

# Can we talk about racism? An exploration of EAP practitioners' views on implementing critical, social justice texts on the EAP curriculum.

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# The “Is EAP apolitical?” debate

- Stretches back at least to early 1990s (e.g. Benesch, 1993; Allison, 1996; Pennycook, 1997; Fenton-Smith, 2014)

## **Critical EAP**

challenges power

sociopolitical topics

education is political

**vs**

## **Accommodationist EAP**

discourse of pragmatism around needs

carrier content

apolitical, neutral, impartial

# Is the debate over?

- Recent discussion on BALEAP jiscmail: “Should striking be allowed?” (Le Seeulleur, 2023)

“We should not be closing down conversations nor **pushing a dubious revolutionary political agenda. It is as legitimate a point of view to oppose strikes as to support them.**”

- Recent blog by Olwyn Alexander on ‘carrier content’ (2022):

“Teachers select texts on the basis of topic...this often means that the texts they choose reflect their own **Arts & Humanities backgrounds and left-liberal ideologies**”

# Session overview

- **Part 1: Watch a talk “Bad at English” by JPB Gerald**
- **Part 2: Discussion / reflections on talk**
- **Part 3: Broader discussion / sharing of experiences**

# Teaching context (where the talk was introduced)

- Talk was incorporated as part of a summer pre-session course
- Part of a series of lectures on different topics
- Students are given a pre-reading text
- Students conduct a small group discussion on the lecture
- Aim of discussion is “to build a shared critical understanding of the lecture”

I showed this talk live in the BALEAP2023 session. If you would like to watch the talk or use it in your practice please contact JPB Gerald directly, alternatively you could buy his excellent book on which this talk was based.

Justin's email is:

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# “Bad at English”

The white listener and student skills perception

JPB Gerald (2021)

# Discussion / reflections on talk

- What are the benefits of using this text on a pre-sessional course?
- Are there any potential considerations or drawbacks?
- Why do you think the talk elicited polarised reactions from teachers?

# Broader discussion / sharing of experiences

- Have you ever used texts on the topic of racism in EAP? If so, how did it go? If not, why not? How about other social justice-oriented texts?
- What forms of social justice are permitted and promoted in EAP/HE? Why? And to what effect? Who benefits?
- What discourses/practices of social justice remain marginalised and why?



# Closing reflections

- Decolonising the curriculum and EDI seems to be okay in theory but not necessarily in practice (Eddo-Lodge, 2018)
- I was a bit naïve and should have prepared tutors better
- I want to involve students more in topic selection
- EAP tutors are positioned as gatekeepers of the global language of academia and colonial histories that position EAP in this way should be interrogated (Mortenson, 2022)
- UK government policies are limiting discussion of social justice topics in education and can discriminate against minoritized English language speakers (e.g. Department of Education, 2022; Office for Students 2021; Weale, 2020)

# Lecture specifications

“In acknowledgement of the colonial histories that have contributed to the dominance of English as the global language of academia, and the consequent positioning of English for Academic Purposes (in its role of induction/gatekeeping but also with transformational potential) as a border site for (de)colonial perspectives, where linguistic, national, racial and cultural prejudices can be not only (re)produced but also challenged (Mortenson, 2022), we aim to provide lectures around a social justice theme with topics that are intended to be directly relevant to students’ lives and academic experiences. The selection of a social justice theme is also an attempt to respond to the University’s guidelines on decolonising the curriculum.”

(Hardman, 2022)

“At a time when democratic institutions and hard-won commitments to equalities are under threat... and when a human-made environmental crisis threatens communities and individuals, classrooms should be places of creative, critical thinking and engagement with ideas that can help society move towards more just and sustainable ways of living”

(UCL Institute of Education, 2020)

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