The Dragon on My Shirt - Discussion Resource

About this resource

Section 1 is a short piece about talking about racism in classrooms, written by Darren Chetty with Dr Adam Ferner based on their book *How to Disagree: Negotiate Difference in a Divided World*. It is written with teachers in mind, but much of it is relevant for discussion in other settings too. We recommend that you read this first and reflect on what you need to do to prepare yourself and the group to discuss ***The Dragon on My Shirt***.

Section 2 is a list of some suggested discussion questions for each episode. We also recommend asking participants for their own discussion questions, listing these and selecting (by negotiating or voting), which of these the group would like to address. It is helpful if you and the group also reflect on the demographics of the group and how that might impact the discussion.

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SECTION 1 - HOW TO DISAGREE IN THE CLASSROOM

Conversations about racism are complex, often difficult, and sometimes actively harmful. Given this, current methods for teaching about racism and discussing it within pedagogical contexts appear under-developed. While they are not hard-and-fast rules, the following suggestions may help facilitate productive dialogue and disagreement.

Don't do it in the classroom if you can't do it in the staffroom.

Many teachers report having conversations about racism with students, but further examination reveals they do not have, nor feel sufficiently equipped, to have such conversations amongst their peers. We suggest that if you have never discussed racism in a room of your peers, you are poorly prepared to conduct a class discussion on the topic, and will likely under-estimate the way that institutional power plays out in the classroom.

Where you are **plays almost as much of a role in how conversations develop as** ***what you say*****.**

As we learn from writers like bell hooks and Michel Foucault, conversations are hugely affected by the spaces in which they are had. The physical and social shaping of the room will inform the discourse. Desks, for instance, may figure as literal and figurative obstacles to free and open dialogue. More generative discussions may emerge if conversants are, for example, sat in an

open circle. The academic context – often a bare white room – carries its own associations and may appear more inviting to some participants than others.

A conversation about racism does not exist in isolation from the broader academic context

What goes on the walls reflects institutional interests. As Charles Mills and Zara Bain have shown us, curricula, syllabi and literary canons are the site of suppression and control. Certain issues are foregrounded, while others are pushed to the margins. In the British context, history syllabi often focus on English monarchs – Henry VIII is a firm favourite – while overlooking the colonial exploits of the British Empire. The academic context in which conversations about racism are conducted will affect the resources that students and teachers have to draw on. Arguments about British racism are harder to make if one cannot refer to the naturalized hierarchies assumed by British projects of "civilization".

Turn-taking, care-taking

Ground-rules are important. Teachers often see a tension between "risk" and "safety" and tend to emphasise the latter over the former. Safety in the classroom is paramount but as Sara Ahmed tells us an over-emphasis can inadvertently shut down the possibility of relevant and important expressions of frustration or anger. By telling interlocutors they cannot become angry or (euphemistically) "vocal", teachers may prevent them from legitimately engaging with the emotional dimension of injustice. Telling a Black student they cannot be upset when discussing anti-Black racism, prioritises the "safety" of others over their emotional well-being.

Ground-rules will be different for every group. In general terms, we have found it helpful to foreground "turn-taking" and "care-taking". Facilitators can encourage group regulation by ensuring different participants "have a turn" while moderating the conversation with positive language and reinforcement. Composing ground-rules as a group (on a white-board, for instance) creates a collaborative atmosphere and gives participants a written document to refer to if the discussion becomes too "risky".

"Can you tell me more?"

An emphasis on "relevance", and "speaking to" previous points can restrict dialogue. It is not always easy for a speaker to "get to the point", especially when the subject matter is emotionally charged. At the same time, rambling monologues can function to silence other voices. Questions can help here. In her paper "Curiousity and Inquisitiveness", Lani Watson identifies some of the ways that we use questions: to glean information, to express concern, to express ourselves, to simply announce our presence in a room. A well-placed question can assist a speaker and open up a conversation. However, it is important to remember that questioning can turn into interrogation. Certain questions – such as "Are you kidding?" – can cause an

interlocutor to become defensive. Darren Chetty and Judith Suissa have argued that the question “Can you tell me more?” demonstrates a readiness to listen and, as Watson puts it, “stay in the conversation”. When confronted with potentially volatile statements, it can help de-escalate and generate knowledge.

Discomfort is an indicator that you are talking about something that matters

Difficult conversations are often uncomfortable. Many prefer to avoid them and for this reason, are poorly equipped to deal with them when they (inevitably) arise. Moreover, as Megan Boler tells us, discomfort can be a good indicator that we are doing something right. We are talking about something that *matters*. If we were not in some way invested in the subject we would not care as much. Acknowledging and staying with discomfort can be productive in a way that avoidance is not. There are limits, however, and in some instances uncomfortable conversations can become actively harmful. In the 1960s, J.L. Austin showed us that the boundary between speech and action is a vague one. “Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you”; catchy, but theoretically shallow, this old adage fails to capture the pervasive and damaging effects of “speech acts” in the classroom context. “Staying with” a conversation is not a matter of forcing others to stay with your conversation.

Conversations have consequences

When conducting difficult conversations it is important to be aware of the time. Assigning time to reflect on the discussion is a helpful way to decompress and re-acclimatize. Interruption by the school-bell may upset the process. It is worth encouraging participants to reflect on the session, especially its emotional dimensions. If there was heat, consider what produced it. How might it be better moderated in the future? Conversations can have long-lasting consequences and are rarely over when they’re over.

Create space to breathe

We live in a society riven by inequality. When talking about racism or other forms of structural injustice we must remember that certain issues will be new to certain participants and very familiar to others. The knowledge gap between these groups can be a tangible source of discomfort and frustration. Listening to the same defensive strategies – such as appeals to “reverse racism” – can take an emotional toll on, for example, students of colour who have routinely had their views and experiences discredited. For this reason, it can be helpful to create “breaks” in the conversation, during which participants can talk to the facilitator about any possible concerns.

Provide resources

There is always more to say and more to think about. With this in mind, it is helpful for facilitators to provide resources that participants can take home with them and investigate in their own time (reading lists, blog lists, podcast lists, etc.). While it's best for facilitators to create their own lists – which they can speak to and discuss – we would recommend texts like Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (Bloomsbury, 2017). For students at a higher level we would also suggest, Barbara Applebaum's *Being White, Being Good* (Lexington Books, 2010) and Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017). We also cover many of the above and related topics in our own *How to Disagree* (Quarto, 2019).

It's easy to want to avoid difficult conversations about racism. Perhaps you "don't like arguments" or "awkward situations". However, by failing to engage with such topics – inside the classroom or out of it – we perpetuate what Charles Mills calls "white ignorance", a systematic turning-away from structural injustice. Learning to disagree productively – rather than 'debate' in the manner of debating teams – is an important academic and life skill that we would benefit from positioning more prominently both inside and outside institutions of higher education.

SECTION 2 - Suggested Discussion Questions

Episode 1 - EDDIE PARRIS

1. In the introduction Darren mentions that football has been a site of unity *and* a site of division and hostility. Can you think of examples of both?
2. "Throughout the interwar period Britain and Wales was undoubtedly a racist society" – what examples does Professor Martin Johnes offer for this? What other examples are you aware of?
3. Professor Johnes suggests that the option for Black people in this period was to live in rural areas away from other Black people or to live in a diverse, but stigmatised community. How does this compare to present day Wales?
4. Eddie was described in one newspaper article as a 'foreign player'. We don't know how Eddie would have described his ethnicity, and terms such as, for example, Welsh Black, African-Caribbean, and mixed-race were less commonly used in his time. Does this make it harder to imagine the reaction to him being selected for Wales?
5. Eddie Parris is the first Black player to play for Wales. How important is it to celebrate players who are the first? Professor Uzo Iwobi suggests he has been written out of history. Do you agree?

6. Armand would like a statue of Eddie. Liz would like a mural. What do you think would be the most appropriate way of remembering Eddie Parris?

Episode 2 - GEORGE BERRY

1. Darren mentions how as a child he had a special affinity with George Berry. Why was this? Does this make sense to you?
2. George says, “I never felt colour mattered, when I was living in Wales”. What caused George to change his view?
3. Darren says that seeing the racism George Berry was subjected to at The Vetch Field in 1981 made him think about “racism, safety, and Welshness”. What do you think he means by this?
4. George was frequently subjected to racist abuse. He mentions ‘the nod’ and how Black players were ‘like a little family’. How does it feel to hear this?
5. In your view, whose responsibility is it to address racism in football and in society?
6. George suggests that there is less overt racism today as there are more players who will call people out. But he suggests that there is still covert racism in the game. What are your thoughts on this?

Episode 3 - WENDY REILLY

1. How did the FAW and FA bans on women’s football affect the game and players?
2. Wendy says she doesn’t resent that she missed out on the TV era of women’s football. How important is it for changemakers to see the bigger picture as well as their immediate goals?
3. Wendy mentions that families were moved out of Pill, and Nathan notices that there is less green space in Ringland now. What do you think are the impact of these actions?
4. Do you agree with Nathan when he says that Wendy’s success as a footballer is largely down to upbringing? What other factors can help someone to succeed?
5. Wendy’s opinion is that there isn’t enough about the history of Wales women’s teams prior to 1993. How would telling the story of women’s football, including the ban, impact school students?

6. Wendy points out that pay is only one of the issues for women's football – grassroots facilities, medical care, qualified coaches are all part of it too. How far do we still have to go before women's football has recovered from the damage that the ban did to the game?

Episode 4 - ROBERT EARNSHAW

1. Darren suggests that we can think of identity as 'the places, people and things with which we identify'. Is this a helpful way to think about identity? Is anything important missing?
2. Darren mentions 'The Tebbit Test', named after Conservative minister Norman Tebbit who suggested that South Asian and Caribbean heritage people in England are not sufficiently integrated if they don't support the England cricket team. Can you tell people which team they should support? Should you?
3. Robert and Darren talk about experiencing racism at school and not feeling that there were any members of staff to support them. How does this compare to George's experience as a footballer? Are these situations a thing of the past in your opinion?
4. Rita talks about wanting her children to feel connected to Zambia and to learn about Welsh and British culture. Is this the role of schools, parents, both – or neither?
5. Robert says that his identity is 'never one thing'. Is this true for everyone?
6. Darren says, "football's 'us and them' narrative doesn't fit neatly for life beyond the game." Do you agree?

Episode 5 - GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

1. Unify's Yusuf Ismail and Shawqi Hasson talk about trying to redefine what it means to be Welsh. Has the diversity of Wales, and Cardiff in particular, been reflected in the popular media over the decades?
2. Sean says 'you cannot be what you cannot see'. Neil says he didn't believe in the phrase 'if you can't see it, you can't be it' when he was young, but he does now that he is older. What is your view of it? If we take it seriously, how do we account for pioneers?

3. Sean identifies the A-licence as a potential barrier to more Black managers being appointed in the league. He says 'the league needs to represent the community it serves'. How might it do that more effectively?
4. Eleeza mentions the work of Amar Cymru in encouraging South Asian fans to watch Wales games. What does an inclusive fan culture look like, in your view?
5. Ahmed mentions how by playing for Cardiff Bay Warriors they are representing the Somali community, Butetown, Cardiff, and Wales. Yacub mentions how, after winning the British Somali Champions League they were 'acknowledged'. How important is it for us all to be acknowledged by those around us?
6. Eleeza sees 2016 as a turning point in viewing herself as Welsh. Yusuf recalls a photo of two of his friends from Grangetown holding the Welsh flag in France. Does inclusivity in football require success on the pitch?

Writing Prompts

1. What stories would you add to The Dragon on My Shirt?
2. Choose one Black, Asian or racially minorised player who has played for Wales and research their career. What were their challenges and successes?
3. Each of the writers in *Welsh (Plural),* the book Darren co-edited with Grug Muse, Hanan Issa, and Iestyn Tyne explores the question, 'what does it mean to imagine Welshness as both distinct and inclusive?' How would you respond to this writing prompt?