



**University of Brighton**

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# **DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING  
ABOUT RACE EQUALITY**

**ISSUE 2, DECEMBER 2019**

Edited by Marlon Moncrieffe, Yaa Asare, Robin Dunford and Heba Youssef

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# EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue 2 of the University of Brighton's journal offering a wide variety of articles with teaching and learning approaches and critical theoretical provocations for decolonising the curriculum.

We begin by celebrating the university achieving a Bronze Award from Advance HE's highly regarded Race Equality Charter. **Momtaz Rahman** explains how the award will strengthen a commitment by the university to actively raise the professional profiles of BAME staff and improve the BAME student experiences in our community.

**Naomi Salaman** and **Jo Hall** each discuss their implementation of innovative decolonising practices through concepts and processes led by their students, increasing their engagement with studies, and raising their attainment and outcomes.

**Arianne Shahvisi** and **Rishen Catteree** each focus on teaching to instil an awareness in their students of the considerable social power they will have as future doctors. They argue that decolonising education and the curriculum must involve helping students to understand where they are coming from with regard to their unconscious racial frameworks.

**Annie Richardson** and **Nadia Edmond** provide reflections on research and theory in each of their articles, speaking to decolonising the curriculum in intercultural primary school teacher-training, and in early years education.

In each of their articles **Marina Trowell** and **Eleftherios Zenerian** see decolonising the curriculum at the university as a route to greater inclusion for creating a firmer sense of connection and belonging for students who feel marginalised by dominant discourses in what they are being asked to learn.

**Natasha Gohlan** and **Ashna Mahtani** each share an article from the perspective of alumni. They reflect on the supremacy of "whiteness" in the curriculum that they experienced in their studies. They call on the need for future teaching content and practice to be decolonised and transformed particularly through student voices and their relatable experiences.

**Helen Johnson** rounds off this collection of articles with a provocative poem. In this we are able to step into the mindset of a character: one who moves from conscious denial; to conscious realisation of their embedded racism.

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Colleagues of the university's Race Equality Steering Group

As Chair of the Race Equality Steering Group, I am delighted to see such a wide contribution from across the university to the second issue of 'Decolonising the Curriculum: Teaching and Learning about Race Equality'.

The articles highlight how racial inequalities have been embedded in education and practice and the approaches that are being taken by colleagues to actively support the university's commitment to decolonisation of the curriculum.

Articles reflect on how racial inequality is exhibited within both the delivery of curriculum and the work environments for which we train our graduates. This is leading, not only to diversification of the learning materials, but the development of pedagogic approaches which instil in our graduates an understanding of how racism is manifested in the workplace. This prepares graduates to be champions for change on their transition from education to employment across a range of sectors.

The 'Student Voice', through contributions from our alumni, highlights the role that our students are making in challenging the university to decolonise our curriculum and the importance of fully engaging our students in delivering this change across the institution. Student led action has not only contributed to changes in reading lists but to improving curriculum discourse.

The importance of understanding Critical Race Theory, lived experiences and a sense of belonging is highlighted. This provides a platform for us to consider how we go beyond decolonising the curriculum by considering the need to change unconscious behaviours, academic language and challenge the perceived knowledge. By addressing these issues we not only create a more inclusive and understanding culture across the university but ensure our graduates are developed to address race issues as global citizens.

I have found the articles in this second edition both inspirational and thought provoking and hope you find likewise – the sharing of ideas and practices is important as we seek to address racial inequality within and beyond the university by working together as a community to delivery our Race Equality Action Plan.

**Andrew Lloyd**  
Race & Faith Equality Champion

# Our Race Equality Charter Bronze Award

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The university has achieved a Bronze Award from Advance HE's highly regarded Race Equality Charter (REC). The award exists to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within Higher Education. It is valid for four years and we are one of only 14 universities to hold the award. A Bronze award recognises that the university has a foundation for eliminating racial inequalities and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff and students. The REC is underpinned by core principles: that racial inequalities are a significant issue within Higher Education, and exist in the context of racism in UK society which manifests itself in everyday situations, processes and behaviours. The REC principles identify that individuals from all ethnic backgrounds must be enabled to benefit equally from the opportunities that Higher Education affords, recognising differing intersecting identities and experiences amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students. Importantly REC principles require the solutions to racial inequalities to be aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change and avoiding a deficit model where solutions are aimed at changing the individual. To this end we recently launched the Race Equality Charter Action Plan which sets out our priorities including:

- To improve the representation of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff in key decision making committees.
- To improve the career progression of BAME staff into senior positions.
- To increase the success rates of BAME applicants in recruitment.
- To reduce race related incidents experienced by staff and students at the university and improve staff and student experience of formal processes.
- To increase connectivity amongst BAME staff, students and community groups.
- To raise awareness and increase all staff engagement with race equality.
- To increase the proportion of BAME students in underrepresented disciplines including at postgraduate level.
- To reduce differential outcomes for BAME students in continuation, degree awards and postgraduate employment.
- To improve representation of race in the curriculum.
- To improve staff confidence in addressing race equality in teaching and learning.

The Race Equality Charter Application was the culmination of two years' work by the Race Equality Steering Group, which was informed by analysis of our staff and student data, the staff and student 2018 Race Equality Surveys, focus groups and staff feedback from a number of forums. Implementation of the action plan will be monitored by the Race Equality Steering Group and formally reported to the Equality and Diversity Committee chaired by the Vice Chancellor. The Steering Group includes representation from academic, professional and support staff from across our university and colleagues from the Staff Race and Faith Staff Network, our trade unions and Brighton Students' Union. The REC award is a great recognition of the hard work by colleagues but we are aware that there is more to be done before we are where we want to be as a university. The REC Action Plan offers a strong basis for us to address racial inequalities across the university and move towards becoming a more inclusive institution to improve the lived experiences for BAME staff and students.

# Decolonise Brighton University - the story so far.

## NAOMI SALAMAN

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Last year some Fine Art Critical Practice students arranged for decolonising activist Melz Owuzu to come to speak to students.[i] *Decolonise Brighton University* formed bringing together students from across the School of Art , 'challenging the legacies of colonialism and racism on campus'. An open call was sent out for a Decolonial Exhibition of student art work, with the title: *How did we get here?*

For students, thinking about how to decolonise our curriculum by asking ourselves '*How did we get here?*' provokes an interrogation of taken for granted narratives that have dominated education and shaped society.....'[ii]

The poster for the exhibition was a thickly painted, colourful rendition of Barbar the Elephant, in his familiar green suit and crown, very much the picture of the colonial subject as described by Fanon (1963, 1967). Having learned something in the Western metropolis Barbar returns ready to rule, having interiorised colonial power and ways of doing things, ways of thinking. The painting of Barbar was made by second year painting student, Virgile Demo. *Decolonise Brighton University* set up regular meetings across campus and came up with a suggestion for the start of the Autumn Term 2018 to spend the first two weeks in studio thinking about the question: '*Why is my curriculum so white?*' That's still a work in progress.



Exhibition poster for HOW DID WE GET HERE? March 2019 image credit Virgile Demo

### Notes

[i] <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/facp/2019/01/30/melz-owusu-on-decolonising-the-curriculum/> See FACP blog post

[ii] From the exhibition press release and gallery wall text <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/facp/2019/03/25/student-pop-up-exhibition-decolonise-brighton/>

*Decolonise Brighton University* adopted an inverted graphic representation of the familiar domes of the Brighton Pavilion, as a logo, that you can see on the exhibition poster.[iii] The graphic was made by Laura Hargreaves, a sculpture student. This simple visual brings us to the heart of the paradox of the history and legacy of colonialism on our doorstep. The domes are architectural archetypes - images of otherness and colonial fantasy that are at the same time normalised as the everyday fabric of our city, our local museum and cultural heritage. As such, they are ours and they are other. As one of the major attractions the domes also function as a sign for the city, used by the tourist trade as well as many organisations such as the local council and both Sussex and Brighton Universities.



Decolonise Brighton University logo devised by Laura Hargreaves

The idea to turn the domes on their heads, makes the familiar strange and confronts us with our everyday reality in Brighton. It is a compelling example of the centrality of the image to the politics and workings of ideology. An inversion is literally how Marx describes consumer ideology, that we see things upside down, not as they really are. The image plays a crucial part in this process.

In the School of Art all students are encouraged to play with images; to invent and to turn things around and see what happens. Only rarely does this activity find traction with the world in a political way. The students who set up *Decolonise Brighton University* began work on the taken-for-granted, every day, common sense visuality that form the basis of ideology, the not-normally-questioned. Some of the Fine Art Critical Practice students who set up the decolonise group went on to do related work for their degree show which took place in May and June 2019 at Grand Parade.

Liz Crane and Al Coffee were both founding members of *Decolonise Brighton University*. They worked with fellow FACP student Tom Nicholson to produce two final year art installations that investigated the legacy of the British Empire alongside the culture and politics of our national collections. They constructed *LOST TREASURES* - a dramatic darkened room with spot lights revealing strident wall texts about the removal of important cultural objects from their original location, referring in particular to then Elgin Marbles and the Benin Bronzes. In the dark room was a well-lit, empty glass display case.





Lost Treasures, Empty Vitrine  
Liz Crane, Al Coffee, Tom Nicholson  
Fine Art Critical Practice Graduate show 2019

'Lost Treasures represented some of the arguments for the repatriation of stolen culture. Specifically, it highlighted the symbolic and political significance of absence for communities all over the world who are asking for the return of artefacts obtained by the British in a time of empire. The installation consisted of a minimalist black room, made to resemble a British Museum blockbuster exhibition. Spot lit quotes from artists, activists and scholars provided some context for the empty vitrine that dominated the room.

Throughout the installation, the focus was not on our own words but those of others who are on the frontlines, who can speak personally about how the loss of culture affects their identity. Amplifying marginalised voices was important to us, coming from a commitment to the decolonisation of museums and other cultural institutions such as universities, where whiteness dominates.' [iv]

#### Notes

[iii] <https://www.facebook.com/decolonisebrighton/>

[iv] Liz Crane in email to author, November 2019

Another work *Symbols of Empire*, involved installing 16 national flags on the main stairway on the Grand Parade campus.



*Symbols of Empire* had a caption on the wall which read:

These are the flags of the 14 British Overseas Territories under the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the UK. First flown together in Parliament Square in 2012, they are used to demonstrate the extent of Britain's realm to visiting state officials. The animals, plants and ships depicted symbolise violent histories of conquest, slavery and environmental exploitation for Britain's commercial and political gain, all under the Union Jack.

Over the last few decades many of Britain's overseas territories and colonies, the remnants of a vast empire, have sought and won independence. The territories represented by these flags have either voted to remain under British rule or have been unable to exercise their democratic right. One of the most shocking cases is that of the British Indian Ocean Territory, where local islanders were illegally expelled by the British in the 1970s to make way for a US military base. They have been campaigning for the right to return to their homes since.

The work of these students was ambitious in physical scale and in what they addressed. It was well received, and they achieved very high grades, even within the band of First Class Honours, and went on to win prizes. If I had the ear of Charles Saatchi I would suggest he install their exhibition next to his block buster Tutankhamun show, or maybe more to the point at the British Museum as an add-on to the Enlightenment Gallery. The 2019 graduates of Fine Art Critical Practice were a formidable group of artists and thinkers, and it was a privilege to work with them. Students in current years are likewise involved in these issues – and the Decolonise group is university wide. Follow the students' lead and join *Decolonise Brighton University*.

# Disrupting value-based frameworks through popular culture pedagogies: A call for the democratisation of Higher Education curricula

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In this provocation, I use the concept of popular culture pedagogies to argue for the democratisation of Higher Education (HE) curricula. I advocate a cultural studies approach to education to disrupt value-based frameworks that currently work to exclude some subjects and individuals through performative acts of hierarchical stratification. This argument is based on one of the central tenants of cultural studies, which is that all cultural activity is worthy of academic investigation (Agger, 1992). However, within HE, complex hierarchies of value ascribe greater worth to some disciplines than to others. Such value-based judgements have impact on the experience of students and staff in terms of identity and belonging. The adoption of popular culture pedagogies can bring about inclusivity within universities, but also enhance student engagement and bring about increased feelings of belonging.

Values are so foundational to human interaction that it would be difficult to find a space that isn't structured by a network of value systems (Dodds, 2011). Fekete (1987) describes how values are produced, reproduced and modified through such exchanges. They operate as acts of evaluation and are the basic tools of transaction in social existence (Connor, 1992). This concept of values enables us to understand how their expression can generate feelings of affiliation and belonging, as well as marking difference as a mode of exclusion.

The performance of values, where they are used to ascribe greater 'worth' to some academic disciplines than others, are acts of micro-aggression, communicating powerful messages about who, or what subjects, belong. I make this statement from the perspective of personal experience, having worked as an academic in the field of Dance Studies for over 25 years, and within Popular Dance Studies for the last 15, where I have frequently been regarded with curiosity or amusement when introducing my subject or research area.[i] This is because perceptions of dance, shaped by Cartesian thought legacies that separate body from the mind and intellect from expression, have affected how the discipline is regarded as a subject for academic study. Hierarchies of value are also entrenched within the field, as since the early 1980s, Dance Studies scholarship has focused on maintaining an elitist artistic canon, placing mainly white, European and North American dance practices and choreographers at the centre of British Dance degree programmes in an effort to gain credibility within the Academy (Dodds, 2011). Whilst Popular Dance Studies has grown significantly since the early 2000s, it is rarely found within UK HE Dance curricula, or is pushed to the margins as an optional module.[ii]

The term 'popular culture pedagogies' has been used predominantly by scholars within New Literary Studies (NLS), where research highlights the substantial influence that popular culture has on young people. There is evidence that recontextualising materials from popular culture into the curriculum, such as popular literary texts, 'make[s] teaching and learning exciting and relevant' (Koh & Benson, 2011, p.127).

The suggestion that popular culture could be used to make learning relevant to students' lives is important, as I argue that the use of popular culture in the curriculum can enhance student engagement and inclusivity by enabling students to see themselves and their interests reflected in the curriculum.

An example of this, in practice, can be found in the redevelopment of the BA (Hons) Dance at Kingston University, London, where I was a Principal Lecturer from 2010 until 2017. As part of a curriculum re-design in 2013, I included the study of Popular Dance as a core module at Level 5 and as an optional module at Level 6. This responded to already established, external perceptions of the course as attractive to students with an interest in street dance and other popular styles (which was, in part, due to the success of Kingston University Student Union's Dance Society in national hip hop and street dance Varsity competitions), as well as my own expertise in the disciplinary field. Students taking these modules responded positively to the academic study of popular styles, with increased attendance and attainment.[iii]

In 2016, as Head of Dance, I then led an initiative to decolonise the curriculum, and, as part of this, the democratisation of subject material through the avoidance of style-limited content. This meant that modules, for example, in dance history, or choreography, would use popular, social, and cultural dances, as well as theatrical 'art dance', to exemplify ideas or concepts.[iv]

I continue to advocate the teaching of [dance] curricula through diversity, but especially drawing upon the popular, as those examples, more than any others, are part of our students' everyday lives.[v] Despite being associated with a paradigm of value that dismisses it as mere entertainment, the popular is a site of subversive power, 'its ability to unsettle beliefs and values renders it a potent cultural form' (Dodds, 2011, p.3). In this potency, there is the potential for popular culture pedagogies to unsettle value-based frameworks that work to marginalise and exclude. In an adoption and acceptance of the popular, the university can turn to embrace the marginalised, enhance student engagement and inclusivity, and be truly democratised.

#### Notes

[i] Popular Dance Studies is concerned with the study of social and vernacular dance forms, as well as dance practices that are found in popular culture.

[ii] Kingston University is the only BA (Hons) Dance in the UK where all students study popular dance as a core module. The University of East London deliver a BA Dance: Urban Practice, which includes popular forms, and the University of Roehampton and University of Chichester offer optional modules in popular dance.

[iii] This is comparing these modules to others within the programme in the same year, 2015-16, as an example.

[iv] The success or longevity, of this initiative is, unfortunately, not known as I left the University at the end of the 2016/17 academic year.

[v] Here I do not use a narrow, youth-based, Western idea of popular culture, but instead, one that reaches across such boundaries.

# Coloniality in the NHS: training medical students to resist

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Throughout its seventy years, the National Health Service (NHS) has enjoyed a unique moral status within British life, where across the political spectrum it is cherished as an instantiation of fairness and decency. The medical students I teach are proud to be promised to a universal health system based only on medical need, and it is never an enjoyable task to disrupt that illusion and demonstrate that the moral status of the NHS is much more complicated.

The establishment of the NHS coincided with the dissolution of the British Empire, and was from its inception reliant on migrant workers in order to ensure safe staffing levels. Migrants from former colonies were encouraged to join the new service as nurses, doctors, porters, and cleaners, setting a trend that has spanned the decades, with half of all new doctors entering the NHS in 2018 trained outside the UK (General Medical Council, 2018). While migrant workers enrich the NHS, “brain drain” is a serious and complex ethical issue: health-workers are poached from areas of urgent medical need, while their training costs—generally subsidised by Global South states which were formerly colonised by the UK—benefit UK patients, amounting to a substantial neocolonial extraction (Shahvisi, 2018). Once within the NHS, migrants have been described as second-class “Cinderella workers” who are commonly confined to roles in less popular specialities and regions, subject to racism from patients and colleagues, and paid less than their white counterparts (Esmail, 2007).

More recently, the NHS has taken on an extended biopolitical role via the introduction of upfront charging for anyone not “ordinarily resident,” whose details may be shared with the Home Office if debts are incurred (Shahvisi, 2019). These changes are part of the creeping “hostile environment,” which undermines one of the founding principles of the NHS—access to healthcare based only on need—and requires that healthcare workers violate a core pillar of medical ethics, a patient’s right to confidentiality. Worse, those same migrant health-workers must pay an “immigration health surcharge” for themselves and their family members to access the NHS in which they serve “ordinarily resident” patients without charge.

With the NHS facing the existential threat of privatisation, it is tempting to strategically highlight its virtues, yet to do so requires an erasure of its longstanding coloniality, and the side-lining of those patients and workers whose relationship to the service is one of subjecthood rather than citizenship. In a medical school the imperative to be critical of the NHS even as its moral necessity is emphasised is particularly pressing. Medical students must be equipped not only to tackle moral difficulties in clinical settings but to engage with the political challenges which face the profession and sector. This requires educators within medical schools to contextualise the NHS—historically, economically, socially, and politically—so that doctors are equipped with the rigour and nuance to both critique and defend it.

Doctors are overworked and well-remunerated; apathy is all too common. Yet medical students must be made cognisant of the considerable social power they will have as doctors, the importance of solidarity with colleagues within the sector, and the effectiveness of collective refusals to serve government agendas. Earlier this year, doctors voted to scrap all charging, citing opposition to the racism of the policy and its public health implications (Campbell 2019). Many are already refusing to charge. Teaching students about the moral shortcomings of the NHS is essential, but we must also tell the stories of those who are resisting, and embolden our graduating doctors to struggle for the principles they wish to serve.

# Race equality education and training future doctors

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Why is it necessary that we should be taught something as fundamental as the concept that all ethnicities are equal? Assuming that we all know about race equality is in fact inherently part of the problem. The reason I say this is because this assumption will inevitably lead us to be witness to attitudes, behaviours and actions which do not support our underlying premise. Knowing, believing and doing are in reality independent variables (Alsharif, 2012). This idea of not making assumptions is important in the fight against prejudicial stereotyping and interestingly also important when reaching diagnoses and forming clinical management plans (Fagan et al, 2003).

I remember teaching communication skills to a small group of medical students and this idea that a patient would naturally just say what was on their mind and the doctor therefore not having to ask certain questions was mentioned by several of the students. Taking the time to ask questions and assuming nothing are consultation approaches I endeavour to cultivate within my students. Ideally the practice of medicine should be at its core “the practice of demonstrating your humanity” i.e. ideally full of care, empathy and compassion (Panda, 2006). All medical students come from different backgrounds and life experiences and while an individuals’ choice to study medicine may somewhat suggest the absence of palpable prejudice, this sadly may not always be the case (Nazar et al, 2015; Bentley et al, 2008). Bias, discrimination and marginalisation of certain groups may find a way to the professional front line via an unconscious route and this reinforces the importance of making no assumptions when training the future generation of healthcare professionals (Niemann, 2016).

I am an advocate of the constructivist approach to education and this method is an essential tool in order to bring what may be unconscious perspectives into the conscious plane (Piaget, 1977). The use of case study vignettes is a useful constructivist tool which is used at BSMS for facilitating reflective discourse. Several scenarios are presented to the students which are designed to challenge and unearth what may be hidden cognitive constructs. The environment should be safe and no judgements should be passed regarding what is perceived to be right or wrong. Fear of not saying “what is expected” or “right” will defeat the purpose of the exercise.

Although I have focused on racial inequality originating from the medical student, the reverse of this can also be true whereby the student is the victim of this behaviour from the patient. As with the student these patient ideas could be either conscious or unconscious in their origin (Dogra et al, 2005). The constructivist approach should also be applied here when teaching and students should be given the opportunity to honestly explore and voice their thoughts and feelings within a safe learning environment (White et al, 2009). We should all act professionally although at the same time acknowledge our personal humanity which encompasses sensitivities and the unmistakable ability to be vulnerable.

I remember as a junior doctor on a GP placement being asked by patients “where are you from?”. Even though I was born and brought up in the UK, I never thought anything of it. Indeed it often seemed to just be asked out of polite curiosity. My GP tutor however seemed disgruntled by this question and would quickly answer “he is from London”. Unconscious cognitive constructs play an important role here within the GP, patients and me. Helping students to understand where they are coming from with regard to their unconscious racial frameworks is an important part of promoting racial equality (George et al, 2015). Making no assumptions in terms of what a patient may or may not say as well as not stereotyping are two sides of the same coin when it comes to practising clinical excellence.



# Beyond colour-blindness in Early Childhood settings

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This year I have been writing as a black mixed-heritage woman born in rural South-East England (a mostly white space), and the effects this has had on my identity, self-confidence and self-esteem (Sinha et al, 2019; Richardson, 2019). In June 2019 a conference workshop prompted consideration of how my personal reflections collided with my professional interest in Early Childhood (EC). A clip was shown of the “doll experiment” (Stienissen, 2012) replicated from research conducted by Clark and Clark (1939; 1950). Children as young as three were shown a black and white doll and asked questions related to their preference. Black children ascribed the white doll as being good and pretty, the black doll as bad and ugly. I saw their pain as they identified themselves as black. The same categorisation of ‘white equals good, black equals bad’ were part of my childhood memories and repeated in stories by people of colour. The workshop prompted participants to look “beyond colour-blindness” (Eddo-Lodge, 2017) an ideology which asserts not see colour, and that discussions of race and racism are outdated because everyone is equal. The workshop problematised this view in the Education sector; as Eddo-Lodge (2017, p.83) explains the myth of equality “denies the economic, political and social legacy of a British society that has historically been organised by race”. Colour-blindness will not fight racism, just deny its existence unless in the extreme and educational institutions need to recognise this.

There is criticism of Clark and Clark’s findings and what can be hypothesised from children’s preferences and the contributory factors affecting their choices (Byrd, 2012). Whatever these criticisms, I believe the findings indicate as Houston (2019, p.2) asserts “Children are not immune from racism in society and are inevitably influenced by actions and opinions of their elders.” From early childhood, children of colour have already internalised racialised attitudes. Racialised refers not to racism although this does play a part, but to the “processes by which racial characteristics become meaningful in different social situations” (Priest et al, 2016, p.809). Our society has a tendency, both overtly and covertly, to categorise people based on “socially constructed concepts of race” (Houston, 2019, p.14). Even our youngest children are not immune to this or sheltered from associated ideas of privilege and power in their personal interactions.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017) is the Cinderella of the various UK Education phases and the bottom of the epistemological hierarchy (Moss and Urban, 2010). However, the foundations for future learning are laid in early childhood and therefore I argue that it is the most crucial education phase rather than the least. These formative years are a period for foundational learning of skills, dispositions to learning, attitudes to others, and self-concepts. I teach EC practitioners who work in predominately white communities. My perceptions come from being born, schooled and having worked in such communities as a black person.



The EYFS seeks to provide “equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported” (DfE 2017, p.5) and the EC practitioners I teach are vehement in upholding this. However, as Konstantoni (in Houston, 2019) suggests practitioners can adopt a “but we’re all the same here” mantra indicating a colour-blind approach. Practitioners of all backgrounds hold high the banner of equality, which in effect often ignores the power and privilege that comes with whiteness. Children of colour are not colour blind, they notice their difference and the dominance of whiteness in their environment (Houston, 2019). It takes bravery for practitioners to overcome their own white fragility (Diangelo, 2018), to ignore their discomfort and confront the privilege they hold as well as the (unnoticed) associated bias. However, this must be a goal, in order to begin to address the secondary socialisation that children experience on their entry into EC education and the resulting internalised conceptions of their identity based on the colour of their skin.

### **Ongoing reflection and action**

*I have decided to focus my attention on two aspects in my teaching:*

#### **Representation:**

- Numbers of black EC practitioners cannot be changed overnight, however recruitment processes and support for students and alumni can be addressed.
- Representation within EC settings and pedagogical encounters can be evaluated. All children need to see themselves and their family reflected positively in the spaces they inhabit. However, adults need to be aware of tokenism, stereotyping and the negative connotations that can also be picked up by signaling something as ‘different’ or exotic rather than a natural alternative way of being than the dominant culture.
- Children need a rich diet of ‘possibilities’ so that they see that having a particular colour does not determine what their future holds. They need to see and hear that it is not just white people who for example write, appear in books, paint, fight fires, or are scientists.

#### **Reflection:**

- Practitioners need a ‘safe space’ to reflect without blame to consider the complex issues of discrimination and racialisation within early childhood.



# Erasmus+ and diversity and intercultural education in Europe - the sustaining of racism

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Between September 2015 and September 2018, the University of Brighton was a partner in SPIRAL, a European Commission Erasmus partnership of EU teacher training institutions in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. The aim of the project was to help “equip future primary school teachers with the necessary professional, intercultural and linguistic skills necessary to meet the needs of a 21st century classroom” (SPIRAL project bid). The partners coordinated two-week placements for primary teacher education students in schools in the partner countries to support the development of a common reference framework for teacher competences and to improve student teachers’ multilingualism and interculturalism.

The Maastricht treaty presumed a European demos and education schemes such as Erasmus became a vital ingredient in building a ‘European identity’ in which European diversity is discursively constructed as a ‘richness’ or a social benefit. However, after the EU expansion to include Eastern European countries and increased international migration of refugees and asylum seekers, ‘diversity’ has increasingly been constructed as a social problem, a threat to social cohesion and even to the “European way of life” (Trilling, 2019).

The existence of these two different conceptions of ‘diversity’ can be understood as the result of racism, a little admitted phenomenon in EU texts. For many black and mixed ethnicity (BAME) Europeans, “their skin disguises their Europeaness and European is still a synonym for ‘white’” (Pitts, 2019, p.4). European institutions have not been prepared to recognise the racist ‘othering’ of black and brown Europeans as a legacy of European colonial history and a result of what Dominguez (2019) has called the “post-colonial zero point”, a reliance on Eurocentric logic which normalizes Whiteness and Western culture.

Indeed, this Eurocentric logic is glaring in European national ‘teacher competence’ statements. A feature of the EU global competitiveness agenda has been a presumption that education problems are susceptible to technocratic solutions resulting in the setting of education standards including teacher competence statements. SPIRAL sought to bring the latter together to produce a “common reference framework” with each partner translating their national teacher competence statements into English. ‘Common’ competence statements were then derived from a synthesis of the various national statements in four agreed domains; professional values, pedagogy and practice, linguistic competence, and intercultural understanding.

Given that the European teaching population is largely homogenous (white and Western) (PPMI, 2017), it is significant that none of the teaching competences within the intercultural understanding domain explicitly included the need for teachers to acknowledge how their own ethnicity/culture shapes their practice. Furthermore, the synthesis of competence statements blurs the differences arising from different educational cultures and traditions and the ways in which these define acceptable and unacceptable divergence from conceptions of national norms. The French teaching standards, for example, include the statement: “Designing and implementing learning and teaching situations which take pupils’ diversity into account”. What this means in France where the wearing of veils and headscarves is forbidden in schools will be different to the meaning in a national context in which veils and headscarves are tolerated or encouraged. With different meanings subsumed in this way, the commonality of ‘common’ statements of “intercultural skills necessary to meet the needs of a 21st century classroom” becomes more apparent than real but nevertheless serve to inhibit discussion of racism in understandings of diversity.

Projects such as SPIRAL may well have been effective in contributing to the valuing of a particular kind of diversity within a ‘European identity’ and the Erasmus programme clearly has had an important role in UK Higher Education. However, as we face a future outside of the EU we should not be seduced by self-congratulatory liberal narratives of the role of European exchanges in ‘inclusion’ and ‘respect for diversity’ when these fail to acknowledge the racist distinction made in EU policy and practice between diverse (white) citizens and diverse (non-white) foreigners. Such uncritical narratives negate the experience of racism of BAME Europeans and sustains the racism affecting both BAME Europeans and non-Europeans. We should, instead, recognise how the language of ‘diversity’ obfuscates the racist distinction between desirable diversity (white/European/national) and undesirable diversity (black and brown/non-European/foreign) and how programmes premised on a “European identity” do nothing to challenge the consequences of our colonial history nor do they help us move beyond the “post-colonial zero-point”.



# I am other: the meeting of two cultures and a widening participation perspective

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This article presents the notion of a double consciousness (DuBois, 1903/2007) that I have identified arising from my being UK born and having parents from a non-British ethnic heritage. This double consciousness can be viewed as a deprivation and a gift; an inability to see oneself except 'through the eyes of other' and at the same time being in possession of two cultural world views which provide a "redoubled comprehension" (DuBois, 1903/2007) of British society. I discuss how I see a parallels in the positionings of young people in my widening participation outreach work, and particular in those students who become the first from their families to embark on university study.

My Japanese parents emigrated to the UK in 1970 and I was born in London. I am the first of my family to be born in another country and go through a different education system. I attended the local primary school and then a state secondary school in a leafy suburb of London. From the age of seven to sixteen, I also attended Japanese School on Saturday mornings. My education life was split between two distinct cultural forms. On Mondays to Fridays, it was an education in which I did well. However, on the Saturday, it was an education where I was woefully unprepared, did poorly in written tests and never enjoyed reading aloud from the Japanese literature text. Saturdays equated to a sudden onset illness and a hope that signal failure on the London underground meant no trains to Camden Town. At the weekend, I felt like I was failing. In addition to this, I felt that I didn't quite fit in with the Japanese students who were living in the UK only for a few years, due to one or both parents being seconded for work. In my mind, I was English. I dreamt in English, I spoke English and I felt at home with the majority white British friendships I had at the time. It wasn't until I was asked questions whilst being introduced at social gatherings or from newly formed friendships such as: "Where are you from?" I received comments like: "You speak good English," I began to feel othered from the sense of English (British) nationality that I readily associated with.

Over the years, starting different job roles and filling out equal opportunity monitoring forms, trying to find a definition that fits me from a given list of choices opens up some further doubts: Am I British if my ethnic heritage is not specifically listed in the numerous tick boxes? Am I Asian? As it lists Chinese and not Japanese, I must be: "Other".

Only after having gone to university and moving into employment, did I arrive at any real sense of ease at being connected with two cultures and being content with "me". Learning to critically analyse information at university, in the workplace and in everyday life, opened the way to acceptance of being part of more than one cultural heritage, to stop the struggle of having to consider where I belonged. This realisation in the value of a double consciousness came on gradually through small moments such being able to speak to my mum in Japanese on public transport and for us to have our own cultural connection whilst being part of a wider London community. In addition to this, friends being curious and wanting to know more about Japanese language, traditions and culture made me reflect that this was in fact a positive facet and one that I seemed to have wanted to put aside due to my conflicting sense of cultural loyalty.

On reflection there was a wealth of humour, culinary delights, arts, crafts, literature, music, technology and more that I didn't fully appreciate on those educational Saturday mornings. And the fact that I can now freely chat with my family on the phone or on trips to Japan is a huge bonus. I still speak to my mum in a strange conglomeration of Japanese and English, answering a question in Japanese when the question was asked in English or vice versa. I even feel ok to support both England and Japan in the FIFA World Cup. As Sir Kazuo Ishiguro says in an interview: "People are not two-thirds one thing and the remainder something else. Temperament, personality, or outlook don't divide quite like that. The bits don't separate clearly. You end up a funny homogeneous mixture" (Bomb Magazine, 1989).

An interest of mine working in widening participation has been on the terminology used with words like disadvantaged, disengaged and non-traditional. These are often used and maybe even affirm the fact that students from non-traditional backgrounds don't quite belong to the whole, they are somehow other. We often hear young people say things like: "I'm not clever enough to go to uni," or "I don't know what I want to do," or, "I just don't know." It's ok not to know, as our stories are not completely known or written. We need to celebrate the not knowing and think of it as being one part of the whole picture. Allowing time for stories to be heard is powerful; student ambassadors sharing with a group of Year 9s about how they found school challenging and how they are now studying a subject they love is inspiring. Rather than an adult imparting their perceived pearls of wisdom, the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970), it also allows for teacher-student power dynamics to become more equal.

For some widening participation students the impact of financial issues, conflicting identity, social isolation and living at home can lead to a sense of not fitting in at university (Gorard et al, 2006). Finding that sense of belonging, keeping hold of where you come from yet embracing a new learning and living environment can be tough. Do those feelings of not fitting in still linger on at university? Or can those thoughts and feelings be part of a narrative that can be shared with others? Is it through critically assessing, processing and reflecting of different views and ideas that we come to a better understanding of our diverse traits and qualities? Universities are great spaces to share, discuss, digest and question those hidden voices within us all.

Decolonising the curriculum provides an inclusive intellectual space for uncomfortable conversations and histories to be shared and opens up a wider cultural heritage which we can learn from collaboratively - isn't that exciting? A Year 10 student was asked what their strengths and weaknesses were. That student wrote: Strength=Football, Weakness=School. This student did not ask the question why football was a strength - eg potential to develop leadership, organisational, strategic planning and motivational skills etc. It was just that they enjoyed football and they didn't enjoy school. Sometimes we just accept what we are given and don't question why. Maybe this student didn't feel that the curriculum had anything that related to their own life circumstances, or they didn't see a link or know how to interpret those shared experiences. It is so important to try and understand those key feelings that can inspire or hinder a young person to succeed. Through widening participation, maybe we can break down some of the barriers that have colonised thoughts to make someone realise that they already have more skills and qualities than they think. That they have already supported, inspired and motivated that other person. That other person being you or me.

# Critical race theory against legitimate cultural capital and exclusion in higher education

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Critical race theory, Marxist perspectives on media work, and feminist and queer theory, inform the curriculum in the group of courses that I find myself teaching in Media Studies. In this context, we engage with racialised and otherwise marginalised scholars. In my opinion, however, the true challenge is to address another dimension of colonisation, which is inherent in Western academia; a dimension that is encapsulated in Fanon's (1963, p. 26) talk of the 'Graeco-Latin pedestal'. Those who occupy, to use Goffman's (1959, p. 21) words, 'privileged positions in the division of definitional labour in the academic field' (i.e. those who credibly define what constitutes scholarly knowledge and how it is produced) are in these positions by virtue of privilege that takes on the form of credentials (legitimated cultural capital), connections (social capital), and money (economic capital), and both conform to and perpetuate the doxa of Western academia. Even critical scholars produce discourse which is underlain by the logic of exclusion, discourse that both makes important scholarly ideas inaccessible to people who lack the habitus that comes with privilege, and discourages the production of counter-hegemonic discourses.

Consistent with other post-1992 universities (see Crozier et al., 2008), many students in our School occupy positions of marginalisation on the issue of structural intersectionality in higher education see Museus and Griffin (2011); on the concept of intersectionality see Crenshaw (1989). From a Bourdieusian perspective, higher education is the par excellence social field that participates in the reproduction of social inequality through processes that create conditions of exclusion of under-privileged students (Naidoo, 2004). Making critical ideas accessible to racialised students is urgent, not simply because the latter can participate in higher education and its ensuing benefits, but also because their own perspectives have to inform learning. According to Thomas (2002, p. 431), "educational institutions favour knowledge and experiences of dominant groups [...] to the detriment of other groups". The lives of racialised students constitute knowledge that breaks through the illusion of ideology. According to Fanon (1963, p. 38), "the unemployed man, the starving native do not lay claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they are the truth". This knowledge is needed and cannot be produced unless students feel confident enough to express themselves, and confident that whichever way they express themselves is legitimate and valued. Feminist critics of Habermas's theory of communicative action are also relevant here, as they stress how narrow and hegemonic conceptions of political discourse exclude marginalised people (see Fraser, 1990).

Although many problems are indeed structural and deeply embedded in the logic of the academic field, scholars like Ramsden (2003) argue that we cannot wait for an institutional revolution. Efforts made by individual scholars to address these problems endemic in academia have been illustrated in the previous issue of this Journal. Handley et al. (2019, p. 15) bring attention to Canagarajah's thesis on "code meshing", which refers to bringing "one's own experiences linguistically and culturally into the standard written formal English", a practice which would empower students to share their experiences. In the same issue, Stephens (2019, p. 19) asks, "how do we communicate complexity without using types of verbal (and non-verbal) language, and attitudes, that restrict participation of students?". These two scholars suggest that decolonising the curriculum should go beyond enriching the syllabus with non-western perspectives. Academic language itself, as a field that is exclusionary, needs to change. A first step towards understanding the urgency and method for challenging existing knowledge and allowing racialised subjects to produce their own knowledge is that white scholars engage with critical race theory; there are no shortcuts.



# Decolonising the Curriculum: Student led action

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Whilst studying the course 'Critical Traditions of Western Thought', my fellow students and I became frustrated with the way our course was taught. Rather than a radical course unpacking and critiquing the canon of philosophical modes of thinking, we found one with a reading list that consisted of only 7 female authors and 5 people of colour out of 80. This was not acceptable to us as students, and our dissatisfaction with the course grew. We knew that there had to be a better alternative and so students and course representatives mobilised to demand the decolonisation of our curriculum. My article will outline how we did this and why it was so important to achieve despite opposition from within the faculty.

We strongly felt that justifications of the course structure such as: "it's just history" and "it's up to the students to critique the readings" were not good enough. We decided to go further than just critiquing the readings by demanding an intersectional critique of the entire course structure and syllabus. Jasmine Ferrari, a fellow student at the University of Brighton and a key figure in decolonising our curriculum, states: "The diffusion of power through knowledge formation and pedagogical practice is not a cause and effect relationship, it reaches through the academy to the playground, into all of our minds and self-disciplinary practices, out to the workplace, to our intimate relationships and beyond." We decided to release a statement to be discussed with the student cohort via their course representatives. The students could sign this statement if they agreed with it.

One of the main points addressed in the statement was the disproportionate presence of white men in our reading list. It is not necessarily their 'whiteness' or 'maleness' that causes the issue, it is "the perpetuation of white male dominance" contained within their thinking that was left unchallenged in the reading list. It is not that we felt the reading list should be substantially larger. I remember that our concerns were met with: "Are you saying we need to give students extra reading? They don't do the readings anyway!" Articles by people of colour and/or women are present only when the topics centre around discussions of race and gender. Intersectional critique was absent. Philosophical modes of thinking need to be decolonised, removed from the notion that abstract philosophical knowledge was formed in a vacuum. Claiming that there is no room for women's voices, voices of colour and voices that critique pieces that form the canon is unacceptable.

Meetings took place between lecturers and course representatives to discuss student voice and to address how to move forward with the curriculum. However, to our disappointment, dissatisfaction with the course was often met with the same response that it was down to students to critique the texts in seminars and essays. We argued that it was not enough for lecturers to simply present the material with a sense of irony, instead of providing a range of texts and critical material that presents the work within its historical context for students to engage with. As a result of this the reading list was amended in part by adding more readings and placing texts in comparison with historic events, such as: reading Eric Williams' (1994) *Capitalism and Slavery* in relation to Adam Smith's (1991) *Wealth of Nations*. An evening seminar hosted by students titled: 'Am I Racist?' was held at Grand Parade campus during the end of July 2018, was attended by over 50 students and lecturers.

At the time we saw the curriculum reform as a success, however, there is still room for advancement. The addition of readings does not go far enough in decolonising the course. The new readings are still analysed through the lens of the Eurocentric historical canon and does not address the myth of the 'white male genius', achieved by removing philosophical thought from its historical context. However, the experience of the student body joining with the department in a unified voice was an example of our ability to deconstruct the way our course is taught, increasing inclusive engagement with the learning outcomes.



# Why is my curriculum white? - An international students' perspective

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This short article is framed by my interest in a campaign for change sparked by University College London students in 2015 who posed the question: 'Why is my curriculum white?' This can be seen in a film produced (Hussain, 2015) in which student concerns are raised about the lack of awareness and realisation by their lecturers of "whiteness" in the curriculum as a result of dominant 'white ideas and 'white authors.' The students put forward the idea that as a result of colonialism this 'whiteness' has been normalised. It is an inequality which relates to the National Union of Students (NUS) Black Students Survey (NUS, 2019) which revealed that 34% of Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) students felt they were unable to articulate confidently their world views and perspectives to lecturers and tutors in developing their knowledge and student experience. This also relates to a cause of frustration for international students where the Eurocentric design of course content fails to account for diverse backgrounds or views. It is suggested by Tannock (2018, p.28) that the default knowledge positions of Eurocentricism found in many UK university courses can contradict any claims made by the institution that they are part of a 'globalised educational landscape'.

I have first-hand experiences of 'whiteness' from my former course of study. My concerns arose through some Year 1 modules where all students were assumed to know about British politics, including politicians of the past and present and their political ideologies. Furthermore, comparative modules in Year 2 and Year 3 were heavily Eurocentric in their academic orientations. Tannock (2018) believes that because international students do not have access to permanent citizenships or residency, they do not feel entitled to object to the dominance of a Eurocentric curricula imposed upon them in their studies.

du Preez (2018) strongly argues that decolonisation and internationalisation are not opposites, but rather, have constructive connections that have transformative potential in a university curriculum. An attempt to internationalise my former course of study would need to involve what I see as a process of integrating an international, intercultural and inclusive dimension into the higher education teaching and learning process, community engagement and research. This could be applicable by expanding the context of modules to not only cover the British agenda, but as a comparative contextual thread running through to give international students the opportunity to conduct research on and in other countries they are more familiar with. An important aspect of internationalising the curriculum is ensuring that different perspectives are embedded into every layer of modules within the curriculum to ensure students do not graduate with a monocultural approach. As a result, Jansen (2017) adds that providing students more knowledge in new theories and perspectives will allow them to see historical colonial problems and related contemporary issues differently in addition to also decolonising the curriculum.

du Preez (2018) claims that the benefits of adopting an internationalised curriculum is an advancement of global citizenship, creating an understanding between and amongst cultures that will foster 'intellectual stewardship' amongst borders to work on shared societal issues. Therefore, by internationalising the curriculum we are also working with a transformative agenda. Ryan and Carroll (2005) suggest that, adopting inclusive approaches for international students, will result in creating a more generally inclusive curriculum for a broader range of learners. Most importantly, however, transformative approaches to decolonising the curriculum through internationalisation must arise from higher education institutions asking themselves challenging questions about how they want to portray themselves as a cultural institution of education to prospective students nationally and globally (Jansen, 2017).

In conclusion, by internationalising the curriculum, we will pave the way to achieve a decolonised curriculum to ensure that students should no longer have to ask the question: Why is my curriculum white?

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# DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

**TEACHING AND  
LEARNING ABOUT  
RACE EQUALITY**

**ISSUE 1, JULY 2019**

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# The Master's Tools <sup>i</sup>

## HELEN JOHNSON

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I am racist.  
Not in a march for Tommy  
KKK,  
white pride, white power,  
kind of way,  
but racist  
with a shame that cramps,  
a brat who flicks her hair  
and stamps,  
"how dare you call me that!"  
in righteous rage.

Bigotry's for baddies,  
in sharks'-head hoods  
and Mein Kampf boots,  
bloodied, other-worldly brutes,  
their rank lips cursing,  
hands that loot,  
that measure and constrain,  
for white man's gain.

It's black boys shot quicksilver,  
reaching for a light,  
kids stolen from their mothers  
in the outback,  
and raised white.  
It's watered-down blood,  
a noose in the night.  
It's civilise,  
or slaughter if they fight.

Not us,  
'cause we're the good guys,  
right?

And I want to believe  
I'm a knight on a steed,  
fighting for what's just,  
or Martin Luther King's best friend,  
liberal, wokeand sussed,

like my privilege unchecked,  
my future held in trust.

You see,  
I was raised  
to drown rebellion in silence.  
It's just anawkward quip,  
not structural violence.  
Subdue dissent,  
it's not your call,  
we build them new schools after all,  
and isn't it our lot to feed the world?

I was schooled so sure  
the Empire's had its day.  
They came, they saw, they conquered,  
walked away,  
but the legacy  
was never held at bay.  
It's in our signs, our statues,  
sculpts speech and streets like clay.

And the place to protest this is here,  
the moment to change is today.  
It took me forty years,  
to say that I am racist.

We need to be accountable,  
dissect, dismantle, rebuild,  
listen to voices we've silenced,  
restore the potential we've killed [ii]  
scour our texts, our hearts and our hands,  
for 'germs of rot,' [iii]  
the slavers' brand.  
Now is the time to take a stand,  
and it starts,  
with  
"I am racist."

### Notes

[i] This is a reference to an Audre Lorde quotation: "...the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." Taken from: Lorde, A. (1984) *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, pp. 110-114.

[ii] "They talk to me about progress, about 'achievements', diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out." (Césaire, A., 2000/1955) *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 42-3)

[iii] Quotation from Frantz Fanon (1983/1961) *Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.





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