*

*In formal English, particularly writing, **we** often prefer to use passive voice.*

- Exclusionary of practices in non-Anglo-American contexts

***Academic writing** does not normally contain emotive language that shows your personal attitude, unless you are writing reflectively.*

Do not use quotations



Findings: The reproduction of discipline norms

Insights from the following guiding questions:

Is there evidence of Eurocentric discipline norms?

Area to address *with* the disciplines:

- Instruction on standardized genres and conformity in writing

Academic style is very discipline specific. One of your responsibilities will be to familiarise yourself with these specifics. You should always follow the advice of your lecturers and follow the style of academic journals in your field.



EAP's greatest challenge: The disciplines?

- Working *for* the disciplines?
- Preparing students for their discipline study by teaching Western/ British academic norms?
- To what extent is EAP reliant on the disciplines decolonising?



How we have addressed the issues

- Recognising the colonial history of English language teaching and engaging with Critical EAP
- Including decolonisation in CPD
- Attending open lectures on decolonisation
- Creating a materials checklist
- Reviewing the language we use in instruction
- Including decolonisation as a topic of enquiry in curriculum

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Questions?