Decolonising the curriculum: Perspectives from the Global South

In this review we offer a series of reviews and commentaries on articles from Nepal, Argentina and Australia addressing different issues relating to the decolonisation of curricula and academic methodologies, research and history

Voices from Nepal

Rachel Knowles considers two articles that emphasise the importance of intersectional discourses and the multiformity that decolonisation of education will need to assume in Nepal.

Poudel, P. P., & Choi, T.-H. (2021) Discourses shaping the language-in-education policy and foreign language education in Nepal: an intersectional perspective

Poudel, P. P., & Choi, T.-H & Jackson L.(2021) Decolonization of School Curriculum: The Case of Language-in-Education in Nepal

Curriculum can be defined as an official statement of 'what students are expected to know and be able to do' (Levin 2007:8). However, lack of neutrality, representation and inclusion in curricula is a highly debated topic. Apple and Beane (2007) argue that in governmental curriculum planning, specific content, approaches and knowledge are favoured over others, according to historical, cultural, racial, economic and gender hegemony, and it is for this reason that decolonisation of curricula is so central in importance.

However it is vital to consider the multiformity that decolonisation will take around the world, it cannot and will not be a homogenous process due to the fact that countries' linguistic and educational systems have been colonised in diverse ways unique to their historical, political and socio-economic backgrounds and development. In their article 'Discourses shaping the language-in-education policy and foreign language education in Nepal: an intersectional perspective', Poudel and Choi (2021) offer a view into the discursive factors defining language use in the curriculum in Nepal stressing the importance of assuming intersectional understandings. Poudel, Choi and Jackson (2021) then provide fascinating insights into the colonisation of language in Nepal and its subsequent implications for decolonisation of the curriculum. Both papers will now be considered in terms of the perspectives they add to our understandings of such multiformity.

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989) to describe the overlapping and interplay of race, gender, class and other characteristics in the creation of advantage and disadvantage. Intersectionality as analytic framework (Gay, 2018) , Poudel and Choi assert, is a suitable one to apply to Nepal's case as it 'unravels the co-existing and interconnected forces shaping language in education policy'(2021:5).

Their findings reveal that the 'discourses of globalisation, neoliberal marketisation and nationalism marginalise the discourses of ethnic identity as well as equity' (2021:1). The ground level motivation to learn and maintain mother tongues in students and families is low as a result of the perceived economic value of languages in their desire to escape poverty and increase social mobility in the context of Nepal's developing economy. Thus decolonising forces, particularly regarding local or indigenous language promotion, are currently unlikely to be embraced or implemented with fidelity, however Poudel and Choi assert the need to advocate for this still exists.

Despite Nepal never having been colonised by colonial governments, its history and educational system is almost inextricably interlinked with colonial histories. Poudel, Choi and Jackson (2022) describe the impact of colonialism on Nepali education; the mirroring of traditional British school structures in primary and secondary schools; the propagation of English language supremacy and western cultural bias leading to a marginalisation of indigenous languages, 'the languages of the nation' and linguistic and cultural epistemologies and even deficit stances towards these in educational policy; and hierarchical allocation

of curriculum time for languages. This they juxtapose with their findings on decolonisation efforts that have occurred in Nepal, from the promotion of Nepali nationalism through to the rights-based policies introduced by the government in 2007 and 2019. These were established to improve equitable access to education through the promotion of local/ indigenous languages and cultures whilst, however, simultaneously implying the superiority of global, capitalist thinking, further contributing toward strengthening the domination of languages such as Nepali and English.

As Audrey Lorde (1983:110) simply states, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', and Poudel, Choi and Jackon's work echoes this, demonstrating that colonisation cannot be dismantled using the same constructs that built it. They clearly iterate the need for decolonisation to occur with a multilayered approach that accounts for the ways colonisation of curriculum and mindsets have come about. This is vital to ensure the centring of social justice and equity in curriculum so as to counter the 'layered nature of coloniality' that exists in Nepal.

Assuming that a western centric understanding of both colonisation and decolonisation will apply worldwide is shortsighted and we need to be cognizant of this in our reading and considerations of decolonisation of curriculum, otherwise the potential arises for the process of decolonisation itself to be colonised by well-meaning but ultimately Western centric educators, when it is the voices of the colonised and indigenous understandings that need to be elevated in the process.

Author Information
Dr Prem Prasad Poudel is a Lecturer at Tribhuvan University in Nepal.

Dr Tae-Hee Choi is an Associate Professor at the Department of Educational Policy and Leadership, at the Education University of Hong Kong.

Dr Liz Jackson is the Acting Head of the Department of International Education at the Education University of Hong Kong.

Voices from Argentina

Laura Rodríguez reviews complementary positions of two scholars from Argentina who also work in international contexts.

Banegas, D. (2014). Of methods and post-methods: A view from Argentina. In D. L. Banegas et. al. (Ed.) *English language teaching in the post-methods era: Selected papers from the 39th FAAPI Conference*. Asociación de Profesores de Inglés de Santiago del Estero. (15-27). Available online at https://www.faapi.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FAAPI2014.pdf

Ferradas, C. M. (2013). Communicating across cultures: encounters in the contact zone. In L. Renart and D. L. Banegas (Ed.), *Roots & routes in language education: Bi-multi-plurilingualism, interculturality and identity. Selected papers from the 38th FAAPI Conference*. Asociación de Profesores de Inglés de Buenos Aires (35-43). Available online at https://www.faapi.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FAAPI2013.pdf

A curriculum reflects a society's vision of what, why, and how students should learn. Being an ideological construct, it is inevitably marked by power relations. Decolonising the curriculum is not a project over which one group can claim sole custodianship. It requires sustained collaboration, discussion and experimentation among groups of teachers and students, who themselves have power to make things happen on the ground and think about what might be done differently.

In 'Communicating across cultures: encounters in the *contact zone*' Claudia Ferradas (2013) addresses a vital dimension of language education. Although intercultural awareness is a transversal objective in our Foreign Languages curricula, it is often neglected by teachers who follow traditional syllabi with an exclusive focus on the four macro skills (see Porto, 2016). In her view, careful selection of *representational* texts , i.e. those 'which involve the imagination of the receiver' (McRae, 1991:3), be they literary works, or texts produced and distributed unconventionally, can become tactical spaces. Such texts illustrate what Mary Louise Pratt calls encounters in the *contact zone*:

the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict. (Pratt, 1993: 6)

The contact zone may be one's neighbourhood, a Facebook page, or the classroom. To advance her point, Ferradas takes Clifford's concept of *translation*, understood as movement from one language to another and/ or one cultural locus to another. Yet, when the emphasis is laid almost exclusively on *otherness*, learners may feel that their cultural identity is at risk. They must be given the chance to reflect on their own values, identity and self-image. Teachers should make sure that students' identities are represented in culture-sensitive text selection, and should teach them the language necessary to describe them and discuss them.

Finally, Ferradas mentions some authentic texts to bring the contact zone into class. These can become provocative starting points for discussion, critical consideration of stereotypes and defamiliarisation of cultural features which may have been naturalised.

Another action-oriented position is found in 'Of methods and post-methods: A view from Argentina' by Darío Banegas. Following Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren, this author offers a critical view of pedagogy. After discussing methods and post methods as colonial and postcolonial frames respectively, he stresses the need for developing local and localised pedagogies which respond to both teachers and learners. He also refers to coursebooks as ideology-carrying artefacts, characterised by

consumerism, individualism, and a cosmopolitan and affluent lifestyle. Once again, it is teachers who can take a critical stance and use them 'in ways which cannot be fully anticipated' (Banegas, 2014:22).

Banegas lists the following professional aims for teacher education and professional development:

■ To move away from best practice — imitative, unsituated— to good practice — reflective, grounded on praxis, on what is possible and practical in our classrooms.

■ To make more connections in the field of professional development by helping teachers become co-authors of their own initiatives.

■ To work towards developing approaches with practitioners and teacher educators in Argentina.

■ To encourage teachers to produce their own materials.

■ To socialise local publications and foster both national and international collaboration.

If decolonising the curriculum involves developing agency and responsibility, Ferradas and Banegas make valuable contributions in this direction. Both view learners as being entitled to learning English considering their own social and cultural realities. Crucially, rather than regard curricula as an external force to be dealt with, they show that practitioners are capable of exerting influence to generate change. This may imply renewing one's professional identity, an opportunity we should not miss if we want to work towards more fairness and equity in language education.

Author Information
Claudia M. Ferradas is a poet, teacher educator and affiliate trainer for Norwich Institute for Language Education.

Dr Dario Luis Banegas is a Lecturer in Language Education and Deputy Director of Postgraduate Research at Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh.

Voices from New Zealand and Australia

Fiona Ranson looks at two books which consider decolonising methodologies, approaches to research and history, reflecting on the way language is integral to this.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People (2nd Ed). Zed Books. Chapter 6 and 8.

Hughes-Warrington, M., & Martin, A. (2022). Big and little histories: Sizing up ethics in historiography Taylor & Francis.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith speaks as a Maori researcher and examines the way in which research in the past and present is informed by Western views of 'how the world operates'. She explores the way this has negatively and at times dangerously impacted upon representation of indigenous communities. She offers an overview of Maori knowledge and ways of knowing and provides a clear picture of how such approaches are being used to develop research paradigms and projects. She shows the reader that perhaps these ways of knowing and seeing are much needed today, especially in terms of sustainable ways of living.

Focusing on Chapter 6- 'The indigenous people's project: setting a new agenda, she examines (amongst other things) language rights and cultural and linguistic revitalisation movements, connecting Maori revitalisation to wider language revitalisation movements such as "Welsh Language actions" (2012:114). She returns to this in Chapter 8, 'Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects', where she connects an international range of linguistic revitalisation movements, including lessons to be learnt from Welsh revitalisation: 'while the Welsh people are not formally part of the indigenous peoples' movements... Their programs are often studied as examples of indigenous achievement. In the cases of Maori and Welsh languages, there is a clear singular language' (2012:149). Key to Maori revitalisation has been the creation of writing programmes and 'multimedia language resources for children' (2012:151).

Tuhiwai Smith references work undertaken in the Western Isles of Scotland, in relation to publishing Scottish Gaelic (publishing house Acair) and first language films produced by first language production teams and actors, as examples of how language revitalisation requires attention to self-representation as well as first language.

Her work offers educators an insight into how perhaps we should: question 'what we know' and therefore what and how we teach; consider 'representation'; examine ways of connecting to wider first language education programmes and incorporating L1 into our classrooms. Lastly, it shows us how our work can be part of wider movements for decolonising- but this requires the willingness to learn ourselves.

Turning to Hughes- Warrington and Martin's 'Indigenous Histories and Place Ethics', although this chapter may not immediately appear to be 'about language' or even about language education', what it does, is show us the way in which colonisation by the West (in this case Britain), has imposed systems of knowledge which in turn come to be seen as 'normal' and 'the way things are.'

It shows us how this Western way of seeing the world has ignored and attempted to eradicate indigenous ways of seeing and knowing, and as educators I think it offers an example of the complexity of those knowledge systems that colonialisation sought to systematically remove and replace.

Looking at 'history', the authors show us that Aboriginal communities frame history within 'the ethics of knowing the relationships that connect and sustain Country'- every aspect relates to the impact on Country. Country is conceptualised

in a non-state way, and within 120 living indigenous languages, language structures offer ways of articulating time, space and tense which take the speaker back to their place in 'caring for Country'. Narratives of history are conceptualised in a non-linear fashion and are 'dynamic personalised tellings' reflecting "personalised considerations of Country" (2022: 177).

Thus, the languages used, so closely and intimately bound up with identity, express this history in a way which oversimplified approaches to 'remembering', render simple 'retellings' as insufficient.

The authors share Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Western 'assumptions' made about history and asks us to understand that these are imposed Western/ colonial views, whose legacy is still felt. As teachers we need to acknowledge then that these assumptions, that history 'can be total, including all knowledge in a coherent whole; can be universal in expressing values for the globe; refers to one large chronology; tells the story of development; is about a self-actualising human subject; can be told in one coherent narrative; is an innocent discipline; is made from binary categories; and is patriarchal' are imposed Wester/ colonial ways of seeing. (Tuhiwai- Smith,2012: 31-32, cited 2022: 180).

"The languages used, so closely and intimately bound up with identity, express this history in a way which oversimplified approaches to 'remembering', render simple 'retellings' as insufficient."

Author information

Linda Tuhiwai Smith is Smith is the Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori, Dean of the School of Māori and Pacific Development and Director of Te Kotahi Research Institute at the University of Waikato

Marnie Hughes-Warrington is Deputy-Vice Chancellor Research and Enterprise at the University of South Australia and Visitor at the School of History, Australian National University, Australia.

Anne Martin is Director of the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre at the Australian National University, Australia.

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