

*‘An increasingly decolonised and progressive approach, nevertheless this has not been fully cracked’*

## **Curriculum analysis document: findings from 3 student teacher analyses in their School Experience schools.**

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### **Introduction**

The student teachers were charged with exploring curriculum decolonization in terms of how it happened in their practice schools- the conceptualization, the process, examples of practice, resources, student voice, concerns and ways going forward. Strengths and areas for development were identified and some tentative recommendations for MFL departments.

### **What is understood by a practical decolonizing of the curriculum?**

Usually described as a review, or an updating of schemes of work/ curricula, the decolonizing dimension is not specifically mentioned by teachers unless prompted but it is embedded to a degree in the process e.g., of monitoring representation and historical references. In one school, it was referenced as: *an expansion of the curriculum.*

### **Who is responsible for the process?**

In one school, there is a drive from SLT that expects involvement from all teachers. However, the main responsibility is on subject leaders:

*... who are to be supported and encouraged by line managers that must facilitate certain opportunities and provide resources for the subject leader to deliver and offer representative and diverse content effectively. Overall, after much discussion with senior leadership, it is evident that it has become the responsibility of the subject head to provide a clear rationale and motivate others in following forward to support staff in the creation of a decolonised curriculum.*

Another school has a similar approach but the subject leadership ( usually the Head of Department) undertakes this in a highly organised way:

*There is no one member who is responsible for this process, but all staff share the responsibility of creating resources for each year group and language subject and which are itemized into a weekly schedule according to the scheme of work so that all students for each language and year group are (or should be) learning the exact same thing each week Each staff member will be assigned a different language or subject which for which they must make*

*sure resources are uploaded on a shared drive in time for it to be taught each week*

Subject leaders have considerable responsibility for ensuring the importance of representation in the classroom and sharing good practice and monitoring. However, with regards to staff, where there was a lack of representation in terms of identity representation amongst the staff, then this posed barriers to achieving diversity and inclusion in the pedagogy and with:

*... individuals who represent a minority within the association or group feel seen as an anomaly ... which may make some people in the staff body remain silent due to the lack of diversity from a cultural, ethical, mental or physical perspective, which can create a state of isolation, apartness, disconnectedness, alienation, separation and a sensation of being on the margins.*

Yet colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds, it was claimed, constantly sought to expand the promotion of working opportunities for new and diverse teachers within the MFL department and that decolonisation is more than resource review: *... but through a diverse cohort of teachers.*

In terms of systematic review, there is no formal process identified but rather staff create their resources independently, and teachers adapt or add contributions as and when. There is perhaps strength in this in that the work is exponentially developmental and ongoing.

### **Reviewing and decolonizing the curriculum/ SoW/ resources/ materials/displays**

Understandably teachers are concerned with assessment and coverage for examinations. This is usually in the form of linguistic knowledge and performance- *“making substantial progress in one language to enable pupils to comprehend, understand and communicate ideas, facts, and feelings in listening, reading, writing and speech, using their knowledge of phonology, grammatical structures, and vocabulary”* (National Curriculum, 2013). Where time allocation is generally not generous in the secondary school curriculum, for example:

*... due to the way classes are timetabled (with some students only having 1 hour of language class a week), often there is no time to do these classes as the priority is vocabulary and language according to the exam specification topics.*

This can lead to a lack of space for students to explore their own identities or share their personal lived experiences and cultural backgrounds to a full extent in the classroom although teachers were seen to be flexible in how they incorporated identity in their lessons:

*Overall, the linguistic, grammatical, phonological, and structural content and provisions in class sometimes provide and enable pupils with tools to describe the way they want to describe themselves (curly hair).*

It might be concluded opportunities for discussing what is going on in student lives is limited.

Some topics e.g. on Festivals in the curriculum lend themselves to:

*... a clear appreciation of a range of materials and resources in a European Spanish sense, which engages, invites, and speaks to the identities of a lot of native pupils in class.*

We identified problems here as the same provision for some pupils, it was suggested, but can also isolate, disconnect and alienate pupils from the wider world of the Hispanic language (this depends on the resources the teacher might use) and also, it is necessary to be wary of producing a 'festival focused' curriculum that only gives a 'folklore' view of the culture.

Because of the provision of Spanish as MFL in the schools, it was noticeable that teachers of Spanish were highly motivated to develop Spanish as a language but also to consider its global culture and aspects of decolonisation such as:

*... a school theatre trip to the Cervantes Institute to indulge in the delights of Ferderico Carcia Lorca's 'La Casa Bernada Alba' in Southwark, which aimed to be an enrichment opportunity to explore Spanish culture to help improve pupil's listening skills, as well as enable them to develop understanding of feminist contributions and resistance to patriarchy during the 1930's.*

This particular example shows rich intersectional and cross- curricular curriculum provision. One school focusing on opportunities with a variety of languages had timetabled provision to enable:

*... a spotlight on different cultures where the languages are spoken, with the enrichment classes which focus on a different country each half term for each year group ... which focus on different countries in the francophone and Spanish-speaking world, so staff have to make sure that this is included.*

Whilst this is innovative, this might only scratch the surface of a culture before moving on to the next language but this represents an attempt to be language and culture inclusive. As regards assessment, we are aware that Exam boards are making some attempt to show increased diverse representation and teachers are replicating this in school assessment as in the following example:

*Students in KS3 are assessed each half on all four of the language skills and assessment resources show diversity, for example photocards for a Year 9 speaking assessment have pictures with people of different ethnicities.*

This is encouraging but is perhaps 'scratch the surface' at this moment, given the need to consider different types of assessment and the type of language task to cater for diverse learner types and cultural nuances in language use.

## **In what ways is the student voice ‘heard’ and their involvement in the process?**

Some schools involve students fully, others not so in curriculum review and decolonization. School C claimed to take a direct approach and to seek:

*... feedback from students about their learning experiences and whether they feel represented.*

This correlates with interview data about conversation with the pupils that teachers say are held as a matter of course.

Students did comment on resources that they found lacking, for example, Year 8 pupils commenting on physical descriptions where:

*... hair texture were represented and vocabulary centred on Caucasian hair, and didn't have words to describe afro hair textures and hair styles.*

Feedback in school B was embedded within lessons flexibly as in this case:

*In response to student's voice and feedback in MFL, most teachers use questioning in class to gauge pupils' engagement in the linguistic and cultural content, whilst observing the atmosphere in the lesson, as well as monitoring the interest of the students.*

In this case, feedback is incidental and part of the lesson narrative. School SLT however pointed out the various more formalised opportunities for student voice e.g. in school councils. However, these meetings may have limited value as they are not subject specific:

*and do not discuss the specific decolonial dialogue of material, approach, discussions, and representation in MFL.*

Our conclusion here is that the role of student engagement in the practical implementation of decolonisation and curriculum review is very limited and quite random.

## **Are colonial assumptions recognised and challenged?**

Colonialism is not hugely evident in the discourse of MFL teachers (whereas diversity is) amongst themselves although there was clear understanding and insight with the researchers. Student awareness is heightened through work in History and English to a lesser extent:

*As far as I have observed, students do not hold negative colonial assumptions as they appear much more aware of the histories of colonization that have impacted on the world.*

There was some concerns expressed in one school where the Senior Leadership felt that some individuals may feel resistant towards this process but they said, these colleagues are free to express their reservations or concerns. We assert the need for an open environment in

which people can express what may be the advantages and disadvantages in terms of where we are in 2023. Staff members within School A were considered forward thinking and:

*positive in favour of addressing some of the issues that the previous curriculum had in terms of following colonial and imperialistic undertones.*

However, there was a great example within the MFL department, there have been instances of challenging colonial assumptions through, for example, the Year 10 Day of the Dead project:

*where students were able to conduct their own research and produce their own informative videos about Hispanic Culture. This enabled an oral and artistic assessment format, permitting pupils to bring their own identities, individualities, ideas, and backgrounds into the discussion. Nevertheless, this project was led by a Spanish speaking staff member, who was not part of the MFL department, but wanted to contribute to a more increasingly decolonised and progressive approach in Languages.*

This was a good example of staff engagement and collaboration across department. Additionally, within the department one could say there are real instances of decolonisation through international external resources such as the provision of RTVE on the online platform and BBC Mundo were used as a way to enable pupils to gain an authentic, more representative and less tokenistic understanding of Spanish life and culture. Another example, used the medium of music to engage students in a conversation on cultural references as in the following example:

*For example, in a Year 8 French class on music, the teacher played clips from The Voice Africa and students had to say whether they liked the music. When a student asked why the people were speaking French if they were in Africa, the teacher turned the conversation back to the class and several of them answered explaining that France colonized African countries, to which the student reacted with a knowing face as if to say, "Oh yes, of course".*

Nevertheless, it has become evident that due to limited time, discussions on decolonisation often seem tokenistic and deductive, not because of the attitude of teachers, but because of the various pressures they experience in the school system.

### **Overall evaluations of the extent to which the curriculum explored is decolonized and what still needs to be done.**

In these research investigations, albeit limited (but supported by observations and interviews with key players), concerns were flagged up about curriculum decolonisation. In most cases, there was diversification and improved and more varied representation but, in the end, this we suggest is not enough as one researcher said:

*I would say the curriculum has not been decolonized as this requires an active and intentional approach across the curriculum.*

The data show that specific intention is missing.

A different approach is needed that is driven by intentionality as this researcher asserts:

*While there are specific topics and modules for different year groups that do represent BAME figures in a positive way and interrogate the role of colonialism in the French- and Spanish-speaking world, for it to be fully decolonized it would mean applying this consciously and holistically.*

The encouragement of soft empathetic skills of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding and kindness are highly visible in the values of schools, but it was thought the school lacked:

*the ability to develop and construct a real work force which enables and facilitates deeper discussions on decolonisation about pedagogy and students.*

Certainly, schools are moving in the right direction in:

*An increasingly decolonised and progressive approach, **nevertheless this has not been fully cracked yet (our emphasis).***

In order to ‘crack it’, we make the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

- Representing a whole community of students requires a shift from Eurocentric representation towards inclusivity of all cultures.
- There needs to be broader promotion of the Spanish and French speaking world, which exist in abundance outside of Europe, and indeed other languages where they are part of the curriculum.
- SLT needs to take a lead in supporting decolonisation in MFL and across the curriculum.
- SLT support needs to include time allocation and some funding to pursue the aims and objectives of decolonisation.
- The responsibility lies with the Subject Head but collaboration (including cross-curricular) is key to successful practical implementation.
- Good practice should be shared and celebrated.
- The more diverse a cohort of staff members, the more diverse will be the different lived experiences to really get a decolonial progression within the curriculum off the ground.

- Teachers currently, for budgetary reasons and lack of time, rely quite heavily on materials that are drawn from commercial pre-made packages and schemes of work, some of which tend to offer quite a tokenistic and reductive perspective, often stereotypical, on Hispanic and Francophone cultures *inter alia*.
- Training needs to be more specifically focused and more frequent to enable an ongoing dialogue.
- Such training will always need the creation of safe spaces for open and honest conversations especially where perceptions might be generational and conflicting.
- The process as ongoing will need to build in systematic and practical review strategies.
- The process should always be on the agenda of departmental meetings as part of curriculum, assessment and lesson planning.
- The student voice needs to have a higher profile and given greater importance so that their voices are properly heard and taken on board.
- Student direct involvement is beneficial in aspects of review and planning.