Unmanaging Inequality

CHANGING MINDSETS & THE DECOLONISED CURRICULUM

LIAM GREENSLADE

PAPER FOR MEDWAY FESTIVAL OF LEARNING & TEACHING 13TH SEPTEMBER 2018
What is the Changing Mindsets project?

- Based on the work of the psychologist Carol Dweck
- The project is taking place at 5 universities in the south of England
- Its aim is to improve success rates, retention and the academic experience of students
- It also seeks to deal with problems caused by the phenomena of ‘implicit bias’ and ‘stereotype threat’ which can affect attainment, retention, and success at university amongst BME & disadvantaged student groups
- Training given to both students and faculty
Re-working Stereotype Threat & Implicit Bias

- Highly dependent on a western individualist ideology in both philosophy and approach
- Tend to place the burden on students to change rather than institutions to accommodate diversity and its consequences
- Can exacerbate existing tensions amongst students around issues of ethnicity/class and advantage/disadvantage
- Specific context of racism in post-Brexit Britain
- Issues around the effectiveness of implicit bias training (e.g. Forscher et al, 2017)
Identity Safety

- Attempt to address some of these difficulties through ‘identity safety’ model
- Students and lecturers taught to identify the way that everyday interactions can generate obstacles to learning (e.g. Micro-aggressions)
- Linking structural elements and processes to student engagement with learning
Recognise that ‘colour-blindness’ or ‘class-blindness’ or ‘gender-blindness’ or ‘ability-blindness’ are neither attainable or desirable

Validate students’ experiences, backgrounds, and identities to promote academic and social success for all students (Steele, D.M. & Cohn-Vargas, 2013)

Identify and provide relevant positive role models for all students from within their discipline

Desegregate the lecture theatre
Harshad Keval’s (2018) ‘How colonised is your discipline?’ slide’
Starting a hard conversation

Learning ‘what may be thought against our thought’
Starting points for ‘de-colonisation’

- Recognising and dealing with racism as it is woven into different aspects of university life
- Engaging with and including perspectives other than white, middle-class, Eurocentric knowledges, cultures, and societies in taught content
- Acknowledging the contribution of the ‘colonized other’ to disciplinary knowledge
- Dealing with the consequences of colonialism for both students and their teachers
- Understanding that the alienation/disengagement expressed by some groups is not evidence of deficit
Walking the walk

- Decolonising is not just ‘diversifying’ our curricula
- Decolonising is not just ‘globalising’ our curricula
- Decolonising the curriculum is not an end state but a reflexive process
- Addressing the hidden hierarchy based historical social relations
- Understanding that the unscrutinized curriculum guides us in how to view marginalised perspectives as just that: marginal
Moving away from ‘innocence’

- Encouraged to examine and question the ‘et cetera conditions’ of pedagogic practice in a diverse academy.
- Consider how much of the curriculum is DWEM and how much has to be.
- Thought around ‘un-representation’ and ‘appropriation’.
- Honestly addressing notions of ‘white privilege’.
And the last word goes to...

- When you crush hierarchy, and replace it with network, then the cultures held in the different languages generate oxygen. They cross-fertilize. Cultures are able to breathe life into each other. Every culture should be taught with a nod to other cultures.

  Ngugi wa Thiongo (2018)
Further reading

- Raewyn Connell (2007) Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science
- Frantz Fanon (1961) The Wretched of the Earth
- N’gugi wa Thiong’o (1981) Decolonizing the Mind
- Jason Arday, Heidi Safia Miraz (2018) Dismantling race in higher education