Editorial

Decolonising the school curriculum: a special feature

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In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and subsequent antiracism protests, calls to decolonise the school curriculum have gained traction around the world. Internationally, educational systems have been engaged for some time with how to decolonise their national school curricula in, for example, Australia (Harvey and Russell-Mundine, 2018), Bolivia (Lopes Cardozo, 2012), Canada (Munroe et al., 2013) and the USA (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Such discussions have been amplified following protests from the Black Lives Matter movement both in the UK and worldwide. A sharper focus on the causes of global protests and events has resulted in growing pressures on governments around the world to resolve perceived discriminations embedded within schools' curricula, and to essentially 'decolonise' and diversify education. For instance, hundreds of thousands have signed petitions calling for schools not only to teach the links between the slave trade and imperialism, but also to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people in history lessons, and in the school curriculum more widely (Arday et al., 2021). Collectively, this movement aspires to transform inaccurate syllabuses and exclusionary pedagogical practices, and to eradicate the biased knowledge that school curricula can produce, espouse and communicate. Scholars have argued that schools, like universities, can be important transformative sites of intervention and disruption in challenging colonialist legacies in the curriculum (and other structures) and in rehumanising these institutions (Dawson, 2020; Gleason and Franklin-Phipps, 2019). Others have warned of the dangers of relativism in the curriculum that may even entrench racial thinking (Williams, 2017).

This special feature comes at a critical moment in history, and at a particularly turbulent political time for many countries around the world, not least the USA and the UK. The debates and controversies surrounding recent elections in the USA, the successive changes in UK government and political speeches railing against 'woke' approaches to education, including the demonisation of critical race theory (Dowden, 2022; Badenoch, 2020), have produced ample examples of what Akhter and Watson's (2022: 2) article in this collection refers to as a 'full-frontal populist culture-war attack'. Yaa Asare's (2022) contribution to this special feature also prompts us to view the decolonisation project as an *ongoing* struggle, which reaches far beyond the classroom walls. Indeed, every article in the special feature, each in their own way, reminds us how decolonising the curriculum offers opportunities to critically review and dismantle colonial discourses, reclaim knowledges and ultimately determine the shape and direction of future nations and societies globally. These are manifestos, which, in Browning et al.'s (2022) and Race et al.'s (2022) articles, are necessarily highlighted as the conspirations, challenges and controversies that lie ahead in realising the goal of decolonisation.

Decolonising curricula is a global phenomenon. At the time of writing, 11 articles from worldwide authors comprise this special feature. This diverse set of articles, which we briefly summarise below, provide analyses of what decolonisation of the school curriculum can mean, including: reports of studies that empirically explore curricula at different phases of education; student and staff perspectives and the impact on teacher training programmes; and methodologies that are required to interrogate and advance this agenda in both research and practice.

Browning et al.'s (2022) article weaves together various contributions from a UK-based PhD-led 'Reading and React Group' (2019/20). A 'dialogical, polyphonic, pluriversal' (Browning et al., 2022: 2) approach undergirds their self-reflective paper, which centres on decolonising language teaching and learning. The authors' reflections are focused on three main strands of enquiry: the coloniality of knowledge; the extensiveness of decolonial work and scepticism about finished projects in this regard; and the possibilities, given their own positionalities. Linking these three threads together, Browning et al. (2022: 11) contend that efforts to decolonise the school language curriculum should not be perceived as discrete activities occurring over a period of time, 'but, rather, as dynamic threads in wider, interconnected flows that are open and reactive to ongoing shifts and reappraisals'.

Akhter and Watson's (2022) article provides useful background information and a timely commentary on the English political context that currently affects the progress of decolonising the English school curriculum. The authors outline the various ways in which political discourses and polarisation have effec- tively usurped meaningful conversations about the curriculum. Indeed, according to Akhter and Watson (2022: 6, 2), decolonisation is 'trapped in political limbo' and, they argue, a 'full-frontal populist culture-war attack' has been waged on the case for decolonising the curriculum. The authors conclude that only a significant change in the political landscape, 'more significantly than a new prime minister sticking to old Conservative tactics' (Akhter and Watson, 2022: 6), will bring about any meaningful change.

In their study located in the Canadian school system, Pillay et al. (2022) consider the impact of social media on students' engagement with social justice issues during the lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In their analysis of students' social media interactions, the authors report finding that, unlike formal classroom spaces (where they argue that educators can fail to provide ethical spaces for decolonising discourse, interaction and learning), social media spaces offer informal occasions for significant learning about social justice issues.

Poudel et al. (2022) adopt a postcolonial approach to policy analysis in discussing the challenges of decolonising the curriculum in Nepal. The authors draw a distinction between the colonisation of lands and languages, which serves to illustrate how postcolonial issues continue to plague a nation that was not itself formally colonised. The authors explore the notion of decolonisation, considering the impact of colonisation on a non-colonised nation, and its implications on legislative and educational policies and school curriculum, with a specific focus on language education. They illuminate the complexity surrounding Indigenous languages and communities, while privileging the significant role that diversity and inclusion play in the process of decolonisation in educational policy and practice. In the increasingly complex process of educational policymaking, the authors argue for involving non-state actors and considering the meaningful participation of native communities.

'Decolonising curriculum in education: continuing proclamations and provocations', authored by Race et al. (2022), provides seven proclamations in relation to the notion of a decolonised curriculum. While some of the proclamations assert the need to teach children and young people about critical race

theory, White power structures and White superiority, and to take on board intersectional complexities, such as class and gender, other proclamations emphasise the need to update curricula so that they are more meaningful and relevant for all students. Accordingly, the need for ongoing diversity training for educational professionals is emphasised. Collectively, the authors encourage and challenge the reader to actively engage in decolonising the curriculum, and they argue that the alternative is to leave 'learners with the idea that somehow White people are inherently better at science, more inventive and greater thinkers' (Race et al., 2022: 6).

In Yaa Asare's (2022: 1) important article, he questions what can be learnt from previous 'unsucc-essful attempts to implement antiracist education'. He charts the development and implementation of antiracist initiatives in the English contexts overseen by successive governments over the decades. Asare highlights how antiracist movements of the past have essentialised racial difference, and have therefore missed out on understanding the *process* of racism. Asare contends that one way to avoid the pitfalls of the past is to construct a 'pedagogic movement that offers critique of inherent systemic injustice wider than racial injustice alone' (Asare, 2022: 5).

Writing about the Chilean context, Moya-Santiagos and Quiroga-Curín's (2022) article highlights the struggles facing Indigenous communities in Chile to revitalise their native languages, with a focus on the experiences of the Mapuche people (the largest group of Indigenous people in Chile). Moya-Santiagos and Quiroga-Curín critically explore the reasons why successive educational and linguistic policies and a key bilingual Intercultural Education Programme (Programa de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe, PEIB) have not succeeded in integrating native languages and culture into the curriculum. The article concludes with the voice of hope (which, they argue, can be found in communities of young people, in social movements and through democratic processes) that Indigenous language and culture of Chile is rightfully recognised.

In his article, Chris Philpott (2022) analyses what it means to decolonise the music curriculum in UK classrooms, and he argues that revising curriculum content is not enough to decolonise the curriculum and further social justice. He takes three 'distortions' of musical knowledge that potentially alienate students from school music: reification; hegemonic appropriation; and the loss of meaning. The article builds an argument about the value of approaching the curriculum as process through the making of meaning to enhance social justice. Philpott cautions that the curriculum as process does not mean 'cancelling' Western music, yet a good place to start is to consider the powerful role of Western art music in music education.

Manathunga et al. (2022) bring an Australian perspective to the special feature. The authors exam-ine the ways in which poetry can afford generative opportunities for the decolonisation of high school (and university) curricula. Spaces for listening and dialogue are put forward as possible means to actively engage in the true history of colonisation, and as a way of highlighting the strengths and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (that is, First Nations Australians). Manathunga et al. (2022: 4) conclude by asserting 'cognitive justice' – which 'involves the full and equal recognition of *all* of the world's knowledge systems, languages and cultural practices, not only Northern science' – as a necessary condition to lead thinking about equality, diversity and inclusion.

Monisha Bajaj's (2022) contribution focuses on primary education. She notes how very little decol-onisation research has been conducted at this level. The author reports on an empirical study based on a small social justice-focused school in Oakland, California, USA. This multi-year case study with teaching staff and school administrators illustrates decolonial approaches to classroom teaching at the early years level. Conducted within a school primarily serving Black, Indigenous and other students of colour, the study serves to illuminate how the presence of teachers of colour does not necessarily result in decolonial approaches in classrooms. The author claims that decolonial approaches involve much 'unlearning', and the unsettling of norms as part of an iterative and ongoing process of examination of the status quo of schooling. Bajaj demonstrates decolonial approaches to education, with illustrative scenarios of how teachers of colour interpret school curricula with and for students of colour. In addressing the role of love and hope in the potential decolonial future of education, the author advocates a humanising and justice-centred approach to the curriculum and teaching.

In the final article comprising the special feature, Nayeri and Rushton (2022) present two case studies related to the decolonisation of geography curricula in secondary schools and in initial teacher education. In the first case study, Nayeri describes how Year 7 secondary school students examined the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Nayeri explains how this unit of study led to salient conversations, for instance about business ethics, and modern-day forms of slavery and racism. The second case study, described

by Rushton, focuses on an 'uncomfortable' walking tour of London, undertaken by trainee teachers. The author discusses how this activity afforded opportunities for student teachers to grapple with, reflect on and debate 'complex and contested contemporary issues' (Nayeri and Rushton, 2022: 12). To conclude, both authors assert the importance of student agency in driving changes in decolonising geography curricula in the UK.

We are extremely grateful to the contributors for their articles for this special feature. As the editors of this feature, we acknowledge that there can be no final word on such a critically important topic. We hope that these articles progress, inspire and animate conversations that extend far beyond this special feature.

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