MAKING IT INCLUSIVE: REFLECTIONS ON DESIGNING A TRAINING SESSION FOR 'DECOLONISING' THE CURRICULUM

Nafisah Graham-Brown*

Natecla National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA), London

In September 2020 I was asked to deliver a session called 'Decolonising the Curriculum' to trainee teachers preparing to teach adults in colleges, as part of their post-graduate teacher training programme. At that time, discussions of 'decolonising the curriculum' had become more prominent in the UK, responding to both the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement against racial injustice in America after the murder of George Floyd, and the UK national context of the experiences of people from Black and minoritized backgrounds. Conferences featured sessions discussing the lack of representation of diverse people in education curricula and the issue with accounts of historical events. This included questioning the use of language in presentations of national and world events[1].

UK-based calls to 'decolonise the curriculum' had originated in student bodies of national universities, where students and academics had identified problematic representations of historical figures and events, and use of reference books and materials created by authors of white male backgrounds (Charles, 2019). A definition from Keele University is that decolonising is about

> rethinking, reframing and reconstructing the current curriculum in order to make it better, and more inclusive. It is about expanding our notions of good literature so it doesn't always elevate one voice, one experience, and one way of being in the world. It is about considering how different frameworks, traditions and knowledge projects can inform each other, how multiple voices can be heard, and how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning. (Keele University, n.d.).

Within English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers have discussed 'decolonising' in different contexts and perspectives: from an identity and language ownership perspective (see Norton, 1997), with reference to experiences in post-colonial countries (see Mishra & Bardhan, 2010; Molina, 2021; Motha, 2006; Pennycook, 2020), and de-centring whiteness in ELT (see Gerald, 2020).

However, the term 'decolonising' had not been discussed much in my sector in the UK, which is the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) sector. Designing the training session provided an opportunity for me to research the different definitions and perspectives of 'decolonising' the curriculum. In this account, I share my interpretation of the use of this term, within the United Kingdom (UK) ESOL context. I describe what I considered when planning the training, reflecting that designing inclusive materials requires an intersectional view of exclusion. I include as Appendix A a framework adapted from Bollas (2020) that could be used by ESOL teachers to develop inclusive materials.

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*ngrahambrown@ioe.ac.uk
[1]For example, *Educating Out Racism, DiverseEd, SET* (Society of Education and Training) Annual Conference

In the UK, the majority of ESOL students are those from refugee and migrant backgrounds. As of 2019-20, approximately 75% people studying ESOL declared that they were from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME[2]) backgrounds (Department for Education, 2021). Many migrant ESOL students are people from countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh and report the lowest English language proficiency (National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults [NATECLA], 2016). We also have many refugee students from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan (Simpson & Whiteside, 2012) and more recently Syria (Home Office, 2017).

During the summer of 2020, discussions took place between council members of the national ESOL organisation for which I am co-chair—NATECLA. Our management council's focus was of the experiences of refugees and migrants who had moved to and were settling in the UK. Many BAME ESOL students come from countries that have experience of colonisation, war and conflict. Therefore, when thinking about decolonising within an ESOL context, language use in teaching materials was one of the first areas I considered. ESOL professional and Belonging consultant Laila El-Metoui reminded us at the DiverseEd conference about the use of language when describing current and historical situations:

> The language we use is important [. . .] these countries were not 'conquered' as stated in britannica.com, but invaded. From an ESOL perspective it means [teachers] being mindful of [. . .] trauma that people may have experienced as a result of leaving their homes or the current pandemic. (El-Metoui, 2020)..

Apart from language use, it is a message about being more conscious about the prior life experiences of our students. I also felt that there was a lack of compiled research about the experiences of ESOL students in their daily lives in the UK (Graham-Brown, 2020). I had recently completed research about the experiences of refugee and migrant women who were settling in the UK, specifically about their social interactions and their perceptions of belonging. Through narrative interviews and oral diaries, I learned about their daily interactions outside of the ESOL classroom. I felt some of the interactions were subtly racist or discriminatory[3] and I was considering how we could support our learners to recognise everyday discriminatory practices and to develop language to be able to respond.

As part of my preparation for the training session, I also sought views and feedback about my thoughts on 'decolonising the curriculum' from ESOL professional colleagues identifying as Black or from minoritised groups. The range of viewpoints and existing practices reminded me that I should be cognizant to not only promote one kind of experience or perspective. I became even more aware of the importance of context, and of the minorities within minorities; each group has a different lived experience. Our students live in superdiverse contexts and the exclusion they face is often intersectional. From this preparation research, I concluded that what was most important in the context of 'decolonising' the ESOL curriculum was representation and intersectional inclusion.

Inclusion and Fostering Agency

Adult teaching in England promotes teaching that responds to the needs of those studying, including an understanding of students' career and future needs in order to support them progress (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted], 2014). In ESOL, participatory approaches to language teaching have become increasingly popular[4], with many professionals discussing the importance of 'bringing the outside in' to ESOL classes (see for example Baynham, 2006; Simpson & Whiteside, 2012). Many of us are very aware of the challenges faced by our learners in their lives, and we are often asked for help by learners

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[2]This term and its acronym has been the mainstream classification for people who declare as non-white.
[3]I mention these in this blog
[4]See for example Cooke, 2006; Cooke et al, 2018; and Moon and Sutherland, 2008.

(e.g. form-filling and reading formal letters for government applications). Our curricula and lessons are driven by our learners' contextual needs with topics such as 'making an appointment', and 'filling in forms'.

To encourage agency, I think we need to develop awareness of our students' rights to challenge exclusionary practices, and the tools they may need to be able to do so. We should re-examine our curriculum content to see if it (a) reflects learners' real lives, and (b) adequately develops their language and knowledge to enable them to build independence to self-advocate. Example 1 shows a sample script for teaching how to make an appointment to see the doctor:

Example 1: *Script for Making Medical Appointments*

Page 6 Appointments

Activity A1/2

Receptionist:	Hello. Ashlea Surgery.
Filiz:	Hello. Can I make an appointment for my daughter to see Dr Green, please?
Receptionist:	Yes. What's the name?
Filiz:	Gulay Akpinar.
Receptionist:	Can you spell her first name, please?
Filiz:	Yes. It's G-U-L-A-Y. Gulay Akpinar.
Receptionist:	OK. Dr Green's next free appointment is on Thursday morning.
Filiz:	Thursday. OK.
Receptionist:	Right. Is 9:30 OK?
Filiz:	Yes. That's fine. Thank you very much.

Source: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), (2001).

Many of the materials related to teaching how to make appointments present language as very straightforward and non-problematic[5]. In reality, many teachers have anecdotes of their students struggling to make appointments with GP surgeries[6] because of difficulty communicating with reception or surgery staff. Some say they do not understand their accents and/or present them with language that is unexpected and biased—e.g. 'That doesn't sound serious enough to see a doctor!'; 'You have to follow the procedure. All new appointments are opened at 8am daily.'; 'Have you gone online and looked at the NHS website?' More recently, our students have experienced digital exclusion. If our language lessons are to be meaningful, we should be considering the range of difficulties our students could encounter, including the potential for discriminatory practices in language and digital transactions, and what they could do in these situations, and to include these in our lessons.

Making It Inclusive: A Framework That We Can Use to Evaluate Our Materials

Angelos Bollas recently published a framework for inclusive practices in EFL teaching to promote inclusion of LGBTQI+ experiences and identities within English Language Teaching (Bollas, 2020)[7]. He

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[5]Other examples: https://www.skillsworkshop.org/sites/skillsworkshop.org/files/resources/e1e2esolhealthroleplay.pdf
https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/uk-life/local-services/making-appointment-optician
https://lassn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/34-Doctor-GP-Appointments.pdf
[6]Doctor's offices in the UK.
[7]Adapted from Jolly and Bolitho's framework for EFL materials writing (2011).

suggests stages for assessing materials for adaptation that can be used for all types of content from curricula to teaching and learning materials; for creating new materials or reviewing existing coursebooks. I found this framework useful and adapted it for my training session, changing the guiding questions in the stages and steps to suit further education and ESOL in my context (England). These stages and steps are shown in Appendix A.

Conclusion

ESOL practitioners already adapt materials to suit the language needs of our students. The guiding questions in Stage 1 (see Appendix A) can support us to think wider than immediate language needs, and to consider topics and language we can teach to develop students' awareness of their context and rights within those contexts. Asking our students about their experiences is important and can help us assess what to teach to develop independence and agency.

The feedback from the training session I delivered was positive. Many attendees stated that it made them feel more confident about how they could assess and adapt their content to ensure they were inclusive and representative. I feel that this framework gives practitioners a practical way to be able to create lessons that are inclusive. It can provide a conscious check that we are promoting anti-racism and in doing so 'decolonise' the topics/materials used. I plan to continue developing this session with NATECLA for future delivery.

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Appendix A: Stages of Adaptation for Inclusive Content

- ➤ Stage 1: Assess and identify the needs for adaptation.
  - ➤ Does the topic/material present a non-inclusive view of the world? Are there underlying assumptions made in the choice of topic/material?
  - ➤ Does the topic/material assume that everyone is of a certain race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, able-bodied, age, etc? Is it heteronormative? How representative is the topic/material? In the UK, we can use the list of Protected Characteristics from our Equality Act to make this assessment.
  - ➤ Does the topic/material assume that everyone starts at the same level or ability, or has the same experience?
  - ➤ Does the material assume that the creations of white European/American peoples have greater value than of others? How are contributions and achievements of others represented and/or celebrated? Are we telling everyone's story?

- ➤ Stage 2: What is the most efficient/effective way to adapt the materials?
  - ➤ Consult with your community of practice. Have colleagues done this work before?
  - ➤ Can you add some information and materials to increase representation?
  - ➤ Do you need to start again or find new topic/materials?

- ➤ Stage 3: Bear in mind your context.
  - ➤ How will your adaptation impact your learners? Will some of your learners find the adaptations challenging?
  - ➤ Do you need to change your methods of delivery?
  - ➤ Do you need to inform programme leaders or managers?

- ➤ Stage 4: Identify your learning objective(s).
  - ➤ Does the topic/material meet the learning objective for the session/curriculum?
  - ➤ How is your adaptation going to improve learning?

- ➤ Step 5 and 6: Use your materials and evaluate them.
  - ➤ Are they effective?
  - ➤ What is feedback from your learners?

- ➤ Proposed further stage:
  - ➤ Further adapt based on feedback and use them again.
  - ➤ Share them with other practitioners.

Note: Adapted from A. Bollas, *A framework for LGBTQI+ identities* (2020), pp. 146–148).