

Decolonising the Curriculum resource 2023



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Introduction from Professor Al Laville, Dean for Diversity and Inclusion & Co-Chair of Phase 2 Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group

Following our well-received [Decolonising the Curriculum resource](#), we are pleased to share our second resource, which starts by providing our institutional vision and guidance on how to create, and maintain, inclusive Teaching and Learning environments. We acknowledge here that decolonising teaching content, teaching methods, and assessment methods is only part of the picture in providing inclusive Teaching and Learning. I would like to thank the student [Inclusion Consultants](#) and the members of the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group for their expert input here. The resource then includes case examples of how colleagues have successfully engaged in decolonising the curriculum initiatives by utilising student-staff partnership projects. These student-staff partnership projects have been funded by the Diversity and Inclusion Fund and are embedded within the Partnerships in Learning and Teaching scheme, which is led by CQSD. As part of the 2023–2028 action plan for our institutional Bronze Race Equality Charter award, there will be future funding for new student-staff partnership projects that focus on decolonising the curriculum.

In the third section of this resource, we focus on decolonising research and the benefits this can provide to both research and Teaching and Learning contexts. We are grateful to Dr Jo Davies, Dr Oscar David Matallana Uribe, and Professor Roger Matthews, for their expert input to this section.

The resource closes by providing information on several podcasts that aim to develop your understanding of decolonisation and anti-racist practices. I would like to thank Dr Eileen Hyder for compiling this part of the resource. I hope you find this resource useful and please do send in any feedback that you may have.



Introduction from Virenda Adhikari, Reading Students' Union Mature Students Officer & Co-Chair of Phase 2 Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group

I am pleased to introduce this collective resource document, representing the culmination of a remarkable journey shaped by the insights of our student Inclusion Consultants and the expertise of the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group. As the co-chair of the committee, this journey has been an enriching and rewarding experience, underscoring the crucial importance of creating inclusive teaching and learning (T&L) environments.

The resource serves as a representation of student interests, showcasing best practices shared by our student Inclusion Consultants. These practices encompass activities such as challenging dominant colonial narratives, fostering engaging group discussions, and incorporating external speakers, diverse cultural backgrounds, and gender-neutral language to promote inclusivity. Achieving these practices necessitates a visible commitment from the teaching staff, along with a focus on empathy, openness to change, and listening to diverse perspectives.

Additionally, the case studies in the resource emphasise the importance of student-staff partnerships in creating inclusive learning environments. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the student Inclusion Consultants and the members of the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group for their expert input and significant contributions through their participation in meetings, as well as for sharing their articles, case studies, and resources for this document. Without the collaborative effort of all involved, this resource would not have been so enriching and impactful.

Looking ahead, I maintain unwavering confidence in the lasting impact of this resource. With the necessary tools and knowledge, this guide represents a significant stride towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive teaching and learning environment at the University of Reading. I sincerely hope that this resource proves instrumental in our collective pursuit of inclusive excellence and that the best practices it offers find implementation in our lectures and classrooms. I encourage you to explore the contents of this resource, engage in critical dialogue, and contribute to shaping a more inclusive future for our academic community. Together, we can achieve a decolonised curriculum that embraces and respects the unique perspectives and contributions of all.



Section 1: Inclusive Teaching and Learning environments

In November 2022, two listening exercises were completed to understand what inclusive Teaching and Learning (T&L) environments are to students and colleagues. We thank the student Inclusion Consultants and members of the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group for their expertise and insights.

Student perspective

1. Power dynamics

For students, there is a clear importance for colleagues and students to create a safe and comfortable environment that considers and challenges power dynamics and structures. Students should be encouraged to think about their own relationship to power and how that might introduce bias when discussing a culture outside of their own. It may feel uncomfortable talking about equity, i.e. the quality of being fair and impartial in the classroom, but classrooms are inherently political. For example, setting ground rules for pair work such as ensuring each student takes five minutes asking questions and listening to the other, may disrupt an unfair power dynamic between students in which the student with a dominant voice becomes the only speaker.

2. Learning materials

The inclusive environment should take into consideration all students by including a range of sources that encompass non-western themes. Inclusivity and cultural representation elicit attention from students to the learning materials and helps them feel part of the whole learning process. It lets students know that they are being considered, that they belong, and that they are so much more than a "minority group". By developing sense of belonging, there can also be a positive impact on student attainment. In essence, it is important that everyone feels seen and welcome within the environment regardless of who they are. To ensure this, there must be visible commitment from students and colleagues.

3. Challenging perspectives

Furthermore, inclusivity is dependent on variety and for a classroom to be considered inclusive, the lecturer must allow for a variety of viewpoints and provide students with ample structured opportunity to explore those viewpoints and to voice their own. Personal opinions should be valued and met with mutual respect, and the safe environment should enable students to be themselves, whether this is the use of preferred pronouns, being open about past experiences or religious beliefs. There should be active challenging of generalisations, stereotyping and biases.

4. Inclusive language

Resources used within the classroom need to be accessible and include inclusive language. Lectures should be run in a way that allow everyone to participate to the level they are comfortable and to also be mindful of inclusive language. This might include providing intermittent breaks, not picking on specific people for answers but encouraging discussion, and making sure students know that they can leave a lecture for any reason and do not need to justify this. Students also commented that lecturers should also feel welcome regardless of their background, ethnicity, beliefs and preferences. By considering inclusion for students and colleagues, an inclusive environment will enable individuals to share their own lived experiences which others may not have experienced however, the sharing of such experiences further supports learning and appreciation of difference.

Staff perspective

1. Sharing perspectives

Colleagues shared that inclusive T&L environments are when everyone feels safe, represented, valued and listened. Within these inclusive environments, colleagues and students can share their own experiences, evaluate their experience of university and teaching, and have those evaluations listened and responded to. It is crucial to listen to students and colleagues and to avoid one's own assumptions of what an inclusive environment is.

2. Supporting contribution

To enable fully inclusive T&L environments, we need to avoid surface-level and performative inclusivity and make sure inclusivity is embedded throughout all T&L. Students should feel able to ask questions of presented material and the safety to do so is key to enabling an inclusive environment. To support this, lecturers should be welcoming and always providing the opportunity for students to ask questions, regardless of how "trivial" one may feel their question is. Moreover, language and appreciation of different accents, has a significant role in how we address inclusivity and build safe spaces. For example, in classroom activities, it is good practice to find out each student's language background and subsequently, allowing them to use different varieties of language in preparatory work. Please see page 18 for a case study on the importance of language in creating inclusive T&L environments.

3. Representation, engagement and participation

Colleagues also shared that inclusive T&L environments need to focus on the themes of representation, engagement and participation. These themes can be realised in the classroom by including exploration of a wide variety of views, perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, the physical environment needs to be considered e.g. a horseshoe shape for seating is often preferred for openness, and a movable lectern would make the dynamic less hierarchical. Colleagues also stated that inclusive spaces need to consider different cultural backgrounds in relation to preferred ways of experiencing and participating in the classroom. For example, using apps such as Pear Deck in the classroom can enable students to type answers to questions and these answers are then shared with the class anonymously. Tools such as these can increase student participation due to the anonymity.

To support colleagues with developing their own practice in relation to the themes above, we have provided examples and case studies of good practice in this resource booklet (see pages 8 to 18).

Inclusion Consultants

Our student Inclusion Consultants (current University of Reading students advising on inclusive practices) have contributed significantly to the work to creating inclusive Teaching & Learning environments by sharing examples of best practice at the University of Reading, which students have appreciated, and by providing answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

Examples of best practice

1. In the Department of Film, Theatre & Television's Approaches to Film module we spend a couple of sessions on culture in film so students can build frameworks in which to challenge dominant colonial narratives.
2. Including group discussion with peers during seminars always seem to generate more discussion than the lecturer asking questions to the whole class (people tend to sit with those they are more comfortable with, and this seems to give more confidence to discuss content).
3. The use of online question forums which are anonymous for assignment support.
4. Flexible assignments that allow the student to work on area of particular interest or knowledge.
5. Our professor gave us a lecture on genetic variance in nutrition related diseases. He emphasized on how some ethnicities are more susceptible to some diseases and he made a point of mentioning the gaps in the literature for some ethnic groups. This was a good chance to have a global look at disease risk distribution. I would give the suggestion to make such lecture more inclusive: assigning a small task to research the most seen disease in each student's home country and discussing in class. This gives a chance for the student to represent their backgrounds.
6. Giving prayer breaks or at least acknowledging them in longer lectures (when they are two hours).
7. In one of my Psychology modules, we're taught how language is processed in the brain. Instead of focusing specifically on how the English language is processed, our lecturer went on to explain how different languages may differ in terms of processing. They looked into Arabic, Mandarin, Greek and Hindu etc. It's that type of gradual inclusion within the classroom that makes students more interested in learning because they feel included and seen.
8. When our class discuss cultural differences during journal club, we would read the article of the day and often, the question of cross-cultural validity would come up. The class would contribute with their own knowledge about their culture and how the findings from that specific article may not fit one culture. This allows students to feel part of the discussion by being able to bring something to the table. We almost always considered the WEIRD acronym (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic).

Frequently Asked Questions

We acknowledge that colleagues might have questions about inclusive T&L environments. Therefore, the Inclusion Consultants have provided the following FAQ to show the importance of inclusive T&L environments for students:

1. Why is it important to be inclusive?

Inclusivity is essential for several reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, inclusivity is the antithesis to discrimination. Not only is it usually against the law to discriminate against somebody for protected characteristics, but it also can be unpleasant, isolating, and frightening to experience discrimination. Additionally, providing an inclusive environment to all students is motivating, promoting better work ethic in students who see themselves represented in their studies and, on a wider level, feel included in the university community.

2. What are the benefits of being inclusive?

There are many benefits to being inclusive. One of which is creating an environment where all students are fostering at their own pace. This allows them to succeed on their terms and reach their potential without worrying about barriers that may hinder this. Being inclusive also develops the students' sensitivity and empathy towards others, helping to dispel bias and prejudice. Being inclusive also diminishes the disparities between students and the unequal opportunities that may present themselves that will disadvantage the minority.

3. Does inclusivity have an impact on T&L?

100% yes. For some students it is a matter of safety, for others a matter of comfort, but both are just as important as each other.

Students are people, and like all people they want to feel welcomed and like they belong. If a lecturer was to make a comment which upset, offended, or even made a student feel threatened, not only are they not going to trust the lecturer, but there is a high chance they will never attend that seminar/lecture/workshop again. They will avoid that person even to the detriment of their own education. If they do decide to return, they will not be truly paying attention to what is being taught, but rather monitoring what is said and scrutinising the lecturer's choice of words.

Unfortunately, it takes one careless comment to lose all trust and engagement with your students. Yet, this can be remedied.

If you have proven beforehand that students can trust you, that you truly do care and what was said was an error, students are more likely to approach you and point this out to you. Learning how to accept you made a mistake, apologise, and do better is an integral part of creating an inclusive environment. No one expects perfection from anyone, and lecturers are human too; they may make mistakes and that is okay. It is how they handle those mistakes which makes an impact.

4. How do I make sure inclusion is embedded in lectures, assessments and modules?

- When sharing sensitive or potentially triggering content in lectures or if including such content in screencasts/online before the material appears and facilitate students' comfort by making it known that students can leave an in-person lecture for that part if they need to/skip a section of online content that might be distressing to them.
- If students need to leave a lecture at any time for any reason, don't point this out or query it in front of the whole group, as this can be embarrassing and anxiety-inducing.
- When practical field work is mandatory due to it being linked to assessment, insofar as it is possible to, make it accessible for all, e.g. a field trip could be difficult for those with chronic illness, so find alternative arrangements for them to complete the activity. This could be a virtual tour or lecture accessible online, or having guest speakers come to the university rather than sending students away from campus for a talk.
- When sharing examples of work by eminent figures in a certain field in the context of lectures and modules, ensure a diverse range of people are mentioned that aren't solely white, Western, male, heterosexual, and middle class, as has been the focus of much of academia in the past. Focusing only on the work of people of some or all of these traits is exclusionary and prioritises a certain type of knowledge. When a diverse range of people and their work are shared, students are able to feel seen and represented by their studies.
- Ensure case studies include people of all nationalities, races, and ethnicities, as well as countries outside of the UK to ensure greater representation of the university cohort and their lived experiences and culture.
- Where possible, use gender-neutral pronouns/language.

- Ensuring students are included within the classroom is vital to the overall learning process. Lecturers should be willing to foster a safe and welcoming atmosphere that encourages a diversity of viewpoints. What is essential here is the promotion of an attitude of mutual respect for differing viewpoints, as this can empower students to express their unique viewpoints and share their own lived experiences without fearing subsequent criticism. Moreover, actively listening to student contributions and keeping an open mind can maintain the continuous development of a collaborative inclusive atmosphere, instead of imposing preconceived ideas of what inclusivity should look like. To add on, using inclusive language and diverse material can go a long way in involving students within the lecture content presented.

5. How do I know my attempts at being inclusive are working for my students?

One way to know your attempts at being inclusive is effective is through how engaged your students are when you are teaching. Students' attitudes during lectures or seminars can change depending on the relevancy as well as how much they feel that they belong e.g students are usually more active and more open in sharing their own experiences because they are comfortable in their environment. Another way to measure this is how well connected everyone feels during group works or discussions. This can be seen in how positive the level of collaboration is in the classroom. Through this, you can assess how much impact your attempts are making on your students' experiences. Moreover, don't be afraid to ask your students whether they feel included. Taking the time to ask already reassures students that their safety is valued. Oftentimes, the best way to measure improvements is through feedback. Not only will you get a direct answer, but it also helps with fostering an inclusive environment.



6. How do I ensure I'm aware of my student's background?

There are many ways that lecturers can become more conscious of their students' diverse backgrounds. One way is by offering opportunities within the classroom setting to discuss topics that would naturally highlight each student's unique life experiences. This can be taken a step further by then encouraging students to share their experiences with the rest of the class while making sure it relates to the topic. Such open dialogue would not only acquaint lecturers regarding the diverse groups present within the classroom setting, but would also form a solid basis for further research and understanding for each group's distinctions. Another is simply taking the time to get to know each student. A standout experience I've encountered throughout my time at university is when I'd attended one of my lecturer's office hours, whereby after they'd answered my academic questions, they took the time to ask me questions. As an international student who had only recently arrived in the UK, their willingness to listen, acknowledge, and learn about my experiences felt incredibly reassuring. Moreover, whatever was asked felt like it was done with the intent of gathering information towards improving my own academic experience. This was a circumstance where I felt that the lecturer truly valued their students as individuals and truly cared about advancing their module's overall educational output.

7. How can we capture information about students to an extent students feel comfortable?

Sometimes it is worth making the statement that people do not have to share more than they are comfortable with and ensuring that students are aware of this.

Sometimes it is also good to tell students that, if the task at hand invokes negative reactions or emotions, they do not have to do that exact topic or question. Let them choose to alter the question and do not press into the why they did so. Let them know that a simple "I am not comfortable with this" is enough for you to make arrangements for them. That is how you ensure that students do not feel pressured to overshare.

With regards to learning about students, pay attention to what they personally are interested in within your topic. For example, in literature, students are more likely to gravitate to areas which have representation of them or discuss aspects of their identity within their essays.

While it is not good to assume people's identity, it is good to note that there is an interest there and providing more material which reflects their interests will not only engage the student, but will also help them feel more comfortable should this indeed be something they personally relate to.

8. How can departments/lecturers support external speakers to be inclusive?

Sometimes it is worth doing a background check before inviting a speaker. Not doing this preliminary search is how you end up with upset and frustrated students.

Other ways can include a brief meeting to “train” them. This doesn’t have to be long, and would be more of a discussion about knowing what content is going to be discussed, and highlighting to the speaker areas which may cause problems/ways they may want to word things.

A speaker who knowingly (or unknowingly) causes offence is not going to be welcomed by students, and it would be better not to have the guest than to insist they remain and defend them.

9. What are key skills for a lecturer to have to enable inclusive T&L environments?

A key skill a lecturer must have to enable T&L environments is always welcoming changes. We are progressively changing and in order to not be left behind lecturers have to be ready to change and adapt in order to help their students succeed. Another key skill is empathy. I feel as though lecturers who are most empathetic create the best environment for their students. Not only are they understanding of various experiences, they are also open to learning just as much as their students. Which is something we, students, value when entering a classroom. Another skill is self-awareness. When lecturers are aware that their methods aren’t working anymore and will be ready to change them in order to improve – it tells the students that their best interest comes first. It’s a breath of fresh air knowing lecturers are consistently considering what would benefit their students.

10. How can I be confident when talking about D&I?

To begin to feel more comfortable talking about D&I, it is first important to listen. Seek out and listen to a wide variety of people whose identity differs from yours, which can include people of a different race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religion etc. to you. Social media can be a great tool for this, as can books and podcasts. By listening, you learn about and gain a deeper understanding of perspectives, cultures, ideas, and experiences different to your own. This can create more confidence when talking about D&I. It is important, necessary even, to be open to getting things wrong and being corrected if and when you do, which is likely because nobody gets everything right every time. Use these moments as an opportunity to be humble, to learn, and to do better next time with your increased understanding. Being open to a collaborative dialogue between yourself as a staff member and students, in which everyone contributes according to their own unique life experience, is not only a great way to learn more from each other, but it also allows all students to be involved and feel able to contribute.



11. How can teaching staff be supported to be inclusive?

Meetings and discussions can be held on multiple occasions in order to help staff know how to create inclusive material, but also by inviting students to talk about their experiences. Hearing from students they have taught or might teach proves how effective the effort was for them, but also allows students to share what worked and what didn't work from other faculty members. This way, staff can take ideas and adapt them to their own practises/departments.

Other ways include online resources which may assist staff in better understanding the individuals they may be teaching, support groups for staff consisting of other staff members who are also trying to implement inclusive teaching, and encouraging staff to ask for feedback from their students. Feedback should be encouraged to talk about the positive aspects as well as the negative, and all students should be encouraged to participate.

Another important aspect is teaching staff how to accept critical feedback. A negative comment is not to be taken as a personal attack even if it feels as such. Being able to accept your mistakes, apologising sincerely and without excess, and striving to do better is an integral part to learning how to improve your overall efforts to be inclusive.

12. What are the Do's and Don'ts when discussing diverse groups?

When it comes to such discussions, always make sure you approach them with an open-minded attitude that is both respectful and eager for growth. Do not attempt to enforce your own assumptions, especially if they have no factual basis or are aimed at perpetuating certain stereotypes. Instead, be willing to ask questions, as they allow group members to accurately describe their own lived experiences and express how to correctly go about describing them. Forming an opinion or perception about a group without asking (such as assuming someone's race, sexuality, or gender identity) can be detrimental to the overall discussion since it would showcase an unwillingness to learn and can offend individuals. It is also important to make sure that surface-level inclusivity, such as tokenism, is avoided. Instead, do make sure to approach discussion topics with a deep consideration for the variety of diverse groups instead of just including them in the discussion as an afterthought. What's more, sharing your own background and experiences can be especially beneficial, as such a willingness to open up can establish a safe space for individuals from other groups to share their own experiences.



13. Why is it important to practice inclusivity consistently? How can we be sure to make sure this isn't just a tick box exercise every now and then?

It is important to practice inclusivity consistently to the point it becomes a habit as not only will it increase student engagement but it also helps students be more mindful and open-minded to the wider world. Practising inclusivity consistently fosters a welcoming environment that brings everyone together whilst also making sure that disadvantaged students are given an equal footing. Ways to make sure this is done consistently: (1) lecturers should always question whether they are being inclusive whenever creating and presenting learning materials, (2) always taking into account their students' background and experiences, (3) taking into account of the wider worldview whenever discussing in class to make sure students feel included and, (4) making sure students are always comfortable in the classroom. These are only some of the ways lecturers can ensure inclusivity is happening consistently. So long as you're always taking into account of everyone's point of views, you're already one step closer to being consistent.

14. How can I engage in discussions with students regarding D&I?

Surveys at the start of term may help you understand your students better. This may initially allow you to see the interests and desires of your students and help you to get to know them better. Keeping this anonymous would encourage student participation.

It may also be good to keep an anonymous survey open and available to students throughout the course of your module. This way, students can provide feedback in an anonymous way with potential chances to discuss with the lecturer more in-depth if they are able/comfortable to. This does not just have to be negative feedback, it can also be positive.

Other things to note is that students are ultimately just people. If you respect them, listen to them, and respond to them in a welcoming manner, they will be more likely to trust you. Trust is key to being able to have discussions with students about what they want to see from you and how you can help them feel more included.

15. How can you ensure all students come into your lecture on an even footing?

The most important way to try to ensure students come into the lecture on an even footing is to avoid assumptions. For example, try not to assume that every single student understands an assignment title, the difference between "describe" vs "explain" etc. Setting your own expectations for all students or signposting them to where they can learn more about your expectations whether it be in academic writing or anything else will help avoid such gaps. Acknowledging equity pedagogy is also paramount. Once you understand that not everyone has the same lived experience which may affect their learning, you should aim to adapt your teaching to facilitate this. This may look like providing extra support/drop-in sessions for your lecture series or creating avenues in which your students can address any issues they may have with your content.





Question-led approach to creating inclusive Teaching and Learning environments

The Inclusion Consultants have created the following questions to support you with creating inclusive Teaching and Learning environments at local level. The questions should be used to prompt individual reflection and to inform further discussion with module and programme teams.

- How do you create a space for conversations about inclusivity in the classroom environment? How do you carry these conversations across the module? How do you use these discussions to inform changes to modules?
- Are all the students in the module able to participate during the session, or do they feel out of place? How do you know?
- Are a range of voices being heard during lectures and seminars?
- What exercises or activities do you include in your teaching to allow critical reflection on the subject matter and to actively encourage a range of perspectives?
- How does broadening the scope of the educational content and discussions enrich the student learning experience and improve the staff-student relationship?
- How can you make sure that the measures you implement are not performative diversity measures and have actual effect?
- Do you realise any increase in participation by students when you make an emphasis on cultural diversity in [insert subject]?
- Have you considered the diversity of your students' backgrounds when designing my presentation/lecture?
- Are there any triggering aspects of your lecture/presentation or recommended reading list. If so, have you put in place trigger warnings for sensitive content beforehand?
- Do students have an avenue to suggest case studies/authors/articles to you that help represent them and foster a sense of inclusion?
- Do the teaching resources provided support all students?
- Do the lectures/group discussion reflect on limitations of resources?
- How do you know you're being inclusive? Does your way of teaching create an inclusive learning environment for all? How so?
- How has the curriculum (for your given subject) changed over the past 5 years? What consideration are you currently taking when working towards the decolonisation of your teaching curriculum? Which aspects of the curriculum do you recognise might be further improved? How might that be achieved?



Inclusive Teaching & Learning environment case studies

To further support colleagues with creating inclusive Teaching and Learning environments, we have supplied two case studies to illustrate how colleagues at the University of Reading are undertaking this work.

Case Study 1: Decolonising the Curriculum: The Power of Small Steps

Dr Emma Pape,
Lecturer in Social Psychology

The notion of decolonising the curriculum can sometimes feel like an overwhelming task for educators, once they begin unravelling the various layers of historical White privilege and bias in higher education (HE). The first step is for lecturers to become aware of just how colonised our curriculum and teaching practices have been. However, this awareness, in itself, can open up a minefield of questions. In my experience, it is quite common for those who are new to the arena of decolonising the curriculum to ask, “Where on earth do I start?”

A widely acknowledged component of decolonising the curriculum is in addressing racial disparities regarding the taught content and reading lists that we offer our students. As a lecturer in social psychology and expert in intergroup relations, covering topics which are culturally relevant to all members of our racially diverse cohort is a relatively simple task. Similarly, given the relative cultural and racial diversity of researchers in my field, it is not difficult for me to enhance feelings of inclusivity and representation amongst my students, simply by signposting them to evidence reported by a diverse range of researchers and academics. However, for educators of subjects which do not naturally lend themselves to these approaches, what can be done to begin broaching this issue?

The first necessary task is simply to listen to your students. Informal discussions and evaluations which are listened to and, importantly, promptly responded to and actioned upon (where possible), empower students to speak openly about what they require to feel more included and represented. From my own informal conversations with students and staff, I have identified and trialled several simple techniques, which require minimal effort from lecturers, but can have

a significant impact on our students in terms of feeling valued, represented and heard within their teaching and learning environment.

First, when using visual aids in your teaching materials, consciously select those which represent the wonderful diversity in our student cohort. For example, when selecting photographs of people to illustrate certain concepts, theories or pieces of evidence in my classes, I make the conscious effort to select ones that represent all races; cultures; ethnicities; religions; genders; sexual orientations.

This approach can also be applied very effectively to the use of names that we might use in illustrations within our teaching. For example, when elaborating on a particular concept or testing our students’ application of knowledge, we might ask questions in the context of a hypothetical individual. The simple effort of using a diverse range of names to represent all genders; races; nationalities and so forth can have a big effect on students’ feelings of inclusion and representation.

Lastly, students value transparency. Do not underestimate the importance of pointing out the “elephant in the room”. If your particular subject area is woefully lacking in terms of racial (or other) diversity, the simple act of acknowledging this and the limitations that it may raise within the field, can serve as a catalyst for frank class discussions. These discussions not only have the power for promoting both awareness and inclusivity, but may also result in student insights that we, as academics, might overlook.

While decolonising the curriculum can initially feel like a monumental task, it is important to remember that every big journey begins with one small step.

Case Study 2: Transformational practices in the decolonisation of language education: critiquing hierarchies of language and culture in the development of a university-wide module.

Dr Tony Capstick,

Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics

Introduction

The choice of language that teachers and learners use together in classrooms all over the world is based on the political, social and economic trajectories of those individuals, communities and educational institutions. Political decisions over many centuries have led to the use of Standard British English in the teaching, learning and assessment of learners at universities in the UK. In our *Globalization and Language* module, we seek to interrogate the principles, values and worldviews that inform the selection of knowledge in modules about language use and language learning, and to account for the centres as well as margins that make it possible to reimagine these relations.

To explore what teachers can do to respect the positionings of students, and those students' language resources, as well as the positionings of those taking part in research, this case study explores the co-construction of the Part 1 undergraduate module *Globalization and Language*, which is taught in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at Reading.

A body of work now exists across generations and continents in relation to decolonisation. Decolonisation represents a philosophical, and some would say theoretical, approach that cuts across education at all levels. Arguably, the best examples of decolonial scholarship do not come from the Western World and have not appeared in peer-reviewed journals but are firmly rooted in the Majority World. For this reason, the *Globalization and Language* module learning outcomes, content and assessment have been designed with colleagues in Pakistan and Iraq as well as in the UK. This global approach has helped us to understand how we repair the harm done by not recognising authentic histories in research and teaching about language use and language education and by preventing ongoing harm which is perpetuated

in historically-informed stereotypes, structures, systems, research and teaching. This informed our approach to the design of a module which had the following goal: to construct new ways of working, thinking and relating to each other which recognise historically informed colonial assumptions, and which seek to treat every individual equally and equitably regarding respect and power.

Context of the module

Working with our partner universities in Pakistan and Iraq, we learned that if we try to understand the past without connecting it to the present, it is history, not decolonisation, and that if we understand the past and how it connects to the present, but do not attempt to repair, it is not going to be transformative and will not address power inequality, which is necessary for decolonisation to happen. For example, our collaborations with teachers, researchers and students in the Majority World helped us to understand that decolonisation is not simply a thought exercise: if it does not include transformational acts, it is tokenism.

Our *Globalisation and Language* partnership projects, between the University of Reading in the UK and universities in Pakistan and Iraq, involved learning about how the histories and ideologies of language education play out in education today, and how interrogating assumptions about language can help teachers and students think through the principles, values and worldviews which inform our curricula.

Working together, we identified the different ways that university undergraduate and postgraduate courses relating to language and culture are based on the assumption that Western-centric knowledge is humanity's only valid way of knowing. Using work by Tuhiwai Smith (1999), we took up this challenge to the coloniality of modern forms of higher education by looking specifically at the development of curricula and pedagogy which

takes a decolonial lens to the hierarchical linguistic and intellectual relationships between dominant and marginalised populations. Translingual activism (Pennycook, 2008) is adopted in the Globalisation and Language module as the theoretical orientation for teaching and assessment, as a means of ensuring that the decolonisation of language education includes transformational practices in our own provision. Rather than seeing English as a neutral medium of international communication, the module seeks to understand its role as an exclusionary class dialect, favouring particular people, countries, cultures and forms of knowledge. Students explore opportunities to take up Ramanathan's critique of the study of English and vernacular medium education in India which has shown how English is a deeply divisive language, bound up with the denigration of vernacular languages, cultures and ways knowing (2005: 112). Students explore the relationship between English and their own language varieties in order to establish the principles, values, and worldviews which are part of their own communities as well as in education systems in India, Pakistan, the UK and New Zealand. Embedded in their module learning outcomes, students:

- Describe and explain political, economic, and social reasons for the spread and influences of different languages, especially in relation to the spread of global languages and colonialism
- Analyse media, literary and academic texts on the spread of English, language standards, language policies, migration and multilingualism, and discuss how they reflect people's attitudes towards different languages and the political and social consequences of language use
- Gather and analyse their own linguistic data related to the spread of English as a global language or the spread of multilingualism and superdiversity

Assessment of the module and future plans

For the assessed *World Englishes* project for this module, students at Reading meet with university students in Pakistan or Iraq in three online sessions across the term. The topics that the students discuss relate to the key concepts from the Globalisation and Language lectures and readings from the Majority World. After the discussion, each student has one week to write their online blog in response to the following:

Blog 1: What language varieties are used in your context?

Blog 2: What genre of English do you use for your assessed work at university and what are some of the challenges of writing in this genre?

Blog 3: What new language varieties are used in a community that you know well?

In their blogs, students focus on the cultural, social, economic and political aspects of colonialism and globalisation discussed in the lectures and readings.

We are currently working with Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan, one of our partners for this project, who wish to run a similar module in their School of Education. Our colleagues in Lahore see the benefits in taking a decolonial lens to their studies and we continue to work with them to design materials that benefit both University of Reading students as well as students studying in Pakistan and Iraq.

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Section 2: Student-staff partnerships in Decolonising the Curriculum

Funded by the Diversity and Inclusion Partnerships in Learning and Teaching (PLanT) initiative 2022/23, we supply three case studies to further illustrate how student-staff partnerships support effective initiatives to decolonise the curriculum.

Case Study 3: Decolonising the Law – a case study of the staff-student partnership at the School of Law

Elizabeth Conaghan,
Associate Professor, School of Law

Introduction

This case study reflects on the experience of the staff-student partnership at the School of Law. It was our aim to draw on the work done at the University on Decolonising the Curriculum and to engage with it in a discipline-specific context. What might decolonisation look like at the School of Law?

Background

A qualifying law degree (QLD) requires a number of compulsory modules to be taught. At first glance, this would seemingly limit our ability to make radical change. But as the writer and academic Folúkẹ Adébí sí acknowledges, decolonisation should not simply be a “tick box” exercise or performative attempt to diversify the curriculum:

“It is important to note, that as a theory and practice within legal knowledge, decolonisation cannot be its own goal. In other words, a critical adoption of decolonisation should be done for the purpose of the world it may produce, and not just for a department to identify itself as ‘decolonised’”

(Adébí sí 2023:11)

At its heart, a decolonial mindset seeks not simply to “acknowledge”, but to **“disrupt and dismantle”** (Adébí sí 2023:11) the continuing legacies of colonialism.

At the School of Law, we sought to explore this further by working in equitable partnership with our students, and by hearing from others outside our institution about their decolonisation praxis and experience.

Methodology

The University regularly awards funding to support Partnerships in Learning and Teaching (PLanT). In 2022/23, additional funding was allocated for projects with a specific focus on decolonising the curriculum. (And this increased funding initiative will continue until at least 2027/28).

The School of Law successfully applied for PLanT funding for a project that sought to recruit three student partners. Almost all of the funding would be used to pay a bursary to each student. It was important to us that students were paid for their work because that would help to democratise this co-curricular opportunity.

We advertised the project to all students at the School of Law and we then held short online interviews. We were delighted by the number of very high calibre candidates; we therefore applied to other funding sources to raise more money. As a result, we were able to appoint and fund eight student partners.

Students as agents of change

As Dianiti and Oberhollenzer (2020:3) note, the involvement of students in collaborative projects can be broadly categorised in two ways: student “voice” (Cook-Sather, 2014b) and student “action”. (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). Student voice seeks to garner students’ views, but student action sees students as agents of change.

For the project at the School of Law we saw our students as active participants in a shared decolonising narrative; it felt appropriate that the collaboration should attempt to reflect Dianiti and Oberhollenzer’s definition of “student as partners” (SaP):

“SaP offers a counter-narrative to teaching and learning in higher education by disrupting power structures and engaging students in meaningful relationships. It aims to interrupt the bystander model of traditional education by offering a place where students become active and engaged leaders...”

(2020:1)

We met with the student partners to discuss the project. The students were invited to choose an area that they would like to research in pairs. These decisions were entirely led by them, but with the promise of support from staff as they undertook the work. The students looked at decolonising the law from various perspectives, and this afforded a richness and diversity to their findings.



The Students’ Research

The eight student partners undertook the following areas of research:

- A survey which gathered views on what students knew and thought about “decolonisation” of the legal curriculum;
- Semi-structured interviews with past and present students about their experiences;
- Compilation of a list of useful resources including books, blogs, podcasts, and journal articles;
- An overview of the decolonising work being undertaken at other law schools; and
- Consideration of and reflection on the challenges faced in any attempt to decolonise the law

Dissemination and Sharing

After the students had undertaken their research, we hosted a symposium to which staff and students were invited. The students presented the work they had done, and we also heard from guest speakers from other institutions that we had invited to join us.

Our guests included two academics who had recently undertaken decolonising research at the University of Oxford; they told us about their co-curricular “decolonising the law discussion group”. We also had an academic member of staff and four students join us from the University of Birmingham. They shared their experiences of an optional first year module called, “Decolonising Legal Concepts”.



The mutual sharing of experiences, praxis, and rationale for decolonisation provided fresh insights and ideas.

Next steps

We will continue our work at the School of Law on decolonisation, but with the understanding that it is a journey rather than a destination. This will include considering how the recommendations arising from the students' research can be implemented.

We will also continue the work that is being done on the "awarding gap", this includes an initiative called the Reciprocal BAME DI-lawgues which seeks to engage staff and students in equitable conversation.

Reflections and tips

For those considering a staff-student partnership on a decolonising project, these would be our top tips:

1. Think about how you recruit students.

Is it equitable and open? Where possible, offer a bursary because this democratises the opportunity.

2. Consider and agree on the nature of your partnership.

Will your project consider the student voice, or will the students be acting as agents of change?

3. **Support your students.** The work of decolonisation can be difficult for many reasons. Where students have been given autonomy, check that they are happy with that role. Generally, we would recommend that students work in groups or pairs.
4. **Offer your students an opportunity to share their work.** This could be within the school or department, at University level, at another institution, or at a conference.
5. **Develop links with other institutions.** Where possible, it can be a real encouragement to meet with staff and students at other institutions who are undertaking similar projects.
6. **Follow up.** Ensure that the results of your project are not left on the shelf; it's important that those invested in the work see tangible evidence of implementation and practical change.



Concluding thoughts: decolonisation begins at home

Two of our student partners wrote the following as part of their research:

“Overcoming challenges to decolonisation requires a large degree of honesty specifically in the legal context so that students are able to think critically and independently: this requires acknowledging that the law has played an important role in reproducing mass inequality, exploitation of labour, and oppression”

“Staff need to undertake self-decolonisation”

And a final observation: the School of Law is situated in Foxhill House, the former home of the Victorian architect, Alfred Waterhouse. He and his immediate family directly benefited from financial investments in the transatlantic slave trade. (For more on this, see UCL’s [Centre for the Studies of Legacies of British Slavery](#))

It isn’t just the theoretical spaces that need decolonisation, the very buildings we inhabit can be imbued with the legacies of colonialism and oppression.

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Case study 4: Exploring the decolonisation of maths and meteorology modules

Professor Joy Singrayer,

Joint Head of Department of Meteorology

Decolonising STEM subjects is often perceived as more challenging than addressing colonial influences in humanities subjects, or less relevant, due to the focus on technical knowledge. How can one introduce different perspectives into differential equations? Does awareness of the views of an individual whose name used in a mathematical constant impact student engagement? The staff in our School of Mathematical, Physical, and Computational Sciences (SMPCS) have expressed a desire to explore decolonisation, but many are cautious about avoiding performative actions and seek authentic activities that could lead to real change in engagement and outcomes for both themselves and their students.

To approach this challenge, we decided to focus on curriculum co-design through student-staff partnerships at the module level. This approach offered feasibility within the scope of the project and allowed for the potential replication of ideas and approaches by other conveners, hopefully leading to expanded impacts over time. Our student-staff partnerships set out to co-create ideas for decolonising the curriculum, drawing from our experiences with two specific modules: an MSc module on climate change and a first-year undergraduate calculus module.

The first module, convened by Joy Singrayer in the Meteorology department, focussed on climate change and attracts a high proportion of international students.



Although only covered briefly in the curriculum, there are clear opportunities to address historical associations of meteorology and climate with empire, and of colonial legacies that continue influence science and policy decisions around global climate change. In contrast, the second module, convened by Nick Biggs in the Mathematics and Statistics department, is a first-year undergraduate calculus module with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds but fewer international students.

This module extensively covers technical solutions for differential equations and currently provides little historical context.

Our collective approach involved journaling to reflect on our experiences as participants or conveners in each module session. We critically examined the teaching and learning environment, course content and resources, and the assessment methods. Additionally, we considered our own positionality and biases in relation to the decolonisation agenda. To support our research, build trust, and foster co-design, we conducted student-staff workshops at the beginning, middle, and end of the term. We acknowledged the discomfort that arose from being honest about our varying levels of understanding regarding decolonisation. An open, listening, and non-judgmental approach was essential for both students and staff.

While the co-designed developments in the Climate Change and Calculus modules naturally differed, we discovered common themes. One of these themes was the students' desire for a platform to share their individual perspectives and learn from their peers. For instance, in the Climate Change module, following a mid-module workshop, we decided to screen a film that highlighted the existential crisis of sea level rise for low-lying island nations. The subsequent student-led discussion, drawing from personal experiences, proved to be one of the most impactful and engaging sessions in the entire module. Although the module primarily focuses on the science of climate change, this experience enabled us to reflect on how science is produced, and how colonial power hierarchies influence the ways scientific knowledge is used in decision-making processes.

Another significant aspect that emerged was the students' need for flexible engagement with their specific interests related to decolonising the curriculum. For example, in the Calculus module, we discussed the introduction of optional research topics aligned with the themes covered in particular mathematics problem sheets. This initiative aims to broaden students' research skills, foster personal engagement, and encourage the sharing of individual perspectives. Topics may include exploring non-Western historical schools of mathematics and highlighting notable mathematicians. By integrating these optional research topics, we want to create space for students to pursue their interests and contribute to decolonising the curriculum.

By adopting a student-staff partnership model, our project has successfully initiated transformative changes in two STEM modules within SMPCS. Through the incorporation of diverse perspectives and flexible engagement, we aim to effect real change in student engagement and outcomes.

The approach we have taken will continue to guide the design of future iterations of these modules. As part of our ongoing work, we are in the process of compiling a comprehensive report that provides recommendations and further ideas for module conveners in STEM disciplines. The project serves as a starting point for the broader process of decolonising STEM education, emphasizing that continuous research, reflection, and collaboration among staff and students is crucial for sustaining progress.

Student and staff partners:

Marshall Alexander, Joan Badebye, Nick Biggs, Serin Binoy, Haisey Chen, Monday Chota, Eme Dean-Lewis, Amirah Ennaouri, Leo Haslett, Sai Kulkarni, Joy Singarayer, Nedim Sladic, Louise Strange, Vedant Vairagi

Case study 5: Decolonising a Geography and Environmental Science Module

Professor Hong Yang

School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science (SAGES), University of Reading

Abstract

This project focuses on the decolonisation of the curriculum within the School of Archaeology, Geography, and Environmental Science (SAGES), with a particular emphasis on the Air Pollution module. Diversifying the reading list is identified as a key strategy for decolonising the curriculum, as it introduces diverse perspectives and challenges the current biases. The project conducted a survey to gather student perspectives on decolonisation, revealing a broad consensus on the importance of diversifying the reading list and including knowledge from the Global South. Interviews with students further highlighted the recognition of decolonisation as a vital process for valuing marginalised groups and their knowledge. The project serves as a compelling example within SAGES, with the potential to inspire broader educational changes. The findings emphasize the need for ongoing commitment to decolonisation and inclusive learning environments, involving continuous consultations and improvements to ensure a representative curriculum.

Introduction

The QAA Geography Subject Benchmark Statement emphasizes that one of the core values underpinning the inclusive learning community geography is “attentiveness to the opportunities and challenges raised by decolonial imperatives” (QAA, 2022). Decolonisation of the curriculum is the process of analysing and interrogating how disciplines have been shaped by colonial history, and the impact of this on individuals and communities (Greer, 2020). The decolonising process seeks to challenge and dismantle the ways in which the academy operates to privilege the needs of some groups and marginalise those of others. Decolonising is not about deleting knowledge or histories that have been developed in the West or colonial nations; rather, it is about reconnecting, reordering and reclaiming knowledge and

teaching methodologies that have been submerged, hidden or marginalised. There is no universal template, and decolonising the curriculum needs to be contextual to disciplines and subject areas.

In the subjects of physical geography and environmental science, there is still a prevalent incorrect belief that science is objective and neutral (Esson et al., 2017). In this student-staff partnership project, we have worked on one module (Air Pollution) at the School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science (SAGES).

Diversifying the reading list is one of the quick approaches to begin decolonising the curriculum, serving as a platform for introducing diverse perspectives and challenging the dominance of Western-centric narratives (de Sousa Santos, 2018). The reading list can be used to incorporate works from authors of different ethnicities, cultures, and geographical locations, thereby broadening the scope of knowledge and understanding. This can help to challenge and deconstruct the Eurocentric bias that is often inherent in academic curricula (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Moreover, a decolonised reading list can foster critical thinking by encouraging students to question established norms and engage with alternative viewpoints. This can lead to a more nuanced understanding of the world, promoting empathy and cross-cultural understanding (Bhambra et al., 2018).

This project serves as a compelling example within the SAGES. Its outcomes have the potential to garner increased attention from both staff and students, emphasizing the importance of decolonising the curriculum and diversifying pedagogical approaches within the school. Moreover, the impact of this initiative is not confined to the boundaries of SAGES; it can also inspire and inform similar efforts in other departments and institutions.

By demonstrating the tangible benefits of a decolonised and diversified curriculum, this project can act as a catalyst for broader educational reform, fostering a more inclusive and representative academic environment both within our school and beyond.

Methods

This project primarily encompasses three comprehensive steps. Initially, a collaborative partnership was established between staff and students with the shared objective of decolonising the Air Pollution module. This partnership was instrumental in fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership over the decolonisation process.

The second phase involved the actual decolonisation of the module, with a particular emphasis on the reading list. Staff and students worked together to critically review and revise the reading list, ensuring it included diverse perspectives and voices that challenge traditional Western-centric narratives. This process was not merely about adding new texts, but also about rethinking the ways in which knowledge is constructed and presented in the curriculum.

The third step of the project will involve conducting a survey and a series of interviews to gather students' feedback on the revised module. This will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the decolonisation efforts and identify areas for further improvement. The feedback will be used to refine the module and ensure it continues to evolve in line with the principles of decolonisation.

Results & Discussion

Survey

A survey was conducted to gauge student perspectives on the decolonisation of the curriculum. The demographic breakdown of the respondents was as follows: 60% identified as white, while 40% belonged to the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) group (Figure 1).

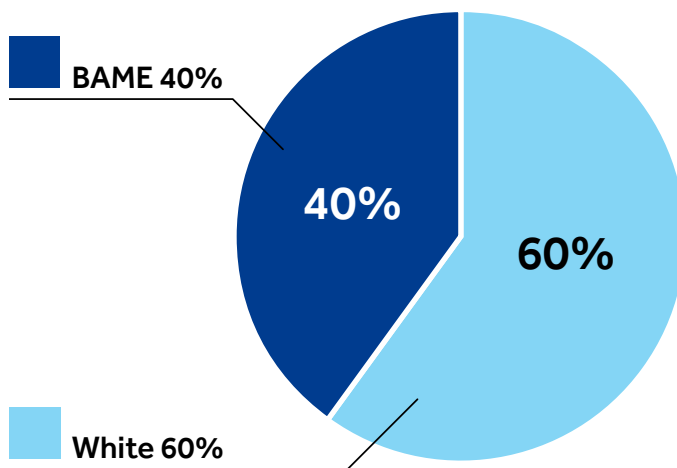


Figure 1. Demographic breakdown of questionnaire participants by ethnic group. BAME refers to the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) group.

When asked whether they believed their course curriculum would benefit from decolonisation, 35% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 2). However, a significant proportion, 45%, remained neutral on this issue, suggesting a potential lack of awareness or understanding about the implications of decolonisation.

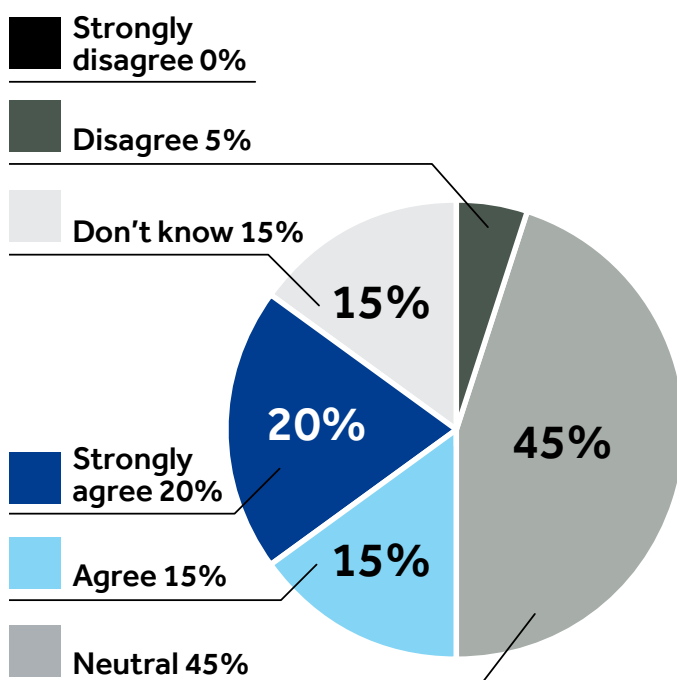


Figure 2. Students' views on "The curriculum of my course would benefit from decolonisation".

The survey also explored specific strategies for decolonisation. When presented with the statement, “In order to decolonise the curriculum, staff should diversify the reading list,” a substantial 65% of students either agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 3). Only a small fraction, 5%, disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating a broad consensus on the importance of incorporating diverse sources and perspectives in the reading materials.

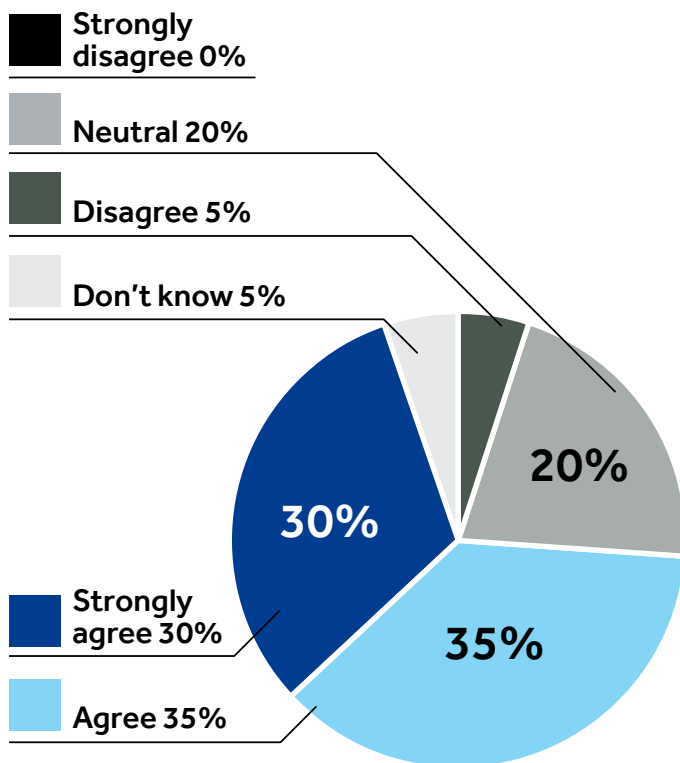


Figure 3. Students' views on "In order to decolonise the curriculum staff should diversify the reading list".

Furthermore, when asked about the inclusion of more knowledge from the Global South as a means to decolonise the curriculum, an overwhelming 75% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 4). Notably, there were no respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposition, suggesting a widespread recognition of the value of integrating knowledge from traditionally underrepresented regions into the curriculum.

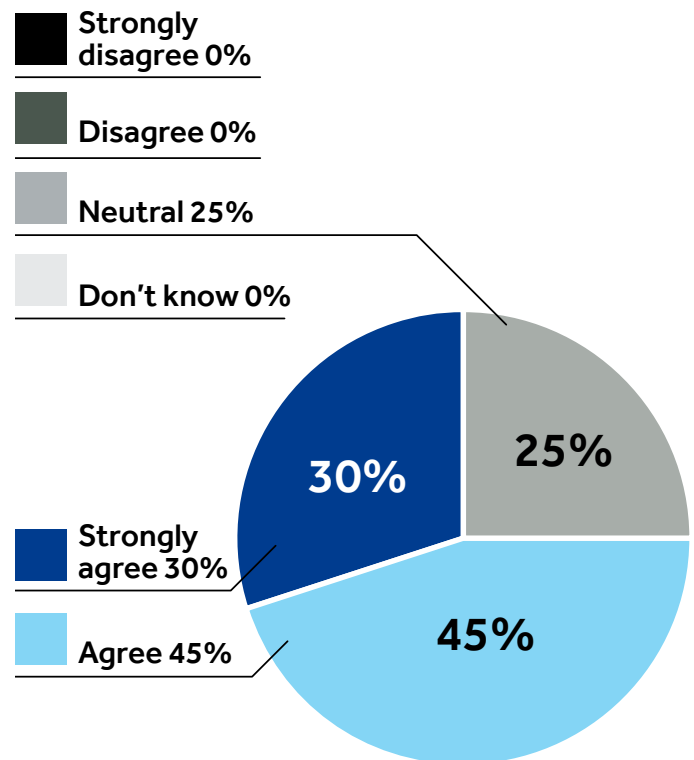


Figure 4. Students' views on "In order to decolonise the curriculum staff should include more knowledge from global south".

Interviews

Students are increasingly recognizing the importance of decolonising the curriculum and are actively engaging with this process. They understand that the knowledge and perspectives of marginalised groups, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, need to be valued and integrated into the curriculum. Some students have emphasized the urgency of decolonising the curriculum, and one student exemplified:

"As students have different needs and experiences, we need a curriculum system that meets these needs and reflects their experiences"

Many students also valued the importance of decolonising the curriculum. For example, one student stated:

"It (Decolonising the curriculum) recognises and respects the knowledge, culture and history of indigenous peoples and other marginalised communities who have historically been marginalised or excluded from mainstream education."

Reading lists play a pivotal role in the educational journey of a student. They function as guides, shaping the academic exploration and fuelling the intellectual curiosity of the students. The books and materials provided on reading lists not only present a roadmap for the students' study but also form the basis for the development of critical thinking, analytical skills, and a nuanced understanding of various subjects. For example, one student commented:

“A decolonised reading list can help promote diversity and inclusion by including texts written by authors from diverse backgrounds. By integrating a variety of voices and perspectives, students can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the world and broaden their understanding of it, while also promoting empathy and respect for different cultures”.

Another student also emphasized the improved critical thinking skills achieved by diversifying the reading list as follows:

“A reading list for decolonisation can develop critical thinking skills, which can help to find adaptive solutions to specific problems in different regions”.

Most students are stratified with the progress of decolonising the curriculum at the Department of Geography and Environmental Science.

For example, one student stated:

“I think the decolonisation of the Geography and Environmental Sciences Department curriculum does a good job of covering different practical examples from around the world in the course, providing different solutions to local situations and promoting students' understanding of diversity.”

To further decolonising the curriculum, students mentioned the importance of diversify the teaching staff. One student commented:

“Invite lecturers from more regions to participate in course planning”.

Conclusion

This project has made good strides toward creating a more inclusive and representative learning environment. The updated reading list, which incorporates diverse perspectives and voices, has been well-received by students, demonstrating the positive impact of such initiatives on student engagement and learning.

However, it is important to acknowledge that decolonising a curriculum is not a one-time effort, but a continuous process that requires ongoing commitment. The positive feedback from students is encouraging, but it also underscores the need for further work. This includes not only expanding and refining the reading list, but also the overall structure of the module to ensure it aligns with the principles of decolonisation.

Future efforts should also involve regular consultations with students, educators, and experts in the field of decolonisation to ensure the module continues to evolve and improve. Additionally, the success of this project should serve as a catalyst for similar initiatives across other modules and disciplines, as the decolonisation of education should be a holistic and institution-wide endeavour.

Acknowledgement

I thank the financial support from the University of Reading Partnerships in Learning and Teaching (PLanT) Fund and all the students participating in this project.

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Case study 6: Using zines to decolonise the curriculum: A case study in student partnership

Michael Kilmister¹, Mathew Haine², Victoria Grace-Bland¹, Drew Taylor²

Overview

Can student-created zines (pronounced “zeens”) decolonise the curriculum? Are they a way of gathering perspectives that other forms of student voice activities, like the focus group, might miss? These questions seeded a partnership project that brought together the Student Panel³ and Inclusion Consultants⁴ to collaborate on a series of student-created zines on diversity and inclusion topics in April and May 2023. The project has not concluded, but our early “experiments” have already proven to be effective models of student partnership and decolonial teaching and learning practice. Moreover, zine-making workshops appear to offer students safe, inclusive spaces to participate in open dialogue on complex topics such as decolonisation.

This case study will explore the radical potential of student partnership and zines in the decolonising space. It will outline the steps involved in creating the student-created zines, and offer reflections on the process as it stands at the time of writing.

What are zines?

Zines (short for “fanzines”) are small-circulation and non-commercial works of appropriated or original texts and images distributed by their creators. Creasap (2014) posits that “[z]ines occupy a middle ground between traditional research papers or essays and Web-based media such as blogs” (p. 155).

Unlike blogs and other digital texts, zines are exemplified by the wide array of forms and styles they take – hand-drawn or cut-and-pasted images are collaged together with handwritten or typed text. They might be compiled by hand and scanned for printing or assembled digitally in graphics or desktop publishing software. Regardless of their format, the production of zines is a countercultural and critical practice that eschews mainstream and formal publication processes (Comstock, 2001). Here, we saw the potential of zines to channel a more direct and unfiltered form of the student voice.

Project objectives

Intrigued by the use of zines in critical pedagogy practice (Scheper, 2023) – including in feminist pedagogy (Creasap, 2014) and most relatedly, the University of the Arts London’s *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum Zine* (2018) – we piloted zine-making with the University’s ongoing student partnership schemes in April and May 2023. The project’s objectives were threefold:

- Establish a welcoming and collaborative space where students would feel safe to express their honest thoughts and feelings.
- Explore the potential of creative workshops and artistic outputs as a mode of facilitating student voice.
- Publish a zine or series of zines that form companion publications to the University’s decolonising the curriculum (DtC) and inclusive teaching and learning resources.

1 Centre for Quality Support and Development, Academic Development and Enhancement team (CQSD-ADE)

2 Student Success & Engagement

3 Student Panel is a diverse team of 50 students, representing all subject-areas, including all years and levels of study (from foundation level to PhD), and a diversity of cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Learn more at [CQSD’s website](#).

4 Inclusion Consultants are students who advise colleagues on how to make their courses and services more accessible and inclusive for underrepresented student groups. The scheme is a part of the whole-University strategy to close the awarding gap. Read more at [Reading’s Diversity & Inclusion webpages](#).

To achieve these tripartite goals, we opted to facilitate the making of the zines in a workshop format. We were inspired by a mental health and wellbeing zine-making workshop organised and funded by Coventry City Council in February 2023. We also took inspiration from a workshop run by PhD students at the University of Warwick that led to the 2022 publication of the zine *Feeling 'Out of Place': A Collective Zine for Feminists Navigating Spaces Within and Around Academia*. The zines at the heart of our project are also "collective zines". In a collective zine, students each make an individual contribution which is then compiled into a single volume.

The process

Student availability was a determinant in the design and timing of the project. We wanted to fit the zine-making around students' timetables and assessment workload, and to undertake workshops before the end of the 2022/23 academic year and the end of their Campus Jobs contracts (all participants were paid hourly for their time). To meet these aims, we condensed the "making" part of the process into a tightly timed two-hour workshop. However, several steps took place in the lead-up to the workshops:

- Recruitment: email invitations were sent to Student Panellists and Inclusion Consultants in March and April.
- The Student Panel was sent one-page pre-reading on DtC and a questionnaire in Microsoft Forms to gather their thoughts and experiences of diversity, inclusion, belonging, and decolonising; the questionnaire needed to be returned two weeks before the workshops. NB: Inclusion Consultants were already familiar with these topics, so did not receive any pre-work.
- Recycled resources, including out-of-date student prospectuses and posters from previous UCU campaigns, were gathered from across the University. Apart from practicing sustainability, providing students with images and text for which the University owns the copyright permits us to reproduce the zines.

The workshops were held in the Carrington and JJ Thomson buildings on the Whiteknights campus. Students were put into groups and art and craft supplies were arranged in accessible locations in the space; each participant was given a single A4 page as a blank canvas, a pair of scissors and a glue stick.

The zine-making process itself was scaffolded. Students were asked to create an identity mind-map, an activity intended to not only get participants drawing and writing, but to also situate "the self" in the creative process. In the next step, students were introduced to zines, explained the purpose of the workshop, and were asked to each respond to one of five themes: inclusion, diversity, belonging, decolonising the curriculum, and community. Examples of published zines were also passed around the room so students could get a feel for the finished product. Students then mind-mapped their page. To guide the mind-mapping, we prompted them to reflect on the pre-work, their existing understanding of their selected theme, and their experience on their course. Students then shared their planned designs with peers. All up, the introduction and ideation phase of the workshop took one hour.

In the second hour, students spent 50-minutes cutting-and-pasting, drawing, and writing. In the last ten minutes of the session, students shared their designs by walking around the space to see what others had created. Before leaving, they wrote their name on the back of their page, uploaded a photo of it to a Padlet board, and completed an evaluation form.

In June 2023, students were consulted on the editorial process. A Padlet board was setup for them to contribute their ideas on the editing and final design of the zine(s), including eliciting ideas for titles.

In all, thirty-one students took part in the three workshops.



Figure 1 – Photo from the first zine-making workshop with the Student Panel, April 2023

Reflections

The transformative power of pedagogical partnership between staff and students from underrepresented backgrounds is becoming increasingly recognised in HE (Islam & Valente, 2021). One of the challenges of ensuring diverse voices are heard is that typical means of gathering student input (such as unpaid focus groups or drop-in feedback sessions) often inadequately meet the needs of underrepresented students and staff, implicitly centring the views and experiences of privileged groups (Felten et al., 2013). Our experience of facilitating the Student Panel and Inclusion Consultant schemes is that reciprocal dialogue can inform and drive progress if decision makers are able/willing to use students' valuable insights in meaningful ways. Convening students and decision makers is especially effective when hybrid ideas are formed through open dialogue, and when the resulting change is concrete and tangible.

However, these discursive environments are fraught with challenges. Focus groups and reciprocal dialogues create a sense of public vulnerability in which students can feel pressured to moderate their views. It takes skilful facilitation and a dedicated norming process to empower students to overcome these concerns and speak with confidence. Some students are

inhibited by cultural, or language barriers and participation is typically led by a vocal minority. There is also the plain risk of harm if the rules and expectations underpinning the safe and supportive environment are not followed, for instance if discriminatory views are shared and not challenged. If students perceive the exercise as having been harmful, tokenistic, or having not yielded change in the manner they were expecting, it may further erode their trust (Bertrand, 2014).

While zine-making does not offer an immediate dialogue with staff who hold institutional power, it does counter the risks and challenges of platforming underrepresented students in a useful way. Creative exercises engender a casual and rewarding atmosphere in which students can freely share authentic views and enjoy themselves. In the post-workshop survey, students were asked "how did this workshop make you feel?" Among the 24 responses received for this question, students said they felt "inspired", "excited" and "empowered".

One student reported:

"It [the workshop] was relaxing and allowed me to really think about my identity. It made me feel empowered and helped me appreciate the diversity of everyone in the room."

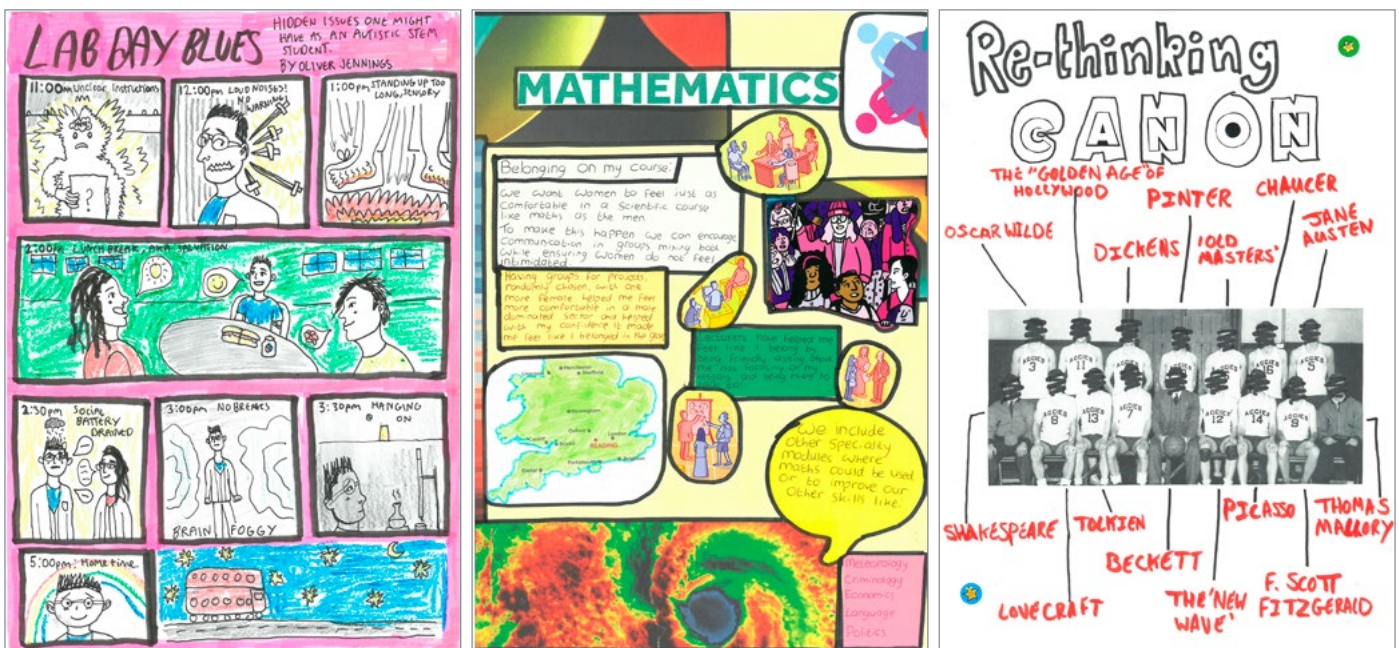


Figure 2 – Sample pages from the zines

All students who attended the workshop produced a zine page, and thus, the entire group shared their views equally. This includes one student who “initially felt hesitant at the idea ... [but] very quickly began to really enjoy the creative expression it allowed.” We agree with Creasap (2014) that zines are an effective teaching resource that help learners “connect theory and everyday life” (p. 166). The freedom, safety, and ease with which students can voice concerns is the basis on which we are advocating for their continued use in the decolonising space.

Although the response was overwhelmingly positive, we also received ideas for changes to make in the future. A student remarked they would have liked the option to have produced their page digitally, and other participants thought the workshop structure could be made more collaborative. As we move into the editorial and publishing phases, we are also grappling with how to address the accessibility issues that the non-standard format of zines might pose.

Based on our observations and student feedback, we believe zine-making workshops are a safe space in which students can critically and creatively explore decolonisation within subject areas or other aspects of the higher education context. The impact of the zines is dependent on how they are shared and with whom. We hope that the broader learning community – including staff with the power to influence and decolonise curricula – will feel inspired by the zines following their publication.

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Section 3: Decolonising research

In March 2023, the Decolonising the Curriculum Working Group engaged in two talks that outlined the key components of decolonising research and how decolonising research can inform Teaching and Learning activity. Professor Roger Matthews shared his approach to decolonising research with the working group, which is supplied below in an “In Conversation” format. Following this, Dr Jo Davies has supplied a case study on her approach to decolonising research. Following these two examples, Dr Oscar David Matallana Uribe has provided a useful series of questions to facilitate a question-led approach to decolonising research.

In conversation with Professor Roger Matthews

Professor Roger Matthews is a Middle Eastern archaeologist working mostly in Iraq for last 40 years. Roger states that work in Iraq / Mesopotamia is fundamental to our understanding of development of early agricultural and urban societies. Roger and colleagues have been establishing ways for local voices to be heard e.g. through community archaeology – integrating interests and capabilities of community through shared research.

Roger defines decolonisation as involving:

- i. critical self-reflection, questioning assumptions, traditions, ways of doing
- ii. recognition of asymmetries of power, opportunity, voice
- iii. only meaningful through action and change.

As such, there is much decolonising to do.

The discipline of Middle Eastern archaeology came to be during the British and French empires, when many antiquities were removed from the area. Unfortunately, the region suffers from periods of looting which coincide with government instability and Iraq is also vulnerable to climate change.

Roger’s activities and projects are partly through RASHID International. Roger is the ex-president and current treasurer of RASHID. RASHID works on areas such as cultural rights, international law and human rights, widening engagement, increasing awareness of cultural value, and lobbying the Iraqi government.

Roger’s work also includes:

- Widening engagement and cultural tourism by working with local and national museums, local schools, with villagers. TV, radio, and print interviews in Iraq.
- Heritage and eco-tourism including income generation and access to knowledge as well as discussions with villagers about how (or if) they want to see tourism developed.

Roger has worked with Yazidi communities in Iraq regarding the destruction of shrines by Islamic state. We are aware that comparable work elsewhere has led to the convictions of some people.

Roger’s research is already feeding through to Teaching and Learning, for example it has featured in his teaching within a Part 1 Module on early empires.

Q & A

How is the work helping local people in Iraq? Do Iraqis need white researchers coming in to protect their things?

The work is a co-creation. However, Roger noted that this is not standard practice in the field and has reviewed papers by archaeologists where no Iraqi co-author is mentioned though the work could not have been completed without Iraqi collaborators.

This is a slow process and not possible to fast track due to the unstable political situation in Iraq which affects investments in museums and universities.

How do you ensure local community voices and people who are co-authoring are being written in the document you are producing?

Framework methodologies – these are often colonisation frameworks.

How do you ensure that the framework design is co-created with the communities and local voices so that you are hearing everything?

In terms of ensuring voices are heard, Roger works with museums and eco-tourism heritage projects. Villagers' views on tourism and heritage are recorded in their language – Kurdish, which feeds through to local museum displays as voice and film.

Anonymised questionnaires have been carried out with Kurdish villagers and will be published in due course.

Involvement in projects is a slow, steady process of engagement, building up networks, working with government representatives who are active collaborators on the projects.

The UK's funding for Iraqi researchers is poor compared to many other European countries.

Do you have further comment on alternate outputs as opposed to traditional research outputs, particularly where this has meaning to the communities and is determined by research partners?

The voices in the museum are extremely popular and give meaning to the families in the communities. Social media is very popular in Iraq so there is much engagement and sharing when stories are broadcast.



Equitable partnerships in research: Reflections on the GCRF-funded Sentinel Project

Dr. Jo Davies

Dept of International Development

Background

Sentinel: Social and Environmental Trade-Offs in African Agriculture (2017–2022) was a Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) funded interdisciplinary research project. The aim was to explore the challenge of achieving food security in sub-Saharan African whilst simultaneously conserving ecosystems and addressing the challenges of social and economic inequalities.

Populations are facing rapidly increasing challenges to food security due to a range of factors, including climate change and population growth. These needs are leading to conflicting priorities between the need for food security while safeguarding vital ecosystems and promoting social equality.

The Sentinel project brought together academic and development organisations across the UK, Zambia, Ethiopia and Ghana to produce research on impacts, risks and trade-offs relating to agricultural expansion. This knowledge will help governments and policy makers to make better-informed decisions about land use and agricultural practices so that food security can be improved without losing precious biodiversity and without worsening social inequality.

Methodology

From the first stages of the project, the objectives were designed to cover both the outcomes and the process of the research. The research programme was explicitly designed to enhance relationships between UK and African research organisations by creating and strengthening collaborative research partnerships. This objective was monitored throughout the research process, with this research stream being led by Sentinel colleague Alexandre Chausson, University of Oxford.

Four rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews with Sentinel team members were held over the duration of the Sentinel project, with the interviews focusing on enablers and constraints to inter- and transdisciplinary working, equitable partnerships and collaborative working in the research team. A workshop with 25 colleagues from the Sentinel team was held to explore the interview findings, to discuss the lessons learnt and to co-create guidance for equitable partnerships in future research partnerships.

Findings: Fostering a supportive research environment for transdisciplinarity and co-creation of research

One of the key findings was the importance of building trust across all levels of engagement. This means that research teams need to be aware of how relationships are operating within the research team, in the wider organisations involved in the research and at the broader institutional level.

Although we designed the work to advise funders in the first instance, the lessons have broader relevance. The more diverse the team (such as in terms of discipline, geography, or types of organisations), the longer it takes for people to understand each other, align perspectives, and develop trust. On the other hand, competitive, demanding research environments, which incentivise peer-reviewed outputs in established, often disciplinary, journals can push researchers in the opposite direction. Although funders increasingly call for inter- and transdisciplinary research, in practice there remains a lack of reward and incentives, notably in universities, to establish interdisciplinary collaborations, or engage research users. In this environment, we found transdisciplinary collaborative research can impose significant transaction costs on researchers, particularly on early career researchers.

Recommendations

The role of funders and incentives

A broad finding was that researchers, particularly early career researchers, can be disincentivised from pursuing interdisciplinary North/South research which engages a broader range of stakeholders because this type of research is often more challenging, slower, and sometimes harder to publish.

Because of this, funders are advised urgently to review how research is evaluated, to shift academic incentive structures towards incentivising collaborative working. Funders could earmark financial support to research organisations, specifically geared at reducing administrative burdens on researchers leading transdisciplinary, collaborative initiatives. This can help free up time for relationship building, research integration, and research user engagement.

Specific findings and possible mitigations

Issue	Possible mitigation
Appointing a Northern institution as the lead, to oversee funding allocation and compliance, can inhibit the emergence of co-ownership between Northern and Southern partners	A direct connection with a Northern and Southern partner through a co-leadership structure may foster more equitable partnerships
A lack of familiarity between partners can discourage collaborative working, team building, and research integration	Shorter-term “startup” seed grants for new research partnerships, to help foster relationship-building and create opportunities to explore ways of working
Potential lack of engagement and buy-in by all partners at the proposal stage. Ensuring shared understanding at earliest stages is crucial to foster shared ownership and collaboration	Ensure ample time for project proposal turnaround to enable co-creation. Allow time for research teams to incorporate suitable capacities and skills at the start and to build familiarity with partners



Further lessons to be taken into consideration when planning equitable research partnerships

- Take note of imbalance in the number of Northern and Southern partners, their team sizes, time budgeted, and roles and responsibilities; these can compound each other, significantly constraining co-ownership and equity
- A dedicated facilitator to support internal communication and relationship building, as we found this fostered shared understanding and collaboration
- An accountability framework to set expectations based on a shared understanding of the partnership and the role of capacity strengthening, where needed
- Robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems to promote reflection and co-learning, to evaluate capacity-building progress, and track partnership dynamics. This captures learning on how to promote effective collaborations

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Implications for Teaching and Learning

This work has had a significant impact on my teaching and learning. Firstly, as the convenor of a module on Research Methods for Development, it has encouraged me to reflect on how we teach methodology. I have always put significant emphasis on an ethical approach to research, particularly working in development, where the power differentials and access to resources between researchers and respondents can be significant. However, this project has indicated the importance of also teaching students to consider the roles and power (im)balances that can potentially exist within research teams, particularly when working cross-culturally, or where funding resources can be unevenly controlled or distributed.

Secondly, this research has informed my teaching and learning more broadly. It has encouraged me to reflect more deeply on why we ask the questions we do in our teaching, and where these questions have come from. I now consider the intended learning outcomes more broadly. Who poses the questions that we ask of our students, and are we sourcing and framing these questions in a sufficiently broad manner? There could be whole constituencies, perhaps based in a different geographical area, who nevertheless have a stake in the subjects we are exploring. What does it mean to consider them as significant stakeholders in what we are teaching and learning? My reflection from this project is that it is not so much how we try to bring in other voices or perspective to our teaching and learning, but when. Consideration of these questions needs to happen at the earliest stages of our teaching and learning design.



Question-led approach to decolonising research

Dr Oscar David Matallana Uribe has created the following questions to support you with decolonising research at local level. The questions should be used to prompt individual reflection and to inform further discussion with research teams.

1. Have I considered the cultural and historical context of the research site and its relationship to the research question?
2. Have I consulted with local community members or stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives and needs are included in the research design?
3. Have I taken steps to ensure that the research process is respectful and culturally appropriate, such as by using appropriate language, honouring local traditions, and obtaining informed consent in a culturally appropriate manner?
4. Have I examined my own biases and assumptions and considered how they might impact the research process or the interpretation of results?
5. Have I considered how power dynamics might be affecting the research process, such as unequal power relations between the researcher and the research participants?
6. Have I considered how colonial history might be impacting the research topic, such as by perpetuating stereotypes or erasing indigenous knowledge?
7. Have I considered the ethical implications of my research, such as potential harm to participants or the wider community, and taken steps to minimise these risks?
8. Have I sought to incorporate diverse perspectives and knowledge systems into the research, such as indigenous knowledge or feminist theory?
9. Have I considered how the dissemination of research findings might affect the community, and taken steps to ensure that the findings are disseminated in an appropriate and respectful manner?
10. Have I considered the potential for my research to contribute to decolonisation efforts or challenge existing power structures?

Section 4: Recommended podcasts

Dr Eileen Hyder has recommended the following podcasts to develop your knowledge of decolonisation and anti-racist approaches:

Anthems

“Anthems” is a collection of original manifestos, speeches, stories, poems, and rallying cries written and voiced by exceptional people, that celebrate and contemplate what it means to be human. Our beauty, our failures, our rich heritage, our rage, and our power. Proving that there is more that binds us together than sets us apart. These Are Our Anthems.

The Wonder House

Many of the episodes focus on decolonising museums and archives

Some of my best friends are...

A podcast hosted by Khalil Gibran Muhammad and Ben Austen, two best friends who grew up together on the South Side of Chicago in the 1980s. Today a Harvard professor and an award-winning journalist, Khalil and Ben still go to each other to talk about their experiences with the absurdities and intricacies of race in America. In *Some of My Best Friends Are...* with Khalil Gibran Muhammad and Ben Austen, they invite listeners into their unfiltered conversations about growing up together in a deeply-divided country, and navigating that divide as it exists today

Renegades: Born in the USA

A series of conversations between President Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen about their lives, music, and enduring love of America – despite all its challenges (often there’s a focus on race)

Where You From?

“Where You From?” is a podcast that asks people how they feel about that question. For people of colour, it’s often a loaded question that moves from simple human curiosity to something deeper when the follow-up question is: “but, where are you really from?”

Human Resources

Exploring the true story of British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and how it touches every part of the nation.





Be Antiracist with Ibram X. Kendi

Be Antiracist imagines what an antiracist society might look like and how we all can play an active role in building one. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi is the author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, the book that spurred a nationwide conversation redefining what it means to be antiracist, and in this podcast, he guides listeners how they can identify and reject the racist systems hiding behind racial inequity and injustice.

Teaching While White

Teaching While White (TWW) seeks to move the conversation forward on how to be consciously, intentionally, anti-racist in the classroom. Because “white” does not mean a blank slate. It is a set of assumptions that is the baseline from which everything is judged; it is what passes for normal. TWW wants to have conversations about those assumptions: what they are, how they impact our students, and how we can confront our bias to promote racial literacy.

The 1619 Project

Four hundred years ago, in August 1619, a ship carrying more than 20 enslaved Africans arrived in the English colony of Virginia. No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the 250 years of slavery that followed.

“1619,” a New York Times audio series hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones, examines the long shadow of that fateful moment.

Vent Documentaries

Young people from one London Borough, telling you the stories we care about.

Good Ancestor

Layla F. Saad is a New York Times and Sunday Times bestselling author, anti-racism educator, international speaker, and podcast host on the topics of race, identity, leadership, personal transformation and social change.

Code Switch

What’s CODE SWITCH? It’s the fearless conversations about race that you’ve been waiting for. Hosted by journalists of color, our podcast tackles the subject of race with empathy and humor. We explore how race affects every part of society – from politics and pop culture to history, food and everything in between. This podcast makes all of us part of the conversation – because we’re all part of the story.

DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

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