
Research article

Challenging times: a contribution to the history of 'Education, decolonisation and international development at the Institute of Education (London)'

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Submission date: 15 February 2023; Acceptance date: 30 August 2023; Publication date: 23 November 2023

How to cite

Little, A.W., Crossley, M., Williams, P., Pridmore, P. and Treffgarne, C. (2023) 'Challenging times: a contribution to the history of "Education, decolonisation and international development at the Institute of Education (London)"". *London Review of Education*, 21 (1), 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.21.1.35>.

Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-anonymous peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Open access

London Review of Education is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

This article contributes to a preliminary historical and decolonial analysis of teaching and research in the field of education and international development at the UCL Institute of Education. The preliminary analysis, published as 'Education, decolonisation and international development at the Institute of Education (London): a historical analysis' by Elaine Unterhalter and Laila Kadiwal, appeared in the Special 120th Anniversary Issue of

London Review of Education. That article and our response to it focus on the work of the Centre for Education and International Development, and its preceding organisational forms from 1927 onwards. In a responsive critique, we consider the evidence, methods, analysis and conclusions offered by Unterhalter and Kadiwal and identify a wide range of additional material on curriculum, staff, students and international partnerships that will be of value to future historians. Contemporary decolonial analysis is important for interpreting the history and for the future positioning of the Centre for Education and International Development, and the wider field of study. We conclude by identifying challenges for ongoing work in this area.

Keywords decolonisation; education and international development; historical method; comparative method; sources of evidence; Institute of Education

Preamble

This article responds to an article published in *London Review of Education* with the title 'Education, decolonisation and international development at the Institute of Education (London): a historical analysis', written by Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022), and published when the UCL Institute of Education (IOE) celebrated its 120th anniversary. For readers unfamiliar with the history of the Institute, it is worth noting that, after many years as one of the federal University of London's self-standing schools and institutes, the Institute merged with University College London in 2014. When discussing matters prior to 2014, we refer to the Institute as IOE rather than UCL IOE.

Readers of our article will need to have read the original prior to reading ours. That article promised, *inter alia*:

- an analysis of how 'hierarchies linked to colonialism were inscribed in initial structures, and unevenly and disparately contested by students, staff and a range of interlocutors around the world over one hundred years' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 1), and of how this history shapes both practice in the present and perspectives on the future.
- a consideration of some of the questioning, discussion and new forms of relationships that are emerging as part of trying to develop an orientation away from a colonial past.

The original article was written at a time of heightened attention given to decolonisation around the world, especially in higher education, in the aftermath of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in 2016 and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, and a burgeoning literature on decolonisation and coloniality. Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) therefore offer a challenging and timely engagement with this literature. For links to this broad literature, and to that relating specifically to education, see articles in the collection edited by Takayama et al. (2017) and others (for example, Tikly, 2006).

Our 'positionality'

Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) state their *positionalities* at the beginning of their article. These have been influenced by 'postcolonial, decolonial and feminist anti-racist scholarship' and have been 'shaped by our classed, gendered, racialised, generational, geographical and diasporic locations', which have influenced 'selecting archival material, conducting interviews and reflecting on decolonial initiatives' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 3).

Reciprocally, it may be helpful for us to explain where we, as respondents, are coming from. Our article builds on Unterhalter and Kadiwal's (2022) article and responds to the authors' call for further work on the history of education, decolonisation and international development at UCL IOE. In taking up that challenge, we recognise that decolonial critiques, like all critiques, require a rigorous basis in evidence: we therefore focus on the authors' 'preliminary' history, its focus, pertinence and challenges.

Our aim is not to offer an alternative history. Rather, it is to add constructively to ongoing work by improving the evidence base, sharpening the methods employed, enriching the analysis and deepening the conclusions drawn.

We write as a group of former staff and students who worked in predecessor departments and groups of today's Centre for Education and International Development (CEID). In our different ways, we have devoted our professional lives to educational progress around the world. We believe that education can contribute both to enhancing the life chances and well-being of the world's people and to reducing social and economic inequalities within and between countries. At the same time, we recognise that education's role is contested territory and that it may serve to entrench inequalities as well as to reduce them. In the social sciences, this tension has provided a long-standing theme in the study of the role and functioning of education in society.

We acknowledge that, like Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022), we are interested *insiders* and so, like them, face challenges in striving for a critical distance. We engaged directly with CEID for varying periods over 44 years (1970 to 2014), and we aim to be critically reflexive in considering the changing and challenging times in which we worked. We call to mind our own efforts both 'to overturn colonial relationships' through curriculum development, pedagogic practices and academic writing and to position CEID in relation to a rapidly globalising world; and the related research we undertook and continue to undertake.

The article by Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) was published in a Special Issue of a UCL IOE-based journal to mark the Institute's 120th anniversary, and it draws both on interviews conducted with four of us, and on our subsequent comments on early draft versions; some readers may interpret its publication as signalling endorsement of it by UCL IOE as a semi-official history, as well as by ourselves. It is partly for this reason that we have chosen to make this follow-up contribution. We do so constructively, and we wish to see the work of UCL IOE in the area of education and international development continue to advance.

Structure of our article

We first offer a *responsive critique* based on considerations of historical and comparative method, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis offered. We then identify important relevant and available historical material for future analysis. We finally offer some reflections on the challenges CEID may face in its decolonisation journey.

For ease of reading, we follow the shorthand convention adopted by Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022), where CEID refers both to the contemporary Centre for Education and International Development created in 2017 and to all its preceding organisational forms, from 1927 onwards, listed in the original article. However, as we see later on, the use of CEID to embrace predecessor groups, departments and subgroups, and individuals who have been involved in academic work on education and international development at the IOE, is not without its problems.

A responsive critique

In this section, we comment on the focus of the authors' article and a range of methodological issues, including documentary sources, units of comparison, other histories, the interpretation of evidence, contexts and actors, and the outcomes and findings of the analysis.

Focus

The focus of the analysis lacks consistency, and this can be confusing for all concerned. It moves between a range of institutional arrangements and practices, the broader field of study of education and development, and a wide-ranging postcolonial literature. While these are interrelated, the reader would benefit from being able to grasp at the outset the article's main focus. What is the question or proposition and hypothesis that is to be explored?

The institutional focus also shifts from the work of the Institute as a whole to CEID as a department in its own right (1920s–90s), to a CEID *group* within a *matrix* organisational structure that had dispensed with departments (1990s–2002), to CEID as a centre within a department (since 2017), to a subgroup of individuals within a centre (current). We return to this point later.

Documentary sources

Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) present selected material from primary and secondary sources. The primary source material mainly consists of six interviews conducted with former staff and student members, of whom we comprise four of the six. In our view, this interview evidence is used sparingly, and more could have been made of it.

The secondary sources consist of 93 referenced documents: 7 of which offer insights on the history of the work of the CEID over different periods of time and 4 are inaugural professorial lectures providing evidence of the perspectives of some departmental professors. A further group of around 20 are writings by former staff that might conceivably be regarded as a reflection of the climate of opinion among some staff colleagues at the time they were written. Strangely, given the extent of transformational change worldwide in the meantime, there is no reference to inaugural or special professorial lectures by any professor appointed since 1988, of whom there have been several. The majority of citations – two thirds – are references to the academic literature on decolonisation, equity or socio-economic development theory written mainly by contemporary decolonisation theorists and other authors unconnected with UCL IOE.

Comparisons

The historical account begins with a contrast between 1952 and 2022, intended to illustrate the magnitude of change that occurred in CEID over this 70-year period. This sets up the article taking as a starting point 13 words delivered in 1952 by Sir Christopher Cox, during an invited address at IOE's 50th anniversary on the importance of the work of the then-named Colonial Department – which was itself marking its 25th anniversary in that year. At that time, Cox was Chief Education Adviser to the UK government's Colonial Office. The few selected words were the 'increasing importance' (of the Institute's involvement with colonial education) 'guiding and helping Colonial peoples to stand on their own feet' (Cox, 1952: 60). These are then juxtaposed with a 'process of reflection' by a virtual CEID Discussion Cafe whose members met in 2022. That process is described as 'decolonial, horizontal and interactive', but the outcomes of the reflections are not shared with the reader. While the words of Cox and the deliberations of the Discussion Cafe, separated in time by 70 years, are interesting matters of record, they are not equivalent units for meaningful comparisons over time. The episodes chosen for comparison and contrast are, in the first instance, excerpts from a public address by an outsider and, in the second, a statement about a process of discussion by a small group of insiders. These two phenomena are incommensurable.

We also question whether comparison between today's CEID and its preceding institutional forms may prove not only unintelligible but also highly misleading, unless set in the context of changing and challenging times. Since the 1990s, there have been radical changes in both the functions and the organisational structure of UCL IOE and IOE. As regards function, the changing focus in work on education and international development over the past 100 years largely mirrors the evolution of the role of IOE as a whole. An earlier concentration on professional preparation and skill enhancement for the education service, and on improvement of education practice, is now enhanced by the Institute's role as a world leader in education theory and research.

As for organisational structure, the remit of a centre such as today's CEID differs markedly from that of a department between the 1950s and 1990s. In that earlier period, departments were largely self-contained. Nearly all IOE academic staff identified with a single department, students (other than Postgraduate Certificate in Education and Diploma of Education students) tended to follow an academic programme delivered exclusively by the department where they were registered. Budgets were allocated departmentally, and departmental heads and administrators were accountable for them. Departmental policies and approaches largely determined course content, staff appointments and external collaborations. Departments enjoyed a high degree of autonomy.

The Institute's many subsequent internal reorganisations have led to sharp reductions in the numbers (currently six) of departments, but these are larger in terms of the staff complement in each department, and the number of centres within departments has multiplied, with more than 30 centres at UCL IOE currently. Following the introduction of modular course structures, today's students have far greater freedom to move across departmental boundaries in their selection of course content. In earlier times, students were required to be physically present in London in order to follow a course of

study. Following the introduction of virtual teaching and learning technologies, students can study from their homes all over the world. Many of these students will never set foot in UCL IOE. Both teachers and students can access limitless curriculum materials via the world wide web. These organisational shifts are likely to have influenced the formation of staff and student identities in relation to academic work on education and international development.

Unfortunately, this preliminary history does not describe what kind of entity today's CEID is in terms of its structural position in the Department of Education, Practice and Society, or provide basic data on student and staff numbers; nor, incidentally – which is highly pertinent to its argument – on the diversity of the ethnicities and cultural identities of current staff and students. As we understand it, today's CEID is not a department in the *unitary* sense of earlier incarnations. Staff are appointed to, and line managed by, a department rather than a centre. Staff may be members of more than one of the Institute's more than 30 centres and of wider university groupings (for example, the London International Development Centre). CEID students are taught by staff affiliated to CEID, but they may also be taught by staff from another of the six departments. In other words, department and centre boundaries are more permeable than they were, and staff and student identities more fluid and multilayered. This adds a layer of complexity to comparisons between the CEID of now and the CEID of the past, which is not addressed. In the worst case, comparison between successive CEID departments, centres and groups becomes impossible, since the entities being compared are incommensurable.

Other histories

The main substance of Unterhalter and Kadiwal's (2022) article is a six-page *history* providing glimpses of staff views and some of their activities, unevenly spread over time, and with many omissions and silences. As they explain, the work of CEID began in colonial times, with a course started in 1927 for missionaries sent to Tanganyika, and a separate course started the following year for probationer Colonial Education Service officers (Whitehead, 1988, 1989). Their account of the period 1927 to 1952 is, however, very brief, and represents an area where further work is needed. This is a lost opportunity, since one of the stated areas of investigation is a distillation of the ways in which 'hierarchies linked to colonialism were inscribed in initial structures' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 1). It was during this formative period that IOE structures were *inscribed*, and that the work of CEID began to change, as recorded in Cox's 1952 address, and started on its decades-long journey.

With a background as student and tutor in history at the University of Oxford, Cox (1952: 62–79) in his address adopts a historical approach to the work of CEID over its initial 25 years. Dividing those 25 years into four sub-periods, he pinpoints changes in the backgrounds and experience of students, a strengthening of departmental contacts and reputation, and contextual change. In brief, these four periods are:

1. 'the economic depression of the early and mid-1930s', during which time the missionary course continued, but the probationer course was halted
2. 'the end of the depression and the onset of the Second World War', a period of 'vigorous revival and expansion', witnessing the beginnings of a 'second to none' library of materials, the re-establishment of the probationer course in the late 1930s, and a bubbling of ideas and activity
3. 'war-time activity', described by Cox as 'a period of steady consolidation', a strengthening of reputation and contacts, especially with representatives of Allied governments, an intensification of staff involvement in government committees and a significant change in the composition of the student body – more than half of the students were now 'colonials and Sudanese'
4. 'post-war developments', which included increases in the number of those of 'mature overseas experience'.

Interpretation of evidence

Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022: 1) promise to identify how hierarchies were 'unevenly and disparately contested' by students, staff and a range of interlocutors. Crucial to such an undertaking is the use and interpretation of historical evidence. By way of illustration, we return to Cox (1952: 60) and ask whether enough has been done to interpret with confidence the quotation about 'guiding and helping Colonial peoples to stand on their own feet'. Are these the words of one who sought to maintain colonial hierarchies, or of one contesting them? Was Cox one who sought to maintain colonial policy in education,

or one who sought to change (that is, contest) it? In commenting in his address on 'the peculiar difficulties that result from introducing western schooling into the fabric of wholly different cultures', does Cox (1952: 63) recognise colonial education as problematic or non-problematic? He neither ignored nor swept under the carpet difficulties and challenges facing education policy in the colonies as popular demand for schooling increased.

The reform of the colonial service in Africa was central to Cox's work, a conclusion that is confirmed by one of our number who had numerous professional interactions with Cox during the period 1962 to 1970, when Cox worked at the Department for Technical Co-operation and the Overseas Development Ministry (The National Archives, n.d.).

The historian Clive Whitehead (1988, 1989, 2003, 2008) has delved into Cox's letters and correspondence held at the National Archives at Kew. Citing Whitehead (2003), Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022: 4) identify Cox as an "'imperial patrician" reformer'. Elsewhere, Whitehead (1989; authors' emphasis) describes Cox as 'an imperial patrician of a different kind'. He paints a portrait of a team leader who played a 'unique' role in Whitehall during the critical years of decolonisation, and describes him as 'unorthodox' and 'not a stuffed shirt'. He describes how some of Cox's Whitehall colleagues referred and wrote to him as 'Major Irritant' (Whitehead, 1989: 35–6). Do these words offer a different portrait of the man who played a key role in decolonisation? In today's language of decolonisation, might he have been described as a *disruptor*?

Our second illustration of interpretation difficulties focuses on the words cited in Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) of the first professor of CEID, Margaret Read. The authors note Read's (1950: 24) concern with cultural contact, Indigenous learning traditions, the English cultural condition and the need for 'an informed confidence in our own cultural tradition which is certain of the contribution it has to give'. They comment that Read offers 'little critical commentary of imperial relationships' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 6).

In our view, this assessment takes insufficient account of many other aspects of Read's work, her personality and her vision. Read viewed the aim of education as far more than the acquisition of basic skills: it involved promotion of ethics, values and philosophical outlook. She was a trained social anthropologist and staunch advocate of mass education, girls' education and health education. She was concerned about the impact of urbanisation on rural life and was critical of the French colonial education policy of assimilation. She was troubled by the practical challenges posed by the British policy of accommodation, and by 1950, she was far from convinced that a fusion of Western and Indigenous education and cultures was possible. She was, however, convinced that the British should shed their paternalistic attitude and learn to work *with*, rather than *for*, colonial peoples (Whitehead, 1988).

In offering these brief portraits of Cox and Read, it is not our intention to defend the colonial past or colonial education. Rather, it is to recognise the challenges that historians face in analysing and interpreting the past on the basis of limited evidence. It is also to help address one of Unterhalter and Kadiwal's (2022: 1) aims, namely, to analyse 'how hierarchies linked to colonialism were inscribed in initial structures, and unevenly and disparately contested by students, staff and a range of interlocutors around the world over one hundred years'. Are Cox and Read to be viewed as *contestors* or *non-contestors*? Were they the *disruptors* or *non-disruptors* of their day?

Contexts and actors

Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) acknowledge that several contextual influences are yet to be examined. It would certainly have been beneficial to examine the interplay between contexts and events that have shaped CEID practices, and the key actors that have made change happen. Some of the earlier histories of CEID provide contextualised accounts of operational changes in its activity, and this previous work deserves further attention (for example, see Bentall and Little, 2005b). Changes and continuities are in large part a product of their times, but they are amenable to initiation and acceleration by proactive leadership. The changing and challenging times in which actors made their particular contributions deserve much more elaboration in any future histories of CEID.

Among the many developments that impacted the work of CEID's earlier predecessors from 1927 onwards, and which deserve further analysis, were: changes in colonial policy; colonial education policy; UK education policies; economic conditions; world wars; the formation of international organisations designed to prevent war, to promote cooperation in educational policies and practices and to foster economic development; the political independence of many former colonies (in the 37 years from 1946

to 1983, 55 former British colonies and dependencies gained independence); the beginning of the Cold War; and changes in organisational structures of IOE, of the University of London and of British higher education more generally. Particularly significant have been changes in funding streams (for example, cessation of government grants, increases in student fees, particularly for international students, and the importance of research and consultancy revenue to supplement tuition fees) and the increasingly widespread use of virtual technologies for teaching and learning.

Outcomes of the historical analysis

The second part of the article delineates three forms of 'decolonising' CEID and its work. These, it is suggested, derive from the historical evidence the authors have presented. The first is described as 'narrow', and 'limited' to the process of establishing the education systems and relationships associated with postcolonial governments, an approach that 'has tended to prioritise concerns with efficient education delivery and inclusion' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 12). A second strand (form) is described as a 'thread which sees decolonisation and education as a process of addressing theoretically, methodologically or through data [the] effects of colonial or postcolonial class formation, concentrations of capital and attendant intersecting inequalities' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 10). This form of decolonisation is seen to have 'widened engagement with decolonising ideas and methodologies, including those problematising race and inequality, but has not attended with any depth to changing forms of epistemic practice and knowledge hierarchies' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 12). A third strand (form) sees 'the decolonial as a more profound shift in naming Whiteness, identifying the consequences of a particular epistemic gaze and trying to shift power imbalances through different forms of practice' (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 10).

While this conceptual framing could be helpful, it is unclear whether and how each of these three forms derives from the examination and analysis of specific evidence about CEID presented. In the absence of references to actual practices and events associated with CEID and its staff and students during the periods when each of these forms is supposed to have been dominant, this typology remains in need of validation.

Alternatively, it is possible that these three forms have been derived from ideas found in a highly disparate and complex literature on decolonisation. If this is the case, then readers would have benefited from a clearer exposition of the meanings the authors attach to decolonisation, and to the related notions mentioned in their article of hierarchy, dispossession, exclusion, epistemic violence and subordination.

Broadening the evidence base: areas for further exploration

Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022: 4) describe their account of CEID's history as 'preliminary' and acknowledge that more of that history remains to be explored and recorded. We have already pointed to a few areas worthy of exploration. We now make further suggestions for adding to the historical evidence base and sharpening the focus of the analysis. Four dimensions fundamental for understanding the unfolding history of CEID, but unexamined to date, are shifts over time in: (1) the aims, content and methods of course curricula; (2) the backgrounds, experience, views and academic contributions of staff; (3) student profiles, including their career expectations; and (4) CEID's international partnerships. We address each in turn.

Curriculum

Central to a student's learning experience at IOE is the curriculum and the way it is transacted. Changes in curriculum and pedagogy over time, up to and including the present, are not yet addressed. In future, those seeking to deepen their understanding of the curriculum transacted by staff associated with CEID might wish to examine closely the many curriculum resources and core texts included in course reading lists and available in the UCL IOE Library. 'Concepts and theories of development', which have been included in course content over many years, might be a good place to start (for examples of texts that address these, see Fagerlind and Saha, 1989; Harber, 2014; Leach and Little, 1999; McCowan and Unterhalter, 2021; McGrath and Gu, 2016; Mebrahtu, 1991; [and see other units in 'Education and Development' course materials in the same collection, as well as reader and audio tapes in the UCL IOE Library]; Yates and Little, 2005). And those wishing to deepen their understanding of the evolution of the

broader field of education and international development, from which some of those course materials derive, can glean much from related books and journal special issues. In some of these, the varying *histories* offered by a range of scholars – even when writing in broadly similar time periods – underline the diversity and disparateness of the field (for examples, see Crossley and Jarvis, 2000, 2001; Crossley and Watson, 2003; Crossley et al., 2020; Davidson et al., 2020; Evans and Robinson-Pant, 2010; Grant, 1977).

Marked pedagogical changes have also occurred, and Cox's 1952 address pointed to a number of these in the post-war period, prompted in part by the increasing number of students of *mature overseas experience*. They included the introduction of the personal tutorial system and the greater use of seminars. From the 1950s through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – probably more than is possible with today's less experienced student body – departmental seminars and discussions depended heavily on presentations with direct testimony from senior *Third World* education professionals, who constituted a significant proportion of the student body at the time. CEID staff were not just *lecturers*, but very much *listeners to* and *learners from* the insights and experiences of their students, who, in turn, listened to and learned from each other. Comparison of today's pedagogy with that employed in earlier times would be a worthwhile undertaking.

Staff profiles

The writings and lecture notes of departmental staff are an important source of evidence on both the formal and *hidden* curriculum. The staff's views that are considered in the article are confined to a handful of writings of four CEID professors (Elvin, 1956; Lewis, 1959; Little, 1988; Read, 1950). Important though these writings are, they can hardly be said to constitute a representative selection of the writings of CEID teaching and research staff, numbering at least 149 between 1927 and 2002 (Bentall and Little, 2005e). Between them, they contributed at least 1,400 pieces of writing on the themes of colonial education, education in tropical areas, education in developing countries and education and international development, all of which are held in the UCL IOE Library (Bentall and Little, 2005a). This is a rich vein of material for future historians.

Highly relevant for an understanding of the curriculum in operation at different historical periods is the analysis of the professional backgrounds, inputs and experience of CEID staff: in other words, their positionality. Compared with the CEID staff of today, is it the case that most of those who worked in CEID departments in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s had more prior professional experience in the field and knowledge of educational practice? Or did they engage less in collaborative field research and publication in academic journals? These are posed as questions for further empirical exploration.

In the 1980s the CEID staff team were diverse for the times and included an eminent Guyanese visiting professor who acted as head of department for a year (Bacchus, 1990, 1994) and an Ethiopian expert on distance education (Inquai, 1993). A Zambian national in exile from his native South Africa was on the permanent staff for nearly a decade (Coombe, 1993; Hawes et al., 1988). He left CEID to help lead the design of post-apartheid education policies in South Africa and subsequently became Deputy Director-General in the new Republic of South Africa Education Department, which dismantled the race-based system and fashioned education provision in line with South Africa's democratic constitution. Colleagues from partner institutions in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (see the next section) also joined the CEID team for limited periods. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the post of departmental administrator, a key part of the student-support arrangements then in place, was held by an Indian national.

Student profiles

Despite the promise to address how students 'unevenly and disparately contested' hierarchies (Unterhalter and Kadiwal, 2022: 1), no such evidence is presented. Reference might have been made to records of the 75th anniversary of CEID, held in 2002, when CEID alumni from different eras shared a few of their recollections of their time, what they learned, what and who they challenged and the work they went on to undertake (Bentall and Little, 2005c). These are a treasure chest for understanding aspects of the past (Little, 2004).

The ethnic, cultural and professional identities of students (as well as of staff, as mentioned above) deserves deeper consideration. As discussed earlier, those who enrolled in 1927/8 and 1928/9 were mainly British prospective teacher educators and colonial education officers. Their career destinations were already known before they embarked on their courses. Over the ensuing years, the composition

of the student body completely changed as regards nationality, background, job expectations and career destinations. Student profiles today are quite different from those of 1927. For purposes of comparison, and to illuminate the extent of change over time, we suggest that it would be a relatively easy task to trace the contrasting career backgrounds, expectations and eventual future destinations, and funding of student cohorts from the 2020s. They themselves will be diverse in educational and livelihood background, ethnicity, race, class and gender – and they will differ considerably, particularly in age and experience, from those who studied in CEID over the course of the twentieth century.

There is no analysis by Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) of the role played by many of CEID's alumni in newly independent countries. Many moved on to a wide range of important senior positions worldwide – in national and provincial ministries and departments of education, in international and regional organisations, in non-governmental organisations, in universities and schools. Even if one accepts that colonialism most certainly played its part in the formation of CEID, and that the legacy of colonialism may still be apparent in some of its contemporary work, many instances will be found where CEID alumni were at the heart of initiatives to decolonise curricula and pedagogy in post-independence countries.

An analysis of student dissertations could also be a rich source of evidence on student contributions to knowledge about education and international development. Between the 1950s and 2002, around 700 PhD theses on education in *developing* countries were written by students from across IOE, and they are available in the library. It seems most unlikely that the findings from these students' research largely served the continuation of colonial practices into the postcolonial period, rather than pointing the way to change and reform (Bentall and Little, 2005d). Much of this student writing will have addressed social injustice and justice, expressed in the discourses of the day. It will have mapped inequalities of access, processes and outcomes in education. It will have focused on educational marginalisation, the language of instruction, curriculum relevance, *education for self-reliance*, de-schooling, dependency theory, postcolonialism, peace studies and evaluations of radical education programmes. As one of us recalls from the 1980s, criticisms of education aid donor activity and irrelevant Western education were ten a penny. Another of us, a master's student in the 1970s, reflects on the then Department of Education in Developing Countries as having a highly diverse student body and being deeply engaged in the work of writers such as Fanon (1961), Nyerere (1967), Freire (1970), Illich (1972), Curle (1970, 1972), Said (1978) and others who were then (and in some cases remain) contemporary challengers to the status quo; the decolonial disruptors of their time.

An updating and analysis of the list of the PhD theses to 2022 would provide a useful source of evidence regarding changes over time in students' background experience, views and expectations, and their contributions to the education and international development literature.

International partnerships across continents

Teaching and research collaborations between CEID and institutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America also deserve attention, striving as they did to embody partnership between equals, rather than superiors and subordinates. Institutional *partnerships* became increasingly important in the work of CEID staff and students from the 1950s. John Lewis was Professor and Head of the Department of Education in Tropical Areas between 1958 and 1973. In his inaugural professorial lecture, titled 'Partnership in Oversea Education', he reviewed earlier and current partnerships between the IOE and institutions elsewhere (Lewis, 1959). A key partnership during this time involved staff exchanges between the IOE's Department of Education in Tropical Areas, Teachers College in Columbia University, New York, and university institutes of education in Ghana, Nigeria, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Sierra Leone and Uganda. During the 1973–85 period, teaching exchanges and research links were established with universities in Bangladesh, Kenya, Malaysia and Nigeria, as well as with the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Between 1985 and 2010, institutional partnership activity focused mainly on staff and student research and research publication. Active research links were created with universities, institutes and centres, *inter alia* in Bangladesh, Chile, China, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. A teaching partnership between CEID and the Aga Khan University, Karachi was the first to be supported by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which enabled MA students to follow *split-site* courses combining face-to-face teaching in London with periods of study elsewhere.

Final reflections

In the light of the above, we suggest that a contemporary understanding and assessment of the significant changes that have taken place in the CEID would benefit from a deeper and more rigorous historical representation. This would do more to place former and current staff and students in their historical context and provide evidence of their role as actors in advancing or obstructing the ongoing process of progressive change.

We have responded to the invitation to add to this emerging history of the CEID. Neither our critique of evidence presented nor our suggestions about additional available sources of evidence should detract from Unterhalter and Kadiwal's (2022) engagement with the present and their wish to move forward in improving the student experience.

Current decolonial critiques confront the field of education and international development with important challenges to its foundations, history and future positioning. They also have educational implications for identity, epistemic justice, balances of power and the global architecture of international agencies. Such trends underlie the contemporary significance of critical reflexivity, the interrogation of current practice across the social sciences and the need for challenging reflections on organisational histories such as the one under development here. These are crucial and pressing issues, but, with regard to contested histories, it remains important to recognise that the field of education and international development has itself repeatedly experienced earlier phases of challenge, critical self-reflection and change. Some of these, including applications of dependency theory and postcolonialism, have contributed to the foundations of contemporary decolonial scholarship (Crossley, 2021). The fields of *development*, and of the social sciences in general, are also punctuated with writings over time that reflect contested positions on change and continuity; on coloniality, on modernisation and dependency; on democracy and authoritarianism; on protest and resistance; on conflict and consensus; and on markets and the state. An awareness of these diverse histories is important in all contexts, but especially when engaging in contemporary debates, and in the course of pioneering and re-imagining new directions, priorities and positionings.

Given that many current staff have worked in the Institute for a number of years, readers of Unterhalter and Kadiwal's (2022) article would have welcomed more information on *current* course content and pedagogy, organisation, staffing and student recruitment in today's CEID. What progress has been possible since the Discussion Cafe in 2022 in translating aspiration for change into reformed structures and operations, corresponding with the third form of decolonisation they identify? It cannot be an easy task. In spite of past and present efforts to liberalise practice, staff find themselves perpetually constrained by UCL IOE and university structures and examination regulations, by the dependence of UCL IOE on extraordinarily high fees charged to international students, and by the need to seek research funding from agencies and billionaire philanthropists that in many cases represent the concentrations of money and power that the authors so much object to. These do need concerted challenge and *disruption*, but, to some extent, we are all complicit and compromised in our dealings with an unequal and unjust order. All must beware of believing that there are new magic bullets to resolve these dilemmas and to operationalise radical intentions in the world as it actually is. Nevertheless, we look forward to learning more in the future about how CEID overcomes these and some of the other challenges that the authors identify.

In closing, we acknowledge that Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) have started an important process of critical reflection that is timely and provides a stimulus for further such endeavours. We endorse their observation that more work is needed to capture appropriately the changing nature of work on education and international development over a turbulent period of 120 years. The decolonial character of their analysis is one important lens, and it provides a perspective that may stimulate further insights and critical reflection. In this respect, we encourage further evidence-based work, while calling for deeper historical analysis, and we caution against being led too uncritically by theory. While we are happy to add to this discussion, and in particular in identifying further evidence, sources and curriculum materials from the past that are pertinent for ongoing analysis, it is today's participants who have the task of shaping the future of CEID, and the distinctive contribution it can make to the field of education and international development.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful for comments on an earlier draft made by anonymous reviewers.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare the following interests: Four of the authors were interviewees named in the Unterhalter and Kadiwal (2022) article. We were chosen because of our insider knowledge of the history of CEID. All five authors have long-standing connections with the Institute and the CEID as students and/or staff, and/or as an external examiner to its MA programme over the period 1970–2014. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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