

Four ways education can make the world more socially just



It is a very rainy cold night in New Cross, London, but it was warm in the Margaret McMillan Building on the Goldsmiths Campus. Several Educational Studies staff, former and current students, and prospective students had gathered both in the building and online to discuss a vital issue for our times: how can education make the world more socially just? It is a huge topic, but a very important one to consider. The discussion was very fruitful and a few key points emerged by the end of the evening, which I'll sum up here.

ONE: Make every voice count. If there was one strident point to emerge from the evening, it was this. If we are going to institute social justice in the world, then both formal and informal educational settings need to foster listening cultures where everyone feels they can be heard and listened to with respect, kindness and consideration. This is not to say that there shouldn't be disagreements, but the crucial issue here is that people should feel their opinions, their thoughts, their feelings, their experiences count. This is something that all the programmes at Goldsmiths encourage. The [BA Education](#) as Dr Amina Shareef, a lecturer and tutor on the degree, pointed out, is all about giving students the confidence to articulate their views, and to listen to other people. Equally, within the Masters' programmes in Educational Studies, this theme was a constant. Dr Chris Millora, module leader on globalization and education on the [MA Education, Culture, Language and Identity](#), highlighted what happens when people are not given a voice. He showed us a photograph of a bulldozer ploughing down homes in the Philippines, where he is from, in order to build a resort, and pointed out that while for some the bulldozer is a symbol for helping communities become richer by building a resort that fosters tourism, for other people, particularly the local community, the bulldozer represents losing their homes. His module and others on the MA interrogate these issues. Whose voice

really counts in the world? Who is listened to and respected? Too often, the voices of the economically disadvantaged and of marginalized groups are ignored at best, and at worst obliterated.

TWO: Help everyone become critical and creative thinkers. Professor Vicky Macleroy, Head of the [MA Children's Literature](#), talked powerfully about the ways in which her MA explores the ways in which people, children and the world are represented in children's literature. This MA is innovative in the way it helps students on the degree become critical and creative thinkers simultaneously. They read so many wonderful children's texts – written by staff on the course like Professor Michael Rosen and alumni like Dean Atta – and then are given space to respond both critically and creatively with their own analytical essays, podcasts, pictures, and creative writing. On the [MA Creative Writing and Education](#), students are encouraged to use creative writing in all sorts of educational ways: to use it as a form of self-healing, to get communities writing poems, plays and stories about the injustices they see around them. Seb Duncan, alumni of the MA Creative Writing and Education, is just about to publish a novel, [The Book of Thunder and Lighting](#), which explores these issues in some depth. His time-travelling hero undergoes a fantastical psychic and physical journey through London's past and learns about the injustices that have happened throughout the ages to emerge as a changed person.

THREE: Foster the spirit of rebellion against injustice. This was a theme that was raised initially by a student on the [MA Creative Writing and Education](#), Denise Dixon Roberts. She'd run a wonderful workshop earlier in the term for the general public on Creative Rebels. She pointed out that it is often the rebels that change the world for the better. We talked about artists like William Blake and Linton Kwesi Johnson (Goldsmiths' alumni) who fostered this spirit.

FOUR: To use research as a tool for social justice. This was another theme that came up again and again. Dr Chris Millora talked about his own research into literacies in the Global South, and how the label 'literacy' can be oppressive when used in certain ways, if, for example, certain people and communities are labelled 'illiterate'. Emeritus Professor Eve Gregory spoke about her research into literacy which had highlighted a similar issue in the United Kingdom and London. Her research conducted with many other academics over the years has shown that there are many hidden literacies amongst groups who are often labelled as lacking literacy skills, such as the Bangladeshi community and the white working class in the East End of London.

Exciting research within the Educational Studies Department with Social Justice as a key theme:

[BeLiFS: www.belifs.co.uk](http://www.belifs.co.uk)

'Becoming literate in faith settings: Language and literacy learning in the lives of new Londoners' (BeLiFS) is a research project funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council. This is a 3-year long project on four faith groups: the Pentecostalist community from Ghana, the Catholic community from Poland, the Muslim community from Bangladesh and the Hindu community from South India/Sri Lanka.

[Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project \(goldsmithsmdst.com\)](http://goldsmithsmdst.com)

The Critical Connections Project, initiated in 2012 with funding from the [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#), is about enabling young people across the primary and secondary age range to create and share multilingual digital stories. It offers an approach to language learning, literacy and citizenship which recognises that communication is enhanced when plurilingual and digital resources are drawn upon purposefully and creatively. Consistent with Project Based Language Learning (PBL), the value of a wider cross-curricular orientation,

particularly in relation to the arts (drama, music, visual art) is also viewed as highly significant.

Other MAs in the Department of Educational Studies which you might be interested in are:

[MA Education: Culture Language and Identity, soon to be MA in Social Justice](#)

The MA Education: Culture, Language and Identity has been developed into the MA Social Justice in Education (new from September 2024). We build very much upon the strong and popular basis that is the MA Education: Culture, Language and Identity drawing upon the expertise of talented and knowledgeable academics. This programme is designed for you if you are interested in how questions around social justice impact upon education as well as lived aspects of our lives. In part, this new MA aims to address issues faced by those in informal learning contexts as well as formal educators at all levels, international settings and related fields.

You can find full details about this very popular MA on the [website here](#):

[MA Children's Literature](#)

You can find full details about this very popular [MA on the website here](#):

[MA Children's Literature: Illustration Pathway](#)

You can find full details about this very popular MA on the [website here](#):

[MA Arts and Learning](#)

You can find full details about this very popular [MA on the website here](#):

[MA Multilingualism, Linguistics and Education](#)

You can find full details about this very popular MA on [the website here](#):

[MA in Creative Writing and Education](#)

You can learn more about the [MA in Creative Writing and Education here](#).