Can we reframe colonialism for children and parents to encourage critical thinking and ethical consumer habits?

Mark Ecob / MAGCD 2 / Research Summary / 2026
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ABSTRACT

In 2020, during a brief window of summer optimism before planes stopped flying and borders closed, I left the UK with my partner and children to live in Cyprus. It's an island shaped over millennia by successive empires, including the British.

We integrated easily, greeting our neighbours with Καλημέρα* on the school run, respectful guests in their country. Everyone spoke English, we drove on the left, you could even get fish and chips if you knew where to look. But while travelling around the region, my children began asking questions like "Where are the missing pieces of the Parthenon, Dad?" and "Why do the Egyptians have pounds?". I lacked the knowledge to answer them because I had never been taught about colonialism at school. So, we began learning about it **together**.

'Decolonising Education' (2023) in UK schools is an ongoing issue for government but it's active right now for our kids. Samantha Williams, Founder of BookLove (2026), a multicultural book carnival says **'It should be happening from nursery. The problem is not the content, it's who is teaching it. Most white teachers would not want to go there because they don't feel comfortable, haven't been taught themselves and certainly have not been given the tools'.**

Colonialism is a subject that children can be curious about if we use familiarity. My publication , *Where's That Really From?* asks a child and their parent/guardian to hunt around their home for everyday items such as sugar, soap and school uniform. It connects origins of these items in the British Empire with contemporary issues such as fast fashion and consumerism. Using questions like 'who made this?' and 'should I buy this?', readers can understand histories and connect to modern effects.

Principally, this enquiry is relevant to children in the UK school system, along with their parents in shared learning space. Through a network of publishing professionals, authors, teachers and by testing with local families, the most appropriate audience is 'Key Stage 3' (children between the ages of 11 and 14 years). The publication could occupy a curriculum-adjacent, home-learning or commercial position.

Born of personal positions on colonial legacies found through subverting the most politically powerful of identity documents, my passport, this body of work recognizes that the path of a designed product of colonial ideas can be redirected. From object to agent, my publication rearticulates it as a learning resource, via the visual, linguistic and production conventions of educational material, into a site of positive and ethical design politics.

'Focussing on passport as an articulation of different relations, practices and performances, has shifted focus away from…an instrumental perspective on design and materiality, to questions of how the world is articulated through a series of material makings and how it can be rearticulated through the same capacity.' (Keshavarz, 2020, page 131).

*Good morning

CONTEXT

This body of work sits at the intersection of decolonising education, object-based learning and critical pedagogy. It uses Graphic Communication Design to mediate and translate complex histories into an accessible form.

By foregrounding everyday objects as entry points into the history of the British Empire, it intentionally steps away from conventions of instruction-response teaching and the Powerpoint presentations and photocopied handouts we are all so familiar with. Using simple questions to build a picture and establish connections, objects can be understood as more than neutral but as carriers of social, political and economic histories.

A key reference point for this work was *The Elephant in the Room* exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery which examined 'the roots and routes of the city's collection' (2026). Using clever curation and graphic communication design, the museum created and environment of acknowledgement and curiosity about the objects' colonial histories and how we engage with them so we can 'help shrink the elephant in the room'.

The publication aligns with discourses such as Decolonising Education from the National Education Union, Lit in Colour from Penguin Books UK and The Runnymede Trust, and Fill in the Blanks via the Advocacy Academy. It seeks to challenge dominant, often sanitised narratives of Empire within UK education and instead connect histories to present-day issues so we can find our own positions in relation to them.

With help from staff at my daughter's school and other schools, I was able to use their structures to engage with accessibility, inclusion and my own inherent biases. Far from an ethical surety, educational and commercial contexts both come with their own inherent ethical considerations such as the ethno-regional characteristics of where a school is located.

As homework, it extends from classroom to domestic, engaging parents and carers directly. These more informal and intergenerational learning networks are part of a wider ecosystem beyond schools and families into cultural institutions, museums and ongoing public debates about national identity and historical responsibility. The publication prompts active critical reflection.

'If Reform get in, they won't want kids learning about this … we are a political football' Richard Thomas, Key Stage 3 History Teacher, King Edwards School, Bath.

This reflection is affected by transient political structures. The current government's educational policy trickles down to the material children learn from. Conservative Leader Theresa May stated in 2016 'if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere', arguing that true citizenship implies local responsibilities over global.

Engaging with colonialism connects us to larger global systems, including the historical networks of imperial trade, governance and enduring global inequality. This publication encourages the co-learners to acknowledge their connection to these global structures via the familiarity of the things they buy, eat, wear and drink, making us citizens of

everywhere who can be agents in tackling various issues. Here are the issues that each of the five booklets within the publication connects with:

TEA – workers' rights, global economic inequality, sustainability.
SUGAR – modern slavery, sustainable supply chains.
SOAP – deforestation, responsible consumerism.
SCHOOL UNIFORM – fast fashion, identity.
CRICKET – racism and inclusivity.

The deliberate inclusion of brand names such as Tate & Lyle, Pears Soap and PG Tips helps readers see that these familiar names not only originate in Empire but also look to engage with these historical entanglements positively. Examples like Fairtrade and The Rainforest Alliance are signposted for deeper investigation. The resource therefore sits within systems of corporate history and public memory given that these companies emerged within and profited from imperial trade networks. Today, they operate within expectations of corporate social responsibility. Ethical branding and corporate storytelling are additional systems this publication engages with.

Practically, the publication operates within conditions of designing for young audience, meaning clarity, accessibility and engagement without oversimplifying complex or sensitive histories. Taking in advice from local teachers, a tiered approach to the design caters for a broad spectrum of engagement, where the middle spread asks the readers to INVESTIGATE, and the last page encourages CHANGE, offering accessible QR codes for the learners to go further. The end matter is located on the back of the fold-out map at the end of the folder and is a site for the adult learner to go further too. This shows equity for the learners if they wish to find out more.

The academic sources consulted all suggested splitting the publication into digestible parts, five smaller booklets that can be spaced out over a half term. As the pupils bring each booklet back and filled-in, they are give with a stamp from the teacher. Each teacher I interviewed agreed that reward systems can be valid for pupils all the way to A Level age and fit within schools' existing points systems.

Projections[1] experimented with conventional yet powerful features of a passport, including a coat of arms, guilloché patterns, stamps, rounded edges, stitch binding, rounded edges and the use of Caslon (a typeface deeply tied to Britain's colonial era). They were subverted to make a bright, playful, super-sized book, suitable for children thanks to the advice from various publishing professionals. Projections[2] offered the chance to inregrate with classroom learning materials.

Early iterations aimed to use government and public accessibility advice for type size, continuity, layout and dyslexia-friendly colour palettes. After querying the day-to-day practices of accessibility in classroom materials, I was advised that trying to make a universal piece of learning material to include SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) students was impractical. They tend to have individual 'Learning Passports' providing tailored support. Clarity and simplicity were therefore guiding principles.

The A5 format considers conventional paper sizes used in schools and the need for

reproduction. Axo from ABYME was chosen because of its clarity and basis in UK writing models and school manuals. The two-colour palette for each booklet was chosen for a sharp, simple feel. Subtle connections exist with the palette, for example a bright cyan to match the packaging of Tate & Lyle sugar, a deep red to echo a cricket ball, purple is present on both my kids' school uniforms. The colours look to avoid any national connotations. Stamping was used as a bold device for titling and other text elements. All of the stamping on the outer binder is from bespoke commissioned rubber stamps. Risograph printing offers a rough feel to the printing and makes the most of the contrasting palettes. The covers of the inner booklets echo school exercise books. The folder opens to a boarding pass device containing introduction, glossary and a perforated QR code for adult feedback. The publication ends with a fold out map, to give geography to the connections made. This all makes design an active pedagogical tool rather than a neutral container for information.

In Projections[1], images of Empire advertisements were included as a comment on their inherent racism, inspired by zine *Five Things I Wish I Learned at School About Empire* from Irregular Zines, which played with contemporary imagery. For example, in spreads for Soap, an advertisment was shown of a man from Africa being 'civilised' by Pears Soap (Popović and Bregović, 2015) proximate to an etching of an orangutan. In an interview with author Dr Darren Chetty (2026), he asked how a young person from Africa would react to seeing this association? This showed me the value of early testing and changed my focus to avoid any potential othering of readers.

Theoretically, the publication draws on constructivist learning, asking the learners to build understanding through interaction with objects and reflecting on that. Professionally, the work reflects a hybrid practice that combines elements of design, education and socially engaged research, positioning the designer as an active participant in shaping how history is understood and discussed. As such, the publication can be understood as a form of critical, practice-based enquiry that uses design to intervene in both educational and cultural discourse.

PROJECTED CONTRIBUTION

This body of work investigates the role graphic communication design can play in shaping critical historical awareness and socially engaged learning. It came from my research into the passport as a colonial object that produces and reinforces its own politics. Those insights led me to reflect on my own education within the UK school system and how little emphasis was place on the realities and continuing effects of colonialism. As both a designer and a parent, I am increasingly aware of how these omissions shape cultural understanding, national identity and attitudes in my children. I do not want them to inherit an understanding of history that lacks critical engagement with Britain's colonial past. This publication can facilitate that questionning for other families.

The project challenges my previous assumption of the neutrality of graphic communication design, positioning it instead as an active political and pedagogical tool rather than simply aesthetic.

'By thinking of designed things as material articulations and designing as an articulatory practice, ethics become about recognizing the politics of the locations and conditions within which one works, and the politics that is generated from working within those conditions. Consequently, the relation of ethics to design is not a matter of "adding" ethics to design or making design ethical; it is about recognizing how design already contains ethical implications and being able to act on that recognition.' (Keshavarz, 2020, page 131).

Testing the publications with families revealed that concerns around the teaching of colonial history are shared by many parents and that an object-based approach was a gateway to deeper engagement.

'The uniform section was very eye-opening for Betty as she loves shopping! So having these facts to back up our parenting on trying to encourage second-hand clothing when we can, was very helpful!'
Polly, Betty's mum.

With this feedback in mind, the methodology could work for other objects or familiarities in the same offline, printed format. Moreover, it could work in a workshop setting where objects temselves are embellished with hidden information and students look for them. Could copy about identity hide inside a wooden cricket bat?

A teacher described the curriculum as 'a political football', which highlights how educational priorities are often shaped by the ideological position of the current government. In a polarised political monent that is increasingly defined by nationalism in the UK and internationally, I believe there is an urgency to create opportunities for critical historical engagement wherever possible. This small intervention can encourage young people to question inherited and accepted narratives, systems of consumption and ideas of national versus so they might be able to consider a global identity for themselves.

Professionally, the works represents a significant shift in my professional practice as a

book cover designer. I now triangulate, question and engage critically and I acknowledge the responsibility I hold as a designer in shaping public understanding. I don'twait for approval but make a critical decisions as part of an ongoing process.

Outwith professional or academic practices, I have noticed shifts in my vocabulary and thinking as a parent and individual, I am more aware of and can translate colonial legacies into positive discussion and behaviours in myself and my children. I have let the work change me, without resisting it. Throughout this body of work, the thing that surprised me the most was the 'Exeptionalism and Jingosim' (Sanghera, p. 152-158), best summed up by the Salman Rushdie quote ''four centuries of being told that you are superior' to brown and black people 'leave their stain'' (Sanghera, p. 155). As I look at this moment in time as a British citizen, I see superiority and indifference in how we conduct ourselves, echoing the civilising attitudes of adverts past.

This piece of work is finished for now, and I'm proud of it, but the practice continues. I intend to continue developing and to publish this work through my book publishing network, in order to contribute to wider conversations around colonial acknowledgement, curriculum development and the social responsibility of visual communicators. Maybe I can effect the same change in other parents and their kids by publishing *Where's That Really From?*

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‘Where are the missing bits of the Parthenon, Dad?’

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..asked Ella.

Ella: 'Where are the missing pieces of Parthenon, Dad?'.
Me: 'Well, they're in London'.
Ella: 'Why?'.
Me: 'Because a British guy kind of stole them about a hundred years ago and never gave them back'.
Ella: 'Why?'.
Me: 'For money, I think. It was during the British Empire'.
Ella: 'The what?'.
Me: 'Empire, like the Roman Empire. It was when Britain ruled over a lot of the world'.
Ella: 'Oh. Ok. Can we get an ice cream?'.
Me: 'Sure'.

‘**Colonialism:** if one country take control of another, it colonizes it. If one nation of people takes over another nation of people, the people who are conquering are the colonizers and the people who are conquered are the colonized. The taken-over place is now a colony, and the people who came in to do the taking over are colonists or colonialists.’

(Sanguera, 2023, p. 10).

Ella: ‘What are you reading?’.
Me: ‘It’s a book about that Empire thing we talked about’.
Ella: ‘Yawn’.
Me: ‘It’s really interesting, I’m learning more from this book than I did at school about this stuff’.
Ella: ‘Still yawning’.
Me: ‘Did you know that HP sauce is from the British Empire’.
Ella: ’Wait, what?’.

‘Introduction

Ella: ‘So you’re saying that sauce I have on chips is from the British Empire?’.
Me: ‘Yes, it was invented in the 1800s by a grocer called Fred, uses spices from India and the HP stands for House of Parliament.’
Ella: ‘So I have parliament on my chips?’.
Me: ‘Kinda’.

History bored me to tears at school. I couldn’t see how spending a whole term learning about the Stone Age was going to help me live my life. It must have been grim to be those strange hairy people in those strange and hairy times, but I didn’t understand why we needed to know about them. I mean, we had chainsaws instead of stone tools, we lived in houses rather than caves, and we had fantastically cheap razors available in most supermarkets. Nor did I see how the Hundred Years War had any relevance to us. Beyond the fact that every single lesson on it felt like it was 116 years long which was, in fact, how long the Hundred Years War actually lasted. How did the war-naming person get that so wrong?!).

It wasn’t just history I struggled with. I never got the hang of art; everything I ever drew ended up looking like a donkey. And I dreaded cross-country running. Not only were we told to run for six kilometres without stopping or drinking water, but the teachers also threatened that we’d have to run in our underpants if we “forgot’ our running kits (the 1980s were weird!). But history was dreadful. It comes as a massive surprise therefore that, at the age of forty-six, I am the author of a bestselling history book for adults, *Empireland*. It’s even more of a shock that here I am now, beginning a children’s version of that book.

Until recently I had read very few history books – finding them, in general, too long and boring. I’m not a historian; I’m a journalist and author. And I didn’t even study history beyond the age of sixteen. What changed? Well, it turns out there’s an incredibly interesting slice of history which I wasn’t taught about at school or university - the British Empire. It’s a part of history that is still important to life as we know it today. It explains so much about Britain as a nation, including where some of our money comes from, the stuff we find in our museums, the reason the country is home to citizens of all different races and backgrounds, the food we eat, the words we use and so much more. It’s this history that explains lots about my life too, such as the reasons why my Indian parents emigrated to Britain in the 1960s (‘emigrate’ means moving from one country to another). It also explains the racism that surrounded me as I grew up in Wolverhampton in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, at the time certain jobs seemed closed off to people of colour – not just the fancy jobs running companies, but some non-white people even found themselves unable to get jobs as teachers or drivers. Some pubs and clubs didn’t allow entry to those who had a different skin colour to white British citizens. And there was horrible abuse and violence directed at those who weren’t white.

I bet the history of the British Empire explains something about your life too.

The British Empire (and don’t worry, I’ll be explaining exactly what this is very soon!) was the biggest empire in human history, covering a quarter of the planet at its height, and is the biggest thing Britain ever did as a nation. It’s as important as the leading role we played in the Second World War, when we beat the evil German Nazis, and cemented the idea that we were as plucky and determined as the British bulldog that is sometimes used to symbolize us (and which graces the cover of this book). Frankly, it’s one of the biggest things that ever happened in the history of the world.

It’s astonishing that I was taught almost nothing about it at school. And it’s astounding that it’s still not a priority to teach this in history classes today. So do not fear if you’ve not come across it yet either. It turns out we’re not alone. In my research and conversations, I’ve come across adults who studied history at some of the most famous universities in Britain who learned almost nothing about the British Empire. A survey conducted around twenty-five years ago found that huge numbers of adults had very little knowledge about it. For example, more than half the people taking part didn’t know that the USA began as a British project. We can’t be blamed for Hershey’s chocolate, or take credit for Disneyland – it was long before all those things – but, yes, America was once a British enterprise.

If you didn’t know these things either, there’s no shame in it at all; you’re still at school and learning. Also, I hope you’ll feel a lot more knowledgeable by the time you get to the end of this book. The plan is to tell you some of the things I wish I had known at your age (beyond a shortcut to that dreaded cross-country route!). I’ll explain what the British Empire was exactly and why lots of us don’t know more about it. We’ll talk about museums, which are home to many priceless artefacts belonging to countries that used to be part of the British Empire. I’ll give you examples of things in our modern world that have roots in the empire – things we see, do, say and experience, from Britain’s towns and cities to our food and drink, sports, books, plants and more. And we’ll also discuss what you can do to expand and spread your knowledge and understanding about it.

Most importantly, I’ll tell you how the British Empire explains why modern Britain is such a multicultural place, filled with lots of people of different colours and cultures and walks of life, living alongside each other. It’s a lot to aim for, but I hope that by the end of this book you’ll understand what has taken me forty-six years to discover: that if we learn the truth about our past, we can make better sense of the present and future. And also fight for a kinder and fairer world.’

If we learn the truth about our past, we can make better sense of the present and future. And also fight for a kinder world.

(Sanguera, 2023, p. 1-7).

‘If design politics is about the articulation of materials on various levels and in certain directions, intervention in design politics is about disarticulating practices, performances, and interactions produced by the design politics, while rearticulating them in directions other than those taken so far or those toward which we are heading. **But it is also important to remember that there is no formula for understanding design politics, nor are there specific criteria for making it. There are only moments, situations, devices, and things that can lead us to disarticulate and rearticulate possible ways of moving through, engaging with, and inhabiting in the world. Passports are one of them. There are many more to engage with.’**

(Keshavarz, 2019, p. 141).

Ella: ‘Why do you keep looking at our passports from Cyprus’.
Me: ‘It’s for Uni. They’re so much more than something we use to just get around. Fascinating’.
Ella: ‘Why?’.
Me: ‘Our passport means we can travel almost anywhere, people from places like Palestine just can’t. The passport enables that’.
Ella: ‘Oooooh kay’.

'Ethics of Design

In this book I have problematized the perspective that sees designing as a task of problem-solving or service-delivering and proposed earlier to see designing as an articulatory practice that helps us to be sensitive to its history, politics, and limits; to its orientations. By articulations, I refer to the acts of negotiation in forging certain relations that may or may not follow the tendential historical and material connections determined by strong forces of the mobility regime such as colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Once we begin to understand design and the position of the designer through articulatory practice, designers encounter choices to be made on the basis of the positions they occupy or have taken, rather than problems to be solved, services to be delivered, or improvements to be facilitated. This consequently locates designers' bodies and subjectivities in relation to the other bodies and subjectivities involved in any act of articulation.

This introduces another way of discussing ethics in and of design. The ethics of design can no longer be reduced to a set of moral and judgmental concerns as some sort of external feature to be implemented and achieved. By thinking of designed things as material articulations and designing as an articulatory practice, ethics become about recognizing the politics of the locations and conditions within which one works, and the politics that is generated from working within those conditions. Consequently, the relation of ethics to design is not a matter of "adding" ethics to design or making design ethical; it is about recognizing how design already contains ethical implications and being able to act on that recognition.

As it was shown, passports for many inhabitants of the world are part of devising their lived experiences and of how they experience the world. For many, however, this artifact still is an instrument that at best would satisfy their needs and speed up their pace of mobility when borders, border guards, and bodies are all connected to each other, as in the case of recent experiments with new smart border crossing initiatives in major airports of the Global North, for instance, in the Netherlands and Australia. Yet designers who are busy with connecting devices, networks, people, and environments in more and more user-friendly ways so rarely recognize the disconnections they design as a consequence of their promotion of interactivity and digitalization.

This book brought about stories of how movement across territories has been and still is regulated through the specific material and technical practice of designing, expanding, and sustaining passports. At the same time, it has been more of a project on immobilities as a particular design paradigm and practice. While there is much scholarship on how design facilitates, helps, and supports mobilities, this book looked at the other side of the spectrum and highlighted how bodies, subjectivities, and their possibilities to act in the world have been, are, and will continue to be immobilized by designed things and design activities.

When a new e-passport acts as the border and border guard simultaneously to reduce the time spent in passport check queues, for many this design is a way of smoothing their experience and interactions at the given checkpoints; therefore, they do not "feel" the border. But what these designs do is reducing our engagement with the world into limited and receptive measures that hide the politics of mobility regime exposed in this book. In this sense the seemingly most ethical designer, best attuned to the needs of users through human-centered approaches, "will generate the least ethical outcome, the one that most fully services others' needs, thereby disabling them" (Tonkinwise 2004) in understanding the design politics that is at work in any situation and context around materialities. In this regard, perhaps the unfinished, not completely user-friendly, and half-functional design is more ethical than its more effective counterparts. And this is why travelers without the right papers, those whose passports function partially and only after modification provided by forgery, can enact the ethics embedded in passports, the essential force of its materiality, better than the authentic owners, the citizens who carry one or more functional passports. A traveler without the right paper learns to engage with the materiality of the border politics precisely because she or he comes up against the materiality of its institutions and practices through their lack of a functioning and user-friendly passport; a device that paradoxically has hidden the materiality of the border politics behind a seemingly immaterial and seamless space of travel and mobility. As Ahmed (2017: 138) puts it: "If we are hit by something, we become conscious of something." Those who do not come up against the materiality of the mobility regime, against passporting, would not recognize the materiality of the right to move, and thus would not be able to enact the ethics embedded in the materiality of the world and its possibilities of access, movement, and residence. The first step in recognizing the ethics of design thus lies in recognizing the materiality of design, in recognizing its limits and its partiality in use for certain bodies.

The second step is to move from reflection, the prevailing paradigm in defining design activity, to recognition. This entails the recognition of the positions of designer(s) beyond institutional or professional ones.

Those who are fascinated by the actual design of passports and may participate in a new brief for a passport design that may represent their country or "nation" better, or make it more user-friendly for "everyone, are not necessarily crude nationalists. What they are unable to recognize is that the design of passports unites citizens in an unexpected way, despite the political disagreement among them. It is not that states consciously shape our perception of being, for instance, European, and then use different measures to legitimize this, rather that the European passport design shapes us as specific subjects of a particular imagined whole and gradually over time, through back-and-forth presence, gains significance. It is through "granting significance" (Bottici and Challand 2013) to a common narrative by a designed artifact like a passport that imagined communities such as Europe are produced and sustain

Ella: 'Wait a minute. That's not fair'.
Me: 'No. It's really not'.

themselves persuasively? There is a smooth nationalism and racism embedded in processes of materializing citizenship via passports through modernism and its sense of technologically produced aesthetics.

To recognize the orientations-history and politics-that identify the relations between objects and bodies as given and natural is to trace how certain historical forces have shaped the context of that specific design in order for it to exist and operate. In this book, the mobility regime as the context in which passports operate and become legible was identified. Consequently, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the current passport in our hands is a specific product of national, colonial, and late imperial ideas around mobility. Furthermore, like other specific material practices that have shaped colonial relationships, these designs are not bound to their specific moment and site of invention and use and move to other spaces once proven to be functional and profitable for the privileged. Thus, to recognize the paths designed things and design activities have taken to arrive to the present moment in which we rework, reshape, or rearticulate them is another aspect of recognizing why design demands an ethical engagement.

If design politics is about the articulation of materials on various levels and in certain directions, intervention in design politics is about disarticulating practices, performances, and interactions produced by the design politics, while rearticulating them in directions other than those taken so far or those toward which we are heading. But it is also important to remember that there is no formula for understanding design politics, nor are there specific criteria for making it. There are only moments, situations, devices, and things that can lead us to disarticulate and rearticulate possible ways of moving through, engaging with, and inhabiting in the world. Passports are one of them. There are many more to engage with.'

(Keshavarz, 2019, p. 138-141).

‘Do you receive training to be able to teach students about colonialism and The British Empire?

No.’

(Reynolds and Morris, 2026).

Ella: ‘Mr Reynolds said you’re coming into school’.
Me: ‘Yeah’.
Ella: ‘Why?’.
Me: ‘I’m designing a kids book that might work in a school, to do with colonialism’.
Ella: ‘Coloni-what?’.
Me: ‘Exactly’.

Adam Reynolds, KS3 Tutor/ Head of Humanities

Sydney Morris, KS3 Tutor/ History

Oakfield Academy, Frome

'Do you receive training to be able to teach students about colonialism and The British Empire?

No – also lacking on PGCE from 2022-23 based on discussion with Sydney Morris (History Teacher). Following our discussions I think this might also be worth raising as a potential route forward – Teacher CPD opportunities/events. There is professional development on offer already re: PSHE about staff delivering sensitive topics etc. Could this be tweaked to accommodate History and the themes of colonialism and the British Empire?

Does this subject area crossover into English and PSHE? Are there broader themes of citizenship at play?

Morality is a big part of the context of the learning specifically in relation to the Colston statue in Bristol. Was it right to pull it down? Is it right to display it in a museum?

How important is a universal approach to approaching a subject like this? Does our language have to be carefully chosen?

Definitely needing to be aware of words but also being honest about the context of language to explain is crucial in developing the pupils' understanding. Also making parents aware of the sensitive language in the right context might further help to develop the impact of teaching.

Do you think existing learning materials such as those from Twinkl or Oak Academy work well, is there any room for improvement?

We don't tend to use those resources for our schemes of learning; they are bespoke resources tailored over years but are always being changed and adapted to suit learners and current contexts. More general resources such as Twinkl do offer a starting point and some resources are presented well but as a Humanities department I would always encourage staff to tweak and amend to their own teaching style and pedagogy to allow greater depth of teaching and therefore learning.

To what extent does learning material account for SEND students and those with dyslexia?

Continued focus and drive on inclusive approaches to teaching and learning have shifted approaches more recently. Trying to accommodate all learners' individual needs is a challenge – personally I do not see it as being a job that is ever complete but just one that is in need of constant response and reflection.

Most of my research has shown a content-delivery task-completion pedagogy, but I have found some innovative alternatives. Do you think that an object based learning approach can help students learn about colonialism?

Always possible as long as it is structured around context and practicalities will always be an issue. Engagement of learners is critical so it does offer a broader range of interests, however education in general does put up some barriers in relation to this. Perhaps I would suggest looking at other educational models outside of the UK that offer alternatives. (Finland being a highly regarded model – inter disciplinary approaches and more project-based learning on offer).'

Ella: 'So how did it go?'
Me: 'Good, thank you. We chatted about teaching colonialism in school, and he says there isn't much of it.'
Ella: 'Is the slavery triangle part of it?'
Me: 'Yes, very much so, did you learn about the Empire more widely'.
Ella: 'No, just the slavery part. Maybe we should learn some more'.

References

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