Decolonising learning for a post-pandemic world: a critical conversation

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Illustration by Zoran Svilar

Three key questions

1. With the shift to blended learning in the context of the pandemic, what is the relationship of online learning to the challenge of decolonization? What are the pros and cons?

2. How can we ensure authentic and inclusive learning takes place?

3. In this moment of disruption, how can we avoid replicating the dehumanizing effects of traditional education pedagogies that privilege individual achievement and competition?
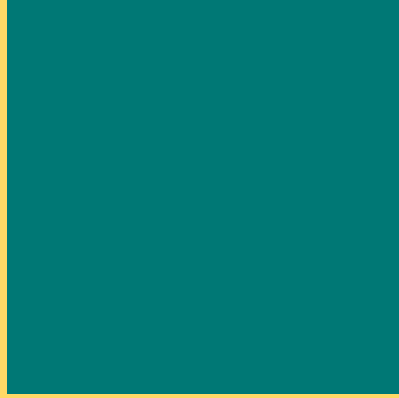
Performative versus authentic learning and assessment
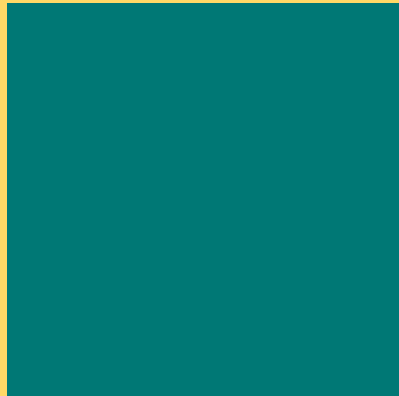
Introductory studio lettering workshop: Stage 1 joint collaborative work (photo by C Caldwell)

Chat activity

When did you have to perform in your own educational journey as a teacher or as a student?

(Use the chat)

"The consumerist model epitomizes the idea of Sat-Nav education, where the potential experience to be gained in attempting to navigate between two points is reduced to a mechanical act of inputting some codes into a machine that then does the thinking for you. While one may manage to get to one's destination much of the time, this is achieved without any sense of how this process took place.

This is akin to students being offered no real sense of where the course of study they are embarked upon comes from, or being unable to see why this matters. "

Singh, G and Cowden, S (Sat-Nav Education: A Means to an End or an End to Meaning? In (2013). G Singh and S Cowem (Eds) Acts of knowing: Critical pedagogy in, against and beyond the university. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

What is decolonization?

"Decolonization involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not "integration" or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems. "
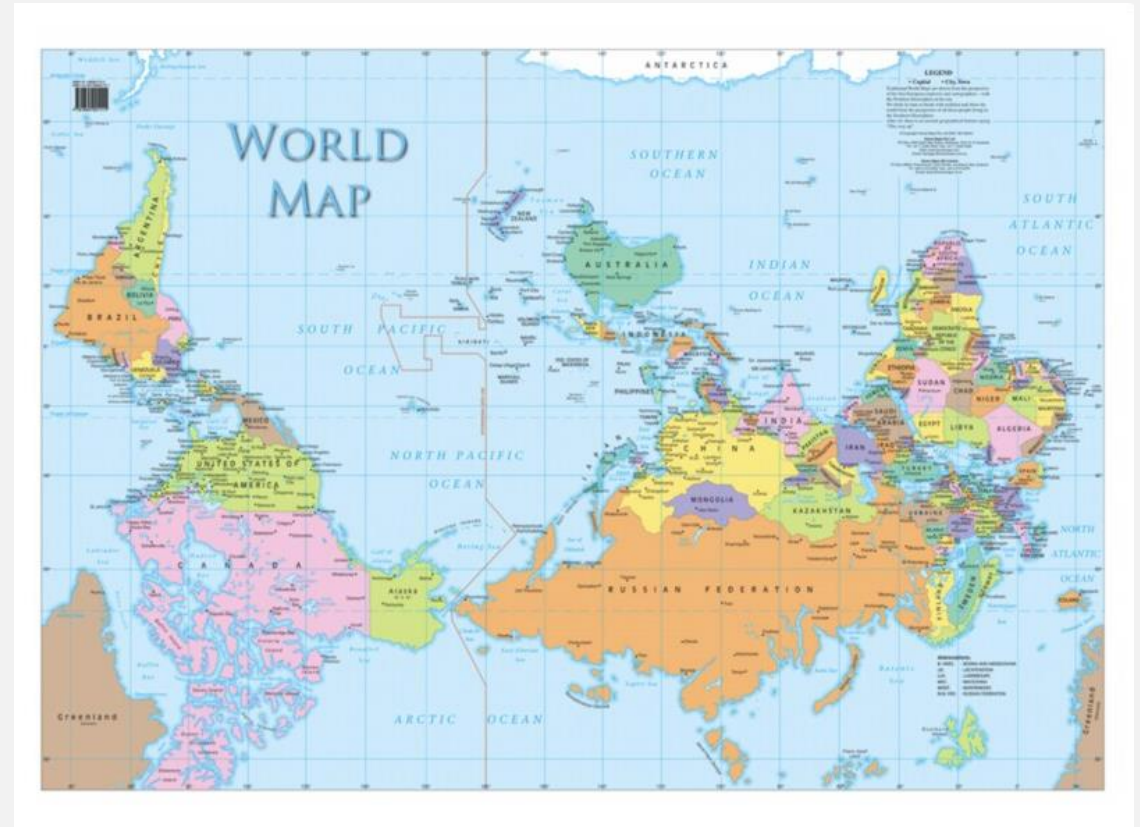
Coloniality and
Human Computer Interaction (HCI)

- Can hide structural inequities and broaden gaps in access, especially where AI is used.

- Make resources less inclusive and accessible and further marginalization

- The fields of ubiquitous computing and AI have been largely driven by framings and outlooks which foster a universalized system of knowledge production and its computing applications, erasing local knowledge

Source: Pendse, S. R., et al. (2022, April). From Treatment to Healing: Envisioning a Decolonial Digital Mental Health. In Proc. CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI'22). https://www.sachinpendse.in/publications/Pendse_et_al_From_Treatment_To_Healing_CHI_2022.pdf

Digital Colonialism

Illustration by Zoran Svilar

"If the railways and maritime trade routes were the "open veins" of the Global South back then, today, digital infrastructure takes on the same role: Big Tech corporations use proprietary software, corporate clouds, and centralised Internet services to spy on users, process their data, and spit back manufactured services to subjects of their data fiefdoms."

Kwet, M. (2019). Digital colonialism is threatening the Global South. Al Jazeera, 13.
https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/3/13/digital-colonialism-is-threatening-the-global-south

Digital colonialism and learning online at UAL: critical question after *Spiegel, S et al (2017)*

- What does it mean for online learning to be driven by thinking rooted in alternative epistemologies besides dominant western paradigms?

- How can we ensure that "the preoccupation with technological innovation does not overshadow deeper inequalities, ensuring that 'techno-fetishism' does not displace focus on complex equity debates?"

- How can the curriculum design process take into account technology barriers for those students with low incomes, both UK and international?

Source: Spiegel, S et al (2017) Decolonising online development studies? Emancipatory aspirations and critical reflections – a case study, Third World Quarterly, 38:2, Illustration by Zoran Svilar

Intelligence and Colonialism

- Ideas about intelligence and mechanisms for gathering 'intelligence' are deeply implicated in the colonial project and systems of regulation, discipline and knowledge generation (research)

- "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity.

(Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonising methodologies: Researching and indigenous peoples. p1)
 (Illustration by Zoran Svilar)

The science of intelligence and deficit modelling

In their influential research on class and intelligence, Murray and Herrnstein argued that **"Socioeconomic status is… a result of cognitive ability"** (1994,p. 286).

Do you agree?

Figure 1

SOCIALLY UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIORS AND TRAITS
Low Scores on "Middle Class Values" Index

- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Injury-Prone
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Welfare
- Crime
- "Idleness"
- High Birth Rates
- Single Parenthood
- Poor Nutrition
- Poor Health Care
- Low Birth Weight

SOCIALLY DESIRABLE BEHAVIORS AND TRAITS
High Scores on "Middle Class Values" Index

- High Quality Child Care
- Fewer Injuries
- High income
- High Levels of Employment
- Tax Paying
- Low Crime Rates
- Industrious
- Low Birth Rates
- Two-Parent Families
- Good Nutrition
- Quality Health Care
- Healthy Babies

LOW — AVERAGE IQ — HIGH

Murray, C and Herrnstein, R (1994) The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life. Free Press.

The science of intelligence and deficit modelling

- Would it not make more sense to reverse the causal arrow and hypothesize that poverty and all of its associates cause low intelligence?

- The idea of intelligence itself appears to be placing value on biased interpretation/representation of cultural behaviours.

- Within HE, similar logics of cultural and social pathology have been used to frame disparities in access, participation and attainment.

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Intelligence is not a panacea!

"IQ increases may have brought us shiny new technologies such as cell phones and computers and more facile use of them, but if people continue to destroy the world and the people in it, there may not be any people left to utilize the technology. We may have created a world in which people are smart, but not terribly wise."(p372)

Sternberg, Robert J., and Judith Glück, eds. (2019) *The Cambridge handbook of wisdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Moving beyond intelligence towards wisdom

- Abolish the concept of intelligence!

- Shift from a singular conception of intelligence to 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner) – e.g. (how) do we assess emotional intelligence?

- Move towards a notion of mass intellectuality – to be human is to belong to a species of thinking animals (Homo sapiens).

- Shift the emphasis away from intelligence to wisdom.
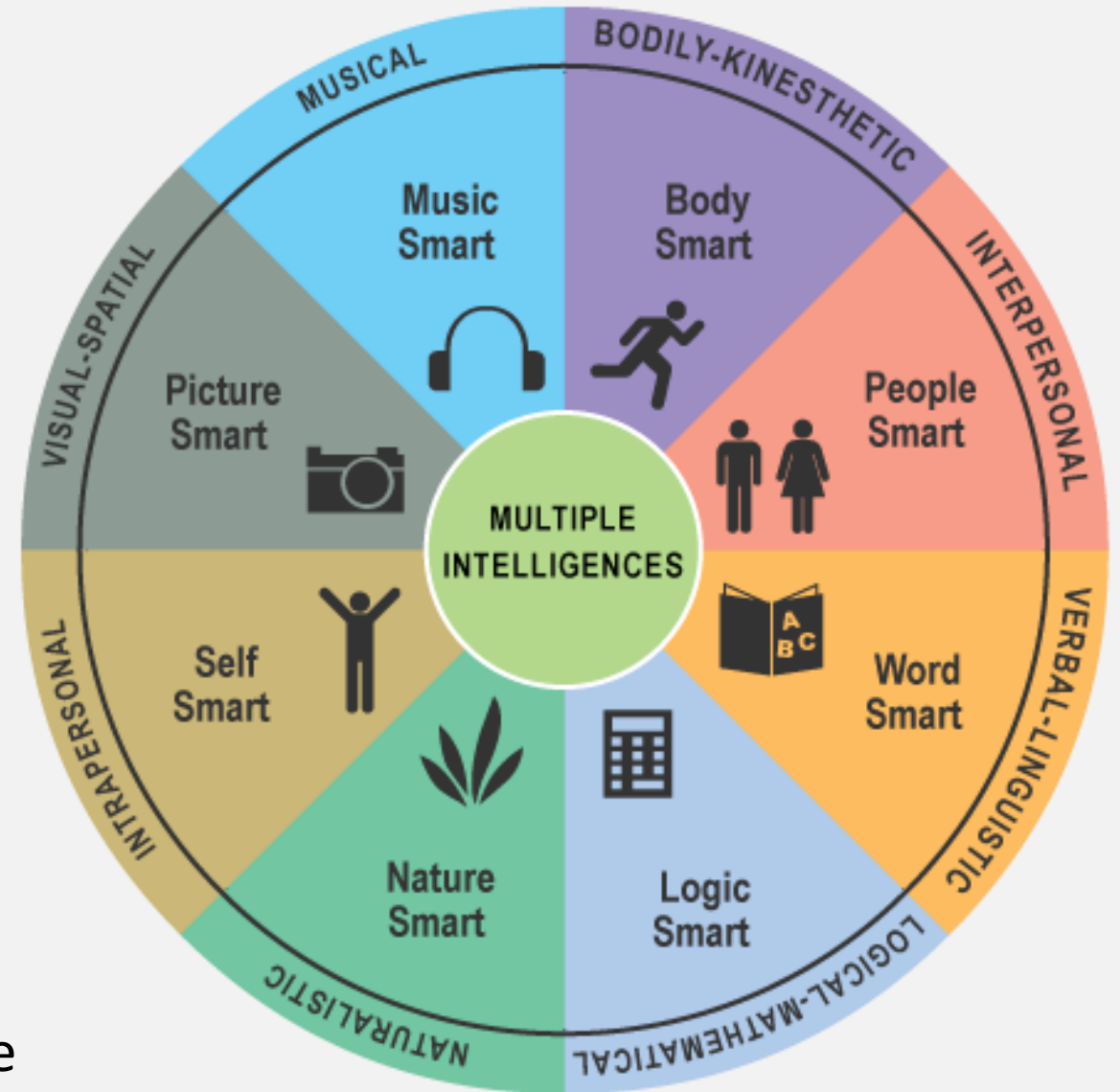
What is the differences between possessing knowledge and developing wisdom?

Fruit is the fleshy or dry ripened ovary of a flowering plant, enclosing the seed or seeds.
Thus, egg plant or aubergine, is technically a fruit.

What has a wisdom-based education have to offer?

- In a world dominated by "artificial intelligence" and 'knowledge ubiquity" we need to reconsider the purpose of education, beyond the traditional emphasis on transmission.

- A focus on wisdom involves using both one's cognitive abilities and one's creativity, as well as one's knowledge base, for a common good/social purpose.

- Addresses some of the critiques of the limitations and violences of European Enlightenment Rationalism made by anti-colonial scholarship.

- Offers the possibility of developing new and honest epistemological frameworks that can reconcile ethics and the blind pursuit of knowledge.

- Big question – can we teach wisdom?

Teaching for Wisdom

- We need to be wary about a whole lot of new age fads associated with wisdom – these do not necessarily represent the wisdom of the ancients

- Wisdom is about problem solving but it takes a more holistic perspective on such matters. (e.g. one does not build more roads to solve traffic jams!)

- Wisdom based education does not displace science, reason, knowledge and theory, but offers a higher level of skill development. Wisdom can be seen as the product of 'natural experimentation'.

- However, wisdom goes beyond temporal constraints. Why? because wisdom doesn't age, new insights can be gleaned from past traditions and practices.
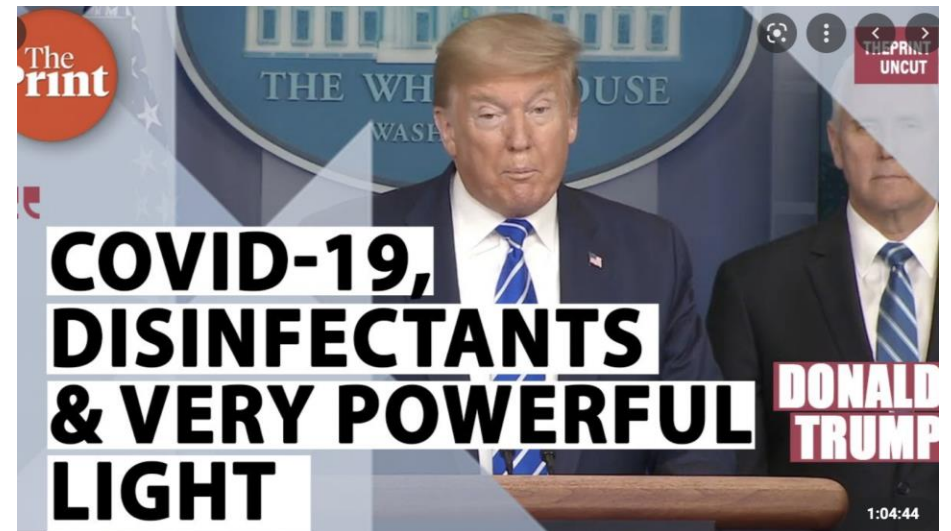
Reframing what we do

Think about assessment you do

and
replace it with more authentic task?

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Concluding thoughts: the way forward

1. Move away from industrialized curriculum delivery and assessment methods and toward incorporating the new and multiple methods for generating, curating and journaling ideas.

2. Rethink how to integrate dialogue and discourse in online spaces: online, it is much easier to lose the connection.

3. Decolonised pedagogy encourages dialogical, live approaches, which require human connection and interaction. Some might argue this is never possible with e-learning.

Thank you to all the colleagues who have contributed to this work
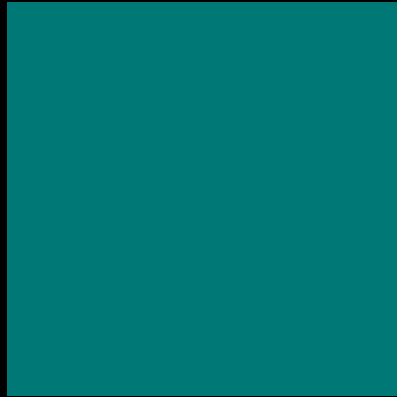
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