Article:
Internationalisation: Critical Incident(s) and Postcolonial Pedagogy

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"Internationalisation includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment" (Altbach *et al*. 2007, p. 290); this definition illustrates the wide-ranging ramifications implied in the term, its aspirational ethos and its infinite possibilities for application. Internationalisation is understood as "using education as means to promote, develop and nurture transnational understanding" (p. 290). I wish to explore internationalisation and reflect on the intersections between equality and diversity and pedagogy as a way to offer viable and meaningful applications in the classroom.

I will do so firstly by discussing a critical incident which hinges on issues of equality and diversity; secondly, I will explore a pedagogical approach – in English Studies – which is intimately connected to the principles of education in a diverse, global context.

Critical Incident: A Positive Action?

Among my first-year seminar cohort for the English Literature (Keele University) there was a female student of Cameroonian origins (referred to as M hereafter). The student's visible, racial difference stood out amongst a predominately white class; moreover, gender here is also important as it highlights even further M's marginality. M is a warm character, willing to participate and eager to learn. Being an exchange student, as often is the case, her first language is not English. Thus, she often seemed to struggle to put her points across or to communicate with her peers or with me. Seminar sessions are designed around students to maximise their learning experience in an autonomous manner. While Barnett suggests that working in groups allows students to overcome barriers of diversity and discrimination, (2011, p. 671) such context and teaching demeanour seemed to play detrimental effects on a student like M. I started to notice a difference in her level of participation as the weeks passed: from her keen interest in the beginning, M progressively retreated inwardly and made less effort to contribute to small or large group discussions. The classroom offers opportunities to "orchestrate student interaction" in order to overcome prejudices that might arise among the group(s) (671, 673). So, M's gradual distancing from the class activities alerted me to a problem: was she isolating herself because she lacked confidence in her language skills? Or had the class or some students isolated her? Eventually, I resolved to approach M with the aim ofdiscussing the matter openly. This decision was informed by my preoccupation with adopting a paradigm of neutrality towards my students, as Joseph Ofori-Dankwa and

Robert W. Lane define it, where I do not place emphasis on students' similarities or differences.[1]

By talking to M, I learnt that she felt linguistically disadvantaged, thus experiencing a sense of inferiority on a more personal level. M explained that since outside the class her difficulties in expressing herself were met by with diffidence, she assumed and feared that such diffidence would also be reserved for(?) her in the seminar. After reassuring M, I decided to adopt positive action – a key principle in Equality (UK Equality Act 2010). The Equality Act Technical Guidance on Further and Higher Education also spells out that "further and higher education institutions may wish to consider adopting positive action measures".[2] Positive Action is a complex notion (dissimilar from positive discrimination which is unlawful in the UK): it "is optional, not a requirement. However, by taking positive action, education providers will often derive broader benefits".[3] Positive Action is intended to meet needs, in this case my proposed positive action aimed at meeting M's needs as a learner as well as an individual in the class. First of all, since M experienced difficulties linguistically – which then impacted on the learning experience, thus confining her to a situation where she was multiply disadvantaged? – I suggested weekly one-to-one meetings with her to make sure she felt confident enough getting through the course material. Also, being a French speaker myself, I proposed to speak to M in French (her first language) in our one-to-one feedback sessions in order to make her more comfortable. This immediately attained positive results as M felt adequately supported and empowered in this context. As the weeks progressed, M and I spoke more often in English, and French was only used to clarify more complicated notions. Secondly, my positive action measures were also applied to the classroom: having consulted with her on what would be best to do, I shared this openly with the class. Though I feared that this approach might single out M even further, I resolved that this would work for the best, to meet her needs. The class responded enthusiastically and constructively suggesting different ways to support their peer and to make sure that she would feel welcome. Henceforth, M's confidence in class increased steadily and this was reflected both in her contributions to discussions and in her final results.

Reflections towards a pedagogical approach

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity maintains that diversity is the "common heritage of humanity", a source of "exchange, innovation and creativity" (Silverman and Ruggles, 2007, p. 36). Yet, diversity has to be understood as strictly bound up with equality. As Sandra Fredman points out: "equality is itself an open-textured term, which can have a variety of meanings. Three commonly accepted meanings are: equal treatment, equal opportunities and equality of results" (2005, p. 375). Fredman's definition aptly fits my purpose, especially in the context of higher education whereby equal treatment of

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[1] Ofori-Dankwa and Lane identify four approaches to diversity; they explain that "teachers using the neutrality paradigm pay little attention to cultural similarities or differences. The teachers using the similarity paradigm will tend to emphasize how cultures are alike, rather than how they differ. […] Finally, the teachers using the diverse similarity paradigm will stress, equally and in appropriate measure, both cultural differences and cultural similarities" (2000, pp. 490-1).

[2] https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equalityact2010-technicalguidance-feandhe-2015.pdf
[3] http://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityanddiversitystrategy/

students is based on equal opportunities made available to them, and seeks to empower them toward an equality of results. Nunan *et al*. remind us that "the notion of educational excellence cannot be extricated from a social dimension – education is ultimately about the ideal balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and of society which are expressed through individual and collective action [...] being inclusive is one measure of educational excellence. Excellence is gauged by the ways in which the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment convey values of inclusivity" (2000, p. 70).

The critical incident involving M – surely not an uncommon scenario – called into question issues of equality and diversity, inclusivity and participation. These are core principles underpinning internationalisation as the Higher Education Academy has it: "a vision to promote a high quality, equitable and global learning experience for all students studying UK HE programmes, irrespective of their geographical location or background" (HEA). But how do we address internationalisation more proactively as educators in a "globally interconnected society"? The role of educator is increasingly challenging in the globalized, hyper-connected present, and the proliferation of HE policies reminds us that our curricula need to embrace, implement and promote internationalisation. How does pedagogy conjugate at once diversity and attention to the individual, discipline specific goals and global learning? Drawing on my critical incident, I want to reflect on positive action and what it can bring to pedagogy.

Positive action allowed me to promote participation and equality of opportunity for learner(s) in a critical incident; "using education as means to promote, develop and nurture transnational understanding" (HEA) is also the ethos of internationalisation. I want to explore this link between participation, inclusivity and internationalisation beyond this critical incident. Positive action can be understood not only as a measure to promote equality in recruitment, in the work place, in HE's admission, etc., but also as a concept that can offer opportunities to shape pedagogy and curriculum design. The importance placed on internationalisation, the ubiquitous reminders that we live in a global world, and the lively debates about the present and future of English as a discipline (see Bonfiglio 2013) pose numerous questions for the teaching of English literature. It is a challenge for subjects such as English where the mere nomenclature bespeaks of one culture, one language, one place. How can English be perceived as a discipline that can effectively "develop and nurture translational understanding"? Positive action can guide a rethinking of pedagogy and of curricula. This is not dissimilar to Nunan *et al*.'s idea of "curriculum justice" "based around rethinking teaching methods, the organization of knowledge and educational assessment" (2000, p. 256).

I am not suggesting to formulate a new pedagogy and bolt it on English Studies:? rather, through positive action we can draw on the discipline itself to generate novel approaches which are still faithful to the discipline's integrity. Positive action becomes a valuable tool to adopt and adapt knowledge, methods and resources within our fields to proactively re-formulate a more inclusive pedagogy. Cutajar proposes an exemplary example; drawing on postcolonial theory – an established field in English Studies – she helpfully exposes the basis of postcolonial pedagogy as an approach conceived to engage with transcultural demands:

"Post-colonial pedagogy is a praxis that helps position classroom knowledge and skills within the demands and constraints of transnational cultural economies. Such pedagogy stimulates students and academics to question on a continuous basis the conditions that enable them to study particular knowledge and not others, the practices they acquire and use" (2008, p. 41).

This approach enables students "to understand the objects and practices of the classroom in terms of transnational epistemologies as well as transnational systems of production, consumption and distribution" (2008, p. 41). A module based on postcolonial pedagogy, both for its content and for the teaching methodologies it employed, is aimed at placing learners at the centre while making sure that the local and global contexts surrounding them are both problematized and put into dialogue. Positive Action measures can illuminate the unmistakable links between discipline-specific pedagogies, transnational education, inclusivity and participation. As it emerges from Cutajar's example, postcolonial pedagogy can be one of the many approaches to deal with contextual and methodological problems – challenges that English (as well as many other subjects) face.

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HEA: Higher Education Academy
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