Decolonising Higher Education, But What Does It Mean?

The term ‘Decolonising’ has begun to be used in higher education institutions and it expresses in part a desire for a wider range of voices to be included in curricula. This is problematic. Too often though a preoccupation with a desire to present a ‘diverse’ collection of cultural perspectives is used to replace a liberationist approach. A liberationist approach demands an examination of the structures of power and the inequalities that exist in society and ways that we can work to make a more inclusive curriculum.

The Empire and the Canon

The problem with the term ‘Decolonising’ is that it implies a desire to represent ‘diverse’ cultural perspectives when the problem is to rethink the way that we create and maintain the canon. Only by re-examining the canon, and creating new ways to think about it, can we truly DEcolonise our institutions.

Are There Any Universal Values?

It is not the case that there are universal values. This notion has long been disputed, but it is one of the ideas that is used to justify the maintenance of the canon. There are universal values, but it is unclear whether or not they exist, or if they can be identified.

The problem with identifying universal values is that they are not always the same. What is true for one society may not be true for another, and this is the case for different cultures.

It is also important to remember that the concept of universal values is a product of the Western world, and it is not necessarily applicable to other cultures.

The term ‘Decolonising’ is often used to describe the process of creating a more diverse curriculum. This is not a bad thing, but it is important to remember that the curriculum is not the only thing that needs to be changed. The way we think about knowledge and how we teach it is also important.