

Decolonising the Curriculum – Drama @ BGU

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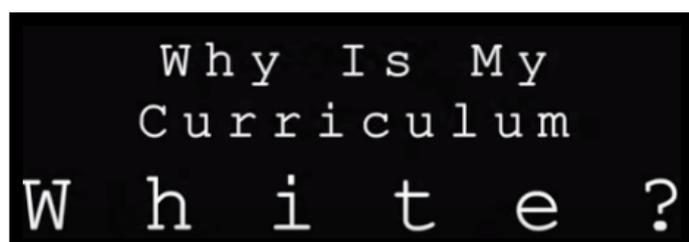
When I arrived at Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) in 2014, making drama more inclusive was one of my priorities. The existing programme, BA (Hons) Applied Drama in the Community, is a specialised subject that focuses on the use of drama as a tool for social change. The need to have a new and more inclusive programme that could enrich and enhance our students' experience, led me to writing a new BA (Hons) Drama programme including these modules: Global Shakespeare, Contemporary British Theatre, Decolonising Drama, and Intercultural Performance Practice.

In order to decolonise the curriculum, we first need to accept the fact that the old curriculum was colonised, embodying the universalization of a certain ideology. Knowledge comes with power, which can be seen by asking: What's to be learnt? When? Why? Who decides this? The coloniality of knowledge constitutes a matrix that operates through hegemony over the practical domains of political administration, production and exploitation, personal life and reproduction. It controls the world-view and interpretive perspectives of educators. Decolonisation of the curriculum is the process of re-writing and re-reading literature.

Why should we decolonise our curriculum(s)? Decolonisation of the curriculum questions knowledge production and produces autonomous thinking in a supportive space. It can be a place of refusal, of deconstruction and revolution, not just for understanding the origin of ideas, but where development and understanding of ideas outside European-based ideology and academic framework can evolve. We must interrogate the 'gaze' of the account presented, from the perspective of both the gazer and of the object of the gaze. It pushes the academic boundaries allowing for broader discourse. This process both liberates and expands knowledge, while encouraging freedom of thinking beyond a geographical area. It also reforms pedagogy, and engages with the process of how education is perceived, received and taught. The decolonisation process removes one-sided hegemony, and replaces it with an expanded and enriched curriculum. We should not just accept that a particular ideology is true and uncritically and universally validate it.

I have always been a strong advocate of intercultural curriculum development. Prior to joining BGU, I presented a paper in 2010 entitled, 'Internationalisation in the Context of Curriculum Development' at a Learning and Teaching Conference that challenged the dominant Western curriculum, which undermines the rich cultural experiences that international students and staff could bring to learning and teaching. Internationalisation should not be limited to bringing international students to study in the UK. The term can be associated with the related concepts of global, intercultural, multinational and multicultural education, and shares a great deal of conceptual territory with dimensions of comparative education. Internationalisation can be defined within the context of intercultural modules and programmes.

Decolonisation gives a space for a better expression and discourse, and a space for rejection, transformation, and (de)construction of ideologies. It is a revolutionary space where new ideas can be born and grown in ways that can shape our understanding of the world around us. It provides a room for a multicultural dialogue, offering educators and learners a way of transforming and



Why Is My
Curriculum
White?

reinventing meanings, empowering students to effect on their own political reform, and evidencing a need to create new strategies for decolonisation within the subject area. Where is the process of decolonisation located? Anywhere – teaching materials, teaching and learning styles, space, tutors, staff, administration, student, discourse, etc. Here are four new modules that have been redesigned with a decolonisation perspective in order to enable the drama modules to be a positive tool for social change.

DRM232: Global Shakespeare

This module is about the interpretation and appropriation of Shakespeare's plays within different cultures across the globe. It is built around the historical context, the performance practices and the rich scholarly criticism of Shakespeare. It introduces the linguistic structure, dramatic impact, aesthetic value and interpretative demands of Shakespeare's plays around the globe, enabling students to explore Shakespeare's transcultural impact on theatre and giving students' academic skills necessary critically analyse his plays from different cultural perspectives.

DRM233: Contemporary British Theatre

This module has a particular emphasis on the post-World War II period, concentrating on trends in British contemporary theatre and how social issues have been represented in dramatic/theatrical texts. It is also considers how society and theatre influence each other, uncovering the links between the larger social melee and creative productions. Furthermore, this module considers how one's social class, context, race and gender influence performance work, and investigate form, structure and meaning, allowing students to gain detailed insights into the world of Black British (among others) playwrights, their intentions and their influences.

DRM236: Decolonising Drama

Here is another module that offers the students the opportunity to develop their understanding of issues of culture and identity in the performance practices of the people from the formerly colonised territories (e.g., Africa, Australia, Caribbean, India, Pakistan, etc.), how they have responded to and confronted the hierarchies of control and repression by the former colonial powers...It discusses some post-colonial plays in terms of their background, contemporary and historic context and the decolonising strategies that the playwrights employ.

DRM334: Intercultural Performance Practice

This module examines the relationship between cultural pluralism and how it informs contemporary performance practice...the module encourages students to open their minds to other cultures in an explicit way, through exploration of their own cultural values and recognition of other people's traditions, extending knowledge of performance and world culture, but does correspond with the exploration of contemporary society as considered in some of the previous modules such as, Global Shakespeare, Decolonising Drama and Contemporary British Theatre.

