

# DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM

## TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT RACE EQUALITY

## ISSUE 3 - JULY 2020



# EDITORIAL

Brighton's #BlackLivesMatters (BLM) protests in June and July witnessed thousands and thousands of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds speaking together in one voice of unity and strength against racism.

The public broadcasting of physical violence inflicted on George Floyd, and his subsequent death, was clear for all to see and to be appalled by. There are many other actions of violence towards black people that the heightened wave of BLM protests in the UK have sought to expose and dismantle.

In Bristol, the tearing down of the symbolically violent statue of Robert Colston was to erase oppression caused by a daily reminder imposed on black people of Colston's and the city's past connections with the ugly transatlantic slave trade.

Psychological violence is inflicted daily upon black people through the overt use of racist language in the workplace; by media; in football stadiums; in the language accepted by popular music; and through covert microaggressions that snipe at black people aiming to undermine their existence in dominant white spaces. The recent Windrush deportation scandal is clear example of this psychological violence. Black pupils' greater percentage of school exclusions; and black university students' lower rate of completion and achievement both point directly to conspiracies of institutional violence.

The epistemic violence of Eurocentrism via the school curriculum has been exposed. Calls have become louder for space to be given to the teaching and learning of black history as part of a fuller, more representative teaching of the past.

We acknowledge that the black experience of racist violence in the UK that we describe does not present the total reality of all non-white people in their life experiences. However, we see this as a black experience that is portable to situations where some identity dynamics are different, but the effects of racism look familiar.

Decolonising the Eurocentric curriculum of teaching and learning is about seeing 'white privilege' and knowing how mindsets have been created and sustained by this. This is a challenge, as 'white privilege' has become the default setting of many in society, and as such has become invisible. It is therefore difficult to recognise, so needs to be deliberately deconstructed. Why? Decolonising the curriculum will equip all of our students and colleagues with greater opportunities to broaden their ways of seeing for more in-depth and considered ways of knowing. Decolonising the curriculum is a process that will advance professional practice for all in the 21st century.

Processes of decolonisation are exemplified by the excellent interdisciplinary articles collated for Issue 3. We have sought to ensure that the contributions to Issue 3 reflect the diversity of experience and expertise from across the university including: current and former staff colleagues; current students and Alumni. Thank you for sharing your excellent articles and poems: Jessica Harper, Fezile Sibanda, Shahnaz Biggs, Emily Brooks & Professor Bhavik Patel, Dr Ushchi Klein, Emeritus Professor Gina Wisker, and Annie Whilby.

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As members of the University of Brighton Race Equality Charter Mark Steering Group, our vision for sharing of this interdisciplinary work was supported by a 2018 Teaching and Learning Scholarship Award provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

Front cover, Back cover, pages 7 and 11 photographs of #BlackLivesMatter protests in Brighton, from @BrightonLivesNews

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/BrightonLiveNews/photos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/BrightonLiveNews/photos/?ref=page_internal) With thanks.

Page 15 background image of Lewis Latimer from <https://www.facebook.com/GulfPowerCompany/photos/meet-lewis-latimer-one-of-his-greatest-inventions-was-the-carbon-filament-a-vita/2404690332898778/> With thanks.

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# FOREWORD

None of us will have failed to be shocked and distressed by the tragic death of George Floyd in the United States, but it was 27 years ago that Stephen Lawrence was brutally attacked and died at a bus stop in Eltham. Since then there have been numerous reports and inquiries into racial inequalities, multiple recommendations and yet the day to day lived experiences of many black people has not changed. This moment must, without question, lead us to reflect on injustice and racism in our own culture – as individuals and as members of society but also, critically, as a University. While I am confident that we have laid good foundations on which to build a community in which discrimination and hate, on any grounds, have no place, there is more that can, and must be done. As a University which holds inclusivity as one of its core values, we are deeply committed to standing against racism in any form. But it is absolutely right that we should also hold ourselves, each and every one of us, accountable for putting our values and commitment into practice in ways that make a tangible difference to staff and students. There is much that we are already doing – from our BAME leadership development programme to our work on decolonising our curriculum – driven by staff and students. But, despite being one of only sixteen universities in the UK with a Race Equality Charter Award and action plan, we know that we can and must do more. I would like to say thank you to all those students and colleagues that have shared their feelings and thoughts with me and for all the contributions to this edition. I hear you and I am committed to action. Thank you.

**Professor Debra Humpris FRCP**  
Vice Chancellor

The articles in this edition, which highlight the critical need for curricular justice, show us the University not as it is, but as it should be. Student, staff and alumni contributions arrive at a watershed moment in the history of antiracist activism, following the murder of George Floyd. The structural inequalities facing the institution are a microcosm of society's entrenched racism. However, the University can and must be a driver for social change and we have a collective duty to disrupt the power structure. For decolonisation of curriculums and race equality to be achieved, I believe it requires the University getting comfortable with its discomfort. These thought-provoking articles should fill us with tremendous hope, instead of causing us to despair at the huge tasks they bring, becoming ever more urgent in the context of recent events and COVID-19's disproportionate impact. I hope each of us embraces the principles presented in these articles, so that we can collectively advance this cause, as far too often it falls to those who are affected by it. Racial justice and a commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement needs to be embedded in all decision making, with the lived experiences of those impacted being heard, in order to do right by them and enable equality of opportunity. Only then, through structural change, will inequality be stamped out from the University so that a vision of racial equity is realised, representing a way of being rather than a notion to which we aspire.

**Ramy Badrie**  
BSU Vice-President

# The 'N' Word: Are Trainee Teachers prepared to teach about race and inequality?

**JESSICA HARPER**

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As a trainee teacher, I undertook a work placement at a secondary school located within an area of low ethnic diversity and high levels of social deprivation. Within my third week, I was asked to begin teaching my first Year Nine class [children aged 13-14]. I was going to be reading *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937). I was nervous. Taking your first class is always going to be a scary experience for a trainee teacher. However, my concern felt deeper than this. In particular, I was anxious about the section of the book that I was to be teaching. The extract that I was going to be reading to the students featured Curley's wife hurling racial abuse at Crooks:

"Well, you keep your place then *Nigger*. I could get you strung up on the tree so easy it ain't even funny."

(Steinbeck, 1937, p.91).

I expressed my concern to the teacher, perfectly aware that I would be arriving into the room as a white, privileged female, teaching these students for the first time, and throwing around the 'N' word. In addition, I had minimum prior relationship building with these students to form a safe environment for a deep discussion about the context in which the word is used in the book, and the power that it holds. The teacher informed me that it was important to have a discussion around racist language to help the students understand the context of the book. So why did I feel so unprepared? Upon reflection, this incident highlights a number of issues, but importantly it begs the question: Are trainee teachers sufficiently prepared for teaching about race and inequality?

There is very minimal content within Initial Teacher Training (ITT) that is directly concerned with preparing trainee teachers to have the confidence and knowledge to teach in an ethnically diverse classroom, how to deal with racist incidents and how to address racial stereotypes (Lander, 2014). My experience consolidates this, as despite issues such as gender inequality and social deprivation being gently touched upon, I had no sessions or directed reading relating to racial inequality within education. Research into trainee teacher perspectives indicates that there is certainly an issue here. Bhopal and Rhamie (2013) found that all trainee teachers in their study agreed that their institutes of teacher training should be doing more to help them understand issues related to racism. Lander (2011) states that 63% of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) felt their preparation to teach pupils from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds was either satisfactory or worse. Callender (2019, p.19) has voiced concerns that teacher educators are 'complicit in reproducing normative whiteness' with their students, and questions the extent (if any) to which race equality is actually being taught by teacher educators in any way on ITT courses.

It is relevant here to consider the purpose of ITT courses. The content of ITT is heavily focused on preparing teachers to meet the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011). Demonstrating professionalism in addressing racial inequalities is not apparent. Whilst Section 5 of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011) states that 'teachers must understand a variety of factors that can inhibit pupils learning', this does not offer clarity on what these 'variety of factors' may be and how teachers can support pupils to overcome them. Smith (2013) notes an absent discourse on race and equality in the Teaching Standards (DfE, 2011) in contrast to the overt instructions given



for teachers not to undermine British values (DfE, 2014), thus allowing teachers to 'feel justified in their quest for the development of Britishness in pupils' (p.443). This suggests that in contrast to preparing trainee teachers to sufficiently teach about race and inequality, the focus is instead on instilling an Anglo-centric hegemonic curriculum and maintaining the status-quo (Smith, 2013). This appears to be attributed by the school-led model of ITT, where trainee teachers are taught to maintain the current standards within schools of Whiteness and White privilege (Callender, 2019). In turn, this is perpetuated by the canon of texts cited for reading with the English curriculum, of which BAME authors are under-represented (Ali, 2016).

ITT institutions need to do more in preparing trainee teachers to address 'race' and racial inequalities within the school and classrooms. Ono-George (2019) suggests that in order for racial equality to be achieved, a shift in the structure and pedagogy of classrooms would first be needed. In order to address structural forms of racism, the education system and curriculum in particular must be decolonised.

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# Black Lives Matter in Education, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

## MARLON MONCRIEFFE

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The violent killing of the African-American man George Floyd by a White-American policeman has justifiably fuelled the force of the #BlackLivesMatter movement across the world. They have proclaimed: 'Enough is Enough!'.

#BlackLivesMatter defends against the physical, psychological, epistemic and symbolic violence of white supremacy which, as a pandemic, has oppressed Black people for over 400 years.

In the UK, #BlackLivesMatter movement has awoken a plethora of unresolved grievances experienced by Black-British people through their egregious institutional mistreatment in the past and in current times. The recent 'Windrush scandal' provides a clear example of institutional ignorance.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also revealed the true inequality of British society's ethnic multicultural co-existence, specifically where it was reported that African, African-Caribbean and Asian people with symptoms of the virus were being treated less favourably with care than White people, and because of this have been two or three times more likely to die from the virus. The Covid-19 crisis has shown clearly how 'White privilege' (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Di Angelo, 2011) works in British society.



George Floyd's brutal death by suffocation is analogous to the early strangulation of Black children's life opportunities within the British education system. Black children today remain the highest percentage of

pupils excluded from schools fifty years after Coard (1971) reported on their mistreatment. Black children's school exclusions are caused by many factors including the 'epistemic violence' inflicted upon them by a Eurocentric national curriculum (particularly history) (Moncrieffe, 2020; 2018). There is no presence of Black people in the national narrative (Moncrieffe, 2020) given by the statutory aims and contents the national history curriculum. Where minimal space has been made for Black people through non-statutory teaching and learning, their ethnic origins and lives are generally trivialised through negative one-dimensional Eurocentric accounts of the transatlantic slave trade. It is no wonder that Black children have been resistant to school, especially where such traumatic histories are being taught.

The school teacher workforce census (DfE, 2020) presented 85.9 per cent of all teachers in state-funded schools in England as White-British; 92.9 per cent of headteachers were White-British. Just 2.2 per cent of teachers were Black people. These figures indicate the dominant influence of White-British teachers on teaching and learning in the school population. Could this then mean that they will be more inclined to maintain the cultural reproduction of White-British history in schools and classrooms through their privileged 'white' perspectives? Boronski and Hassan (2015) suggest that where White people mainly interact with only each other, this can result in the sharing of similar cultural and racial experiences. This can influence the formulation of shared attitudes, thereby reinforcing their socialisation and allowing for further White supremacy ideologies to prevail in a setting where shared values and attitudes about non-Whites dominate. As a result, 'white privilege' becomes the invisible unchallenged norm.

Anti-racist teacher education training must occur by decolonising the curriculum. Future advancements for training student-teachers on history education should offer the opportunity to study through various forms of historical consciousness. This discipline is a key skills-set which will allow student-teachers to develop a greater sense of reflexivity for critical curriculum thinking, and advancing their actions in providing social justice through their pedagogical approaches (Moncrieffe, 2020).

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This article is an adaptation of #BlackLivesMatter in Education published as a Blog by the British Educational Research Association on 11th June 2020. See <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/blacklivesmatter-in-education>



# Decolonial voices in colonial spaces

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When unpacking the notion of decolonisation in relation to British universities, it is imperative to consider the challenges that occur for academic staff in institutions, particularly those of academics of colour (people who identify themselves as stemming from African, African Caribbean and Asian origins). I will highlight some of the challenges affecting academics of colour, suggesting that race and decolonisation can become intertwined. According to Noxolo (2017), a decolonised system refers to a system without (colonial) oppression. I will examine this in relation to higher education, paying attention to the perspective and plight of academics of colour within Eurocentric and Western university contexts.

It is first accordant to examine how racialised inequalities persist for academics of colour within institutions and how these can impact on the prospect of decolonising the curriculum. Bhopal (2014), Lander and Santoro (2017) report that there is a clear issue of underrepresentation of people of colour (POC), particularly within British institutions. This means that the minority voices of the few POC can be silenced. When considering this silencing, I avoid the assumption that white academics cannot also fight for a decolonised or racially equal university space. However, I draw on the works of critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic (2017) who champion the voices of people of colour when discussing issues of racial equality and parallel topics.

Historically, decolonisation has been a racialised issue due to colonised spaces being made up of oppressed people of colour, with whiteness and Eurocentrism dominating (Noxolo, 2017). Therefore, issues of race and decolonisation are difficult to separate. Globally in academia Eurocentrism dominates with alternative ideologies remaining marginalised (Heleta, 2016; Moncrieffe et al, 2018). In considering issues of representation as well as the dominance of Eurocentrism and Whiteness, it becomes clear that the current landscape of British academia needs to shift, in rejection of the current hegemony in order to become decolonised (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Moncrieffe et al, 2018). Pilkington (2011) argues that institutional racism is endemic within universities. Subsequently, the oppression of people of colour is normalised within the academy.

A key challenge impacting the progress of decolonisation in academia is the underrepresentation of academics of colour. Their narratives regarding race equality and decolonising the curriculum become diminished as their voices are few. POC offer their own perspectives, based on their experiences and these need to be shared, considered, and applied to decolonising practices. While making this argument I reject any homogenising suggestion that all POC have the same viewpoint in regard to race and decolonisation, however, their varied narratives can inform and help to transform and advance academic knowledge.

Often when people of colour are seen in British institutions, they appear in positions that centre race. Within many institutions, we see academics of colour leading race equality teams or doing additional work around their campus in regard to race, decolonisation and activism (Arday and Mirza, 2018). Although this work is necessary, it can often mean their scholarship or roles within the institution focus solely on race activism. Although these academics work hard campaigning to challenge the inequalities they see, their work is limited to this single area, therefore, marginalised. A challenge that exists for decolonising the curriculum is that it is

often perceived as an issue that affects only the minority, not the majority. Studies by Smith (2017), McDuff et al (2018) and Ross (2018) present issues of attainment for students of colour. In terms of decolonisation a focus is then placed on students of colour being the ones in need of a decolonised system (Sleeter, 2016; Bird and Pitman, 2019). Decolonisation is then seen as a Black issue within institutions. Underrepresentation, institutional racism, everyday racism (Essed, 1991) and the victim narrative (Gilroy, 1992) resonate with this critique. Consequently, POC are stifled when fighting for racial equality and decolonised systems in HE.

The challenges faced are complex and multifaceted. Issues regarding representation, social agency, institutional racism, access to resources, the importance placed on decolonisation by the dominant groups and the current neoliberal climate of British higher education all play a part in how achievable a decolonised system can be.

We must first balance the scales before tackling decolonisation. We must all be able to speak, especially academics and students of colour. Our voices must be heard. Only then can we begin to challenge the complex notion that is decolonisation.

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# Towards decolonising research processes - Inviting researchers to seek out Black scholars and scholars of colour

## NAZ (SHAHNAZ) BIGGS

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### Outlining the problem

Students and academics alike have critiqued Higher Education for reinforcing colonialist views (Arday and Mirza, 2018). During my masters research degree training year, my reading lists were overly populated with literature written by scholars who were White, male and from European or North American countries (Bird and Pitman, 2019). Ethnically diverse references did appear within some taught Research Methodology courses, for example, when discussions arose around intersectional feminist epistemology or postcolonial theory. This is because traditionally these topic areas were led by Black scholars (Ashcroft et al., 2003; Collin and Bilge, 2020). However, these subjects are not compulsory across all taught programmes in UK academia. They are often glossed over and not studied in depth, or advertised as 'specialist' modules, which have to be chosen by students (Bhambra et al., 2018).

As a Black doctoral researcher, I was confronted with the lack of ethnically diverse scholars appearing in my literature searches. Through a series of reflective research journal entries, I questioned why we so easily draw on scholars from Global North countries such as the UK, France, USA and Canada, and embarked on a journey to challenge this notion. I began to unpick ways to contribute my solidarity with the decolonising the curriculum movement in order to ensure my contribution to knowledge did not blindly reinforce and perpetuate the one-dimensional practices of Eurocentrism. I realised that it was going to take more than searching key terms in library databases to ensure my research was more inclusive. In this article I offer a literature search strategy I have developed that can be used to identify Black scholars and scholars of colour.

### The search strategy

The steps outlined below form an example of searching for non-White scholars systematically:

*Step 1 - Map out the key words within your project.*

I started with my working PhD title '**Social enterprise** involving **academics** and **community partners** - using a **resilience** lens to assess whether **co-creating knowledge** generates **value**' (keywords in bold), and then highlighted key debates that connected to them: 'The role of the university', 'neoliberalism' and so on.

*Step 2 - Write a list of synonym words for each keyword.*

To ensure you are returning a wide range of results, it is useful to have awareness of concepts that might substitute your keywords. For example, social enterprises are also termed: 'social businesses'; 'hybrid organisations'; 'mutual organisations'; 'co-operatives'; 'not for profit organisations'; 'trading charities'; 'ethical businesses'; 'organisations with a social purpose', etc.

*Step 3 - Choose a location you would like to have literature from, and search for a list of academic institutions in that country.*

To illustrate the strategy, I have chosen The University of the West Indies (Jamaica - Mona Campus and Barbados - Cave Hill Campus).

*Step 4 - Use your search terms on the website search area.*

On the University of the West Indies, Jamaica - Mona Campus website, the keyword '**Social Enterprise**' brought me to a Jamaican scholar, K'adamamwe A.H.N. K'nife, and research which focuses on social enterprise, social inclusion and community development. All of these are relevant to my PhD area. If Step 4 does not return many relevant results, go to Step 5.

*Step 5 - Search for scholars by checking department staff pages.*

On the University of the West Indies: Barbados - Cave Hill Campus website I searched for academic staff through the Faculty of Social Sciences and Department of Government, Sociology, Social Work and Psychology. Here, I found a scholar called Tennyson Joseph. His research is centered around political philosophy and includes: Western Political Philosophy, Caribbean Political Philosophy and Global neo-liberalism.

### **Concluding remarks and limitations**

This step-by-step strategy is an example of my action to decolonise approaches to literature searches in research work. It is by no means an exhaustive way of gathering literature or research sources, and should be conducted as a complementary process with other systematic ways of literature searching (Denzin, et al., 2008). Researchers willing to embark on this journey must recognise that this strategy takes time and dedication. In any case, this strategy illustrates simple steps that can be taken towards decolonising the research process for any academic field.

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# Decolonising science research education and practices

**EMILY L. BROOKS and BHAVIK ANIL PATEL**

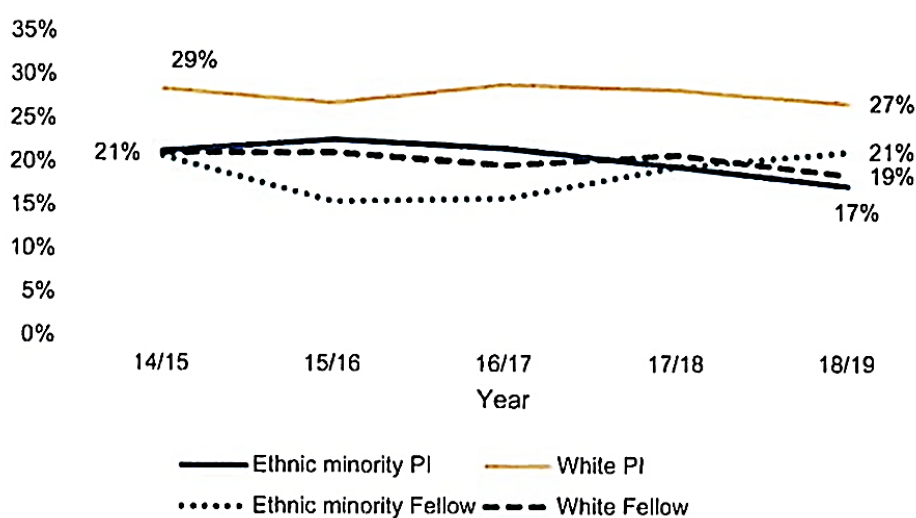
*School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences, Centre for Stress and Age-Related Diseases*

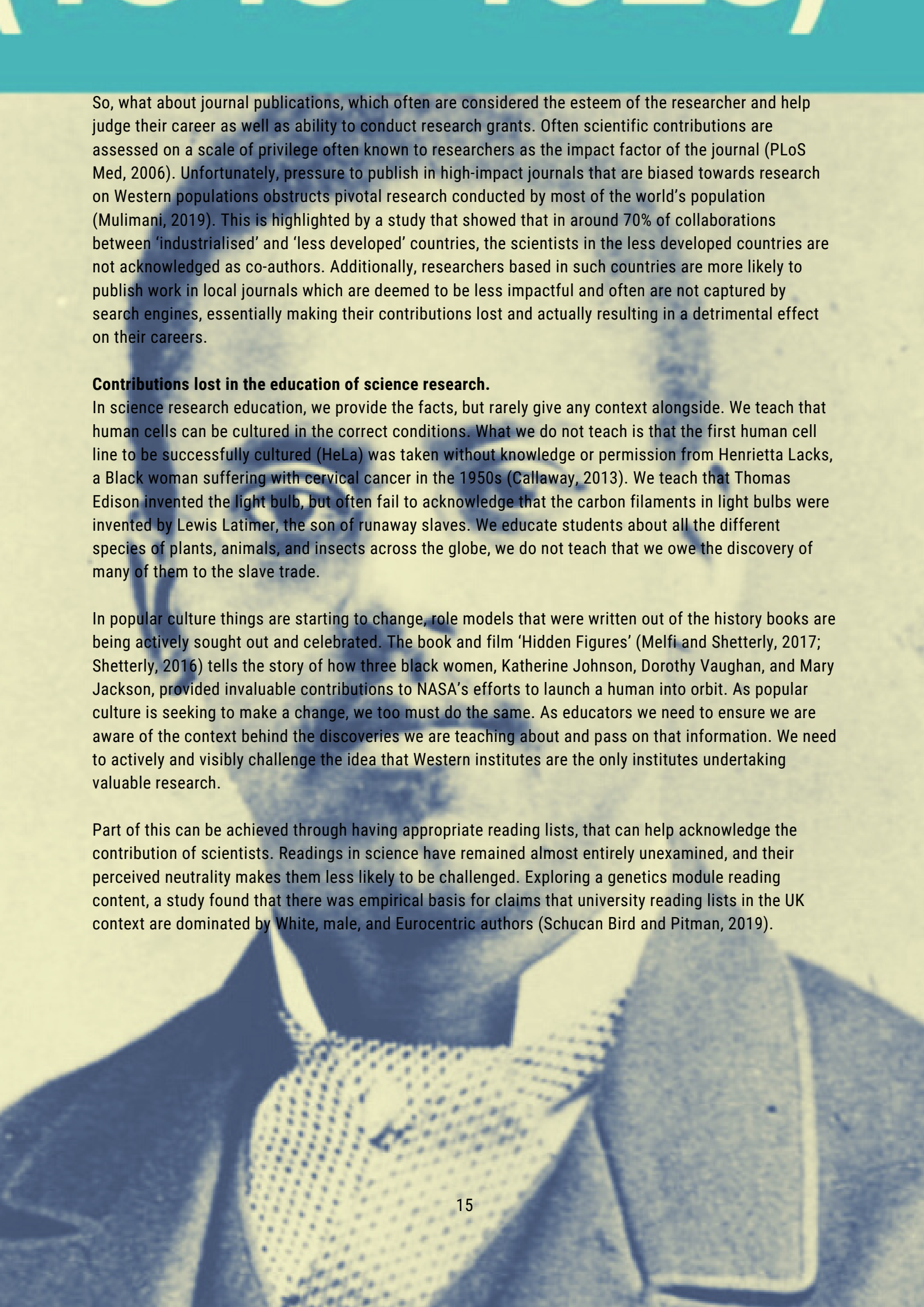
What is being done to decolonise the science research education and practice? On the surface, you might assume very little needs to be done, given that scientific research is conducted with global communities that collaborate and network together. However, sadly, scientists often claim there is little that can be done for decolonisation of science research education because the study is based on objectivity and facts. What is missing from that argument is that the approach we take towards education and practice of science research is often lacking context, and is riddled with bias. Not many students are aware that most early science discoveries were driven by European colonialism and the desire to take over the world. Kipling (1899) wrote about the 'The White man's burden' of introducing progress and civilization to the native peoples of colonial lands. This idea that Western White people are more intelligent than other civilizations provides the context for early scientific endeavors and, unfortunately, lives on today.

## Privilege

It is well known that there is elitism in science which leads to inequalities in opportunities, funding, and recognition. Let us consider grant funding by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). In a recent (2019) data request from the chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee MP Norman Lamb, the success rates of grant applications had significant disparity; particularly White Principal Investigators (PIs) in comparison to PI with minority-ethnic group backgrounds. Whilst White applicants achieved a success rate in applying for grant funding of 27%, the success rate is only 17% for those applicants from minority-ethnic groups (Walport, 2019). The average amount of those grants which minority-ethnic groups applicants do receive is almost 20% lower than those received by White applicants (Figure 1).

Figure 1.  
Success rates of UKRI submitted applications by ethnicity for Principal Investigators (PIs) and Fellows over a 5-year period





So, what about journal publications, which often are considered the esteem of the researcher and help judge their career as well as ability to conduct research grants. Often scientific contributions are assessed on a scale of privilege often known to researchers as the impact factor of the journal (PLoS Med, 2006). Unfortunately, pressure to publish in high-impact journals that are biased towards research on Western populations obstructs pivotal research conducted by most of the world's population (Mulimani, 2019). This is highlighted by a study that showed that in around 70% of collaborations between 'industrialised' and 'less developed' countries, the scientists in the less developed countries are not acknowledged as co-authors. Additionally, researchers based in such countries are more likely to publish work in local journals which are deemed to be less impactful and often are not captured by search engines, essentially making their contributions lost and actually resulting in a detrimental effect on their careers.

### **Contributions lost in the education of science research.**

In science research education, we provide the facts, but rarely give any context alongside. We teach that human cells can be cultured in the correct conditions. What we do not teach is that the first human cell line to be successfully cultured (HeLa) was taken without knowledge or permission from Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman suffering with cervical cancer in the 1950s (Callaway, 2013). We teach that Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, but often fail to acknowledge that the carbon filaments in light bulbs were invented by Lewis Latimer, the son of runaway slaves. We educate students about all the different species of plants, animals, and insects across the globe, we do not teach that we owe the discovery of many of them to the slave trade.

In popular culture things are starting to change, role models that were written out of the history books are being actively sought out and celebrated. The book and film 'Hidden Figures' (Melfi and Shetterly, 2017; Shetterly, 2016) tells the story of how three black women, Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, provided invaluable contributions to NASA's efforts to launch a human into orbit. As popular culture is seeking to make a change, we too must do the same. As educators we need to ensure we are aware of the context behind the discoveries we are teaching about and pass on that information. We need to actively and visibly challenge the idea that Western institutes are the only institutes undertaking valuable research.

Part of this can be achieved through having appropriate reading lists, that can help acknowledge the contribution of scientists. Readings in science have remained almost entirely unexamined, and their perceived neutrality makes them less likely to be challenged. Exploring a genetics module reading content, a study found that there was empirical basis for claims that university reading lists in the UK context are dominated by White, male, and Eurocentric authors (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2019).

### **What can we do to create a more ethnically diverse research environment?**

As much of the current background is bleak, there is also much that can be done to change our science research education and practices to create a more ethnically diverse environment for supporting the contribution of all researchers in science. So here are our recommendations of a few changes:

- Like UKRI, thousands of institutions and researchers' worlds, we should also adopt the recommendations of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). The main recommendation of DORA (2020) is that we do not use journal-based metrics, such as Journal Impact Factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions.
- Many universities hold journal clubs and seminars, however, seldom are these from researchers from the Global South. Their contribution should be discussed without bias and given our new ability to embrace virtual communication, seminars can be conducted via online platforms to allow the voices from a broader range of global researchers.
- Universities need to engage in a transparent and informed discussion about what a 'diverse/inclusive/decolonised' reading list actually looks like. This is a process which needs to engage with a range of stakeholders, including staff and students, to ensure clarity and commitment to the agenda.

Adopting some of these recommendations will ensure that our education and practice of science is inclusive, fair to all and highlights role models from all walks of life, so that students, the public and the community can identify and enhance the joys that science can offer.

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# Learning and teaching a decolonised photographic canon

## USCHI KLEIN

*School of Humanities*

Not without being contested, recent student-led campaigns, such as 'Why is my curriculum white' and 'Rhodes must fall', sought to decentre Eurocentric epistemological structures in higher education. That the campaigns were student-led was significant, as they illuminated the overwhelming "'Dead White Men' approach to teaching" (Begum and Saini 2019, p.196). Students called for a greater representation of non-European thinkers in their curriculum.

The process to decolonise the curriculum tackles questions around the value of knowledge in higher education and how 'barriers that have silenced non-Western voices in our 'multi-cultural' higher education system' can be removed to challenge assumptions, frameworks and pedagogies that are dominated by Western thought and privilege (Harvey and Russell-Mundine 2019, p.789). A decolonising approach does not stop with any discipline, and there is a need to critically engage with photography and its colonial legacy.

The arrival of photography in 1839 coincided with a time when Great Britain and other Western European nations were colonising countries across the world. Photography played a central role in capturing 'the political and violent reality of Western imperialism' (Sealy 2019, p.1). The camera was used as a tool to create Eurocentric images and narratives of the 'Other' (Said, 1979). As a result, the dynamics and histories of photography and colonialism are inherently linked. Similarly, the photographic canon was established, shaped and reinforced through questions and themes addressed within a Eurocentric photographic culture, which 'attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production ... and disregards other epistemic traditions' (Mbembe 2016, p.32). No one questions the influence photographers like Walker Evans, Robert Capa or Henri Cartier-Bresson have in the history of photography, but by decolonising and diversifying the canon, we can develop a more holistic, self-reflective, inventive and collective approach to photography. This can be partly achieved by discussing the use of photography in relation to health and wellbeing (some projects can be seen here [www. http://fragmentary.org](http://fragmentary.org)), or by including photographers in the curriculum who captured their own experience of colonialism and its legacy, such as the South African photographer Ernest Cole, who escaped South African apartheid to live in exile (Newbury, forthcoming); contemporary women photographers who still negotiate post-colonialism in Nigeria, such as Yetunde Ayeni-Babaeko; and Aïm Deüelle Lüschi's horizontal camera project, which opens a space to rethink conventional cameras (Azoulay, 2014).

Indeed, the inclusion of feminist, queer and non-Western perspectives has both complicated and globalised the canon to advance the scholarship on photography (Aloulay 2019; Camp 2017). Here, it is crucial to recognise that 'a globalised canon' is perhaps more inclusive but does not automatically challenge Eurocentric values. This can be seen in photography books like Rosenblum's *A World History of Photography* and Marien's *A Cultural History of Photography*. Although they both include photography from different eras around the world, their focus is nonetheless grounded in European frameworks. Researchers increasingly seek to create narratives that do not 'Other' non-Western perspectives (Fairey 2018). However, these critical developments in scholarship are not necessarily taught in undergraduate

photography degrees. More often than not, students will recognise established textbooks of thinkers like Roland Barthes, John Tagg, Allan Sekula and John Berger, who take up central positions in any reading lists on photography-based undergraduate courses. The reading of non-Western thinkers is reserved for seminars on one-off topics.

As a researcher in photography and currently completing my PGCert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at University of Brighton, I am particularly interested in challenging the lack of diversity of non-Western photographic writers, thinkers and practitioners in the curriculum by placing Eurocentric knowledge alongside non-Western thinkers on photography and the visual arts. Through my own experience of teaching undergraduate students at Brighton, I realise that students identify the Eurocentric approach to teaching photography and the visual arts in their curriculum. Over the last few years, many of my students, especially Black, African and Minority-Ethnic (BAME) group students, voiced their concern over the lack of diversity and used their essays and dissertations to challenge the predominantly 'white curriculum' (Begum and Saini, 2019). I also invited students to share their knowledge and research on non-Western thinkers and artists during seminars and lectures.

A recent interview I conducted for my PGCert reinforced a sense of frustration with the visual arts curriculum. The student suggested that alongside setting up regular reading groups that should be made compulsory for undergraduate students and run throughout their BA years, frequent exposure to BAME artists was necessary by inviting them to deliver guest lectures and workshops on issues such as cultural identity. It is important that the curriculum reflects wider societal issues around race, equality and diversity, and that students are directly involved in the decolonising process to include their lived experiences.

There is no quick fix to decolonise the curriculum but as part of my PGCert, my aim is to develop strategies that start the process of decolonising photography and the visual arts through changes in course structure that place colonial scholarship in dialogue with emerging non-Western scholarship. I believe as educators, we must accept the responsibility for the histories we create when we teach our students. That does not mean neglecting that colonisation took place, but critically engaging with the photography canon and read the scholarship differently in today's context. Ultimately, this will increase student engagement with their studies too.

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# Decolonising the Curriculum: Some thoughts

## **GINA WISKER**

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Unless we are aware of the histories of power and the legitimisation of sources and forms of knowledge as well as the creators of knowledge, knowledge remains either brazenly or surreptitiously, subtly, the production and possession of those in power.

Curriculum is understood here broadly as content, learning, teaching and assessment practices and also technological systems, library, induction, study support. In this theory-based discussion of decolonising the curriculum, I will mention some of my own experiences, one of establishing and leading a large Access course in the late 1980s in the UK, social justice projects in South Africa (Wisker, 2013; Wisker and Masika, 2017) and the SARIHE ESRC/NRF Newton-funded project (Timmis et al., 2019, a, b, c).

When considering decolonising the curriculum, we often think of access to higher education, and in this respect, Engstrom and Tinto (2008, p. 50) remind us that 'access without support is not opportunity'. Access to higher education, at least in the UK, became a major drive towards equality in the 1980s. However, the best work on removing barriers to gaining access to HE, on seeing yourself as invited and welcomed into HE, is not nearly enough to achieve decolonisation of the curriculum studied. The adaptation is often all one way, on the part of the student. If and once the full diverse range of students have been enabled to access higher education through their own merit and the implementation of widening participation initiatives, such as Access schemes (UK), and Foundation courses (South Africa), we have to ask what higher education and whose higher education they are entering, and who and what must adapt to enable their success. This adaptation should not be all on the part of the students. There is a responsibility on the part of policy makers, HE management, academic staff, and other colleagues, e.g. in library and technological support, to help make learning opportunities genuinely accessible.

A thoroughgoing concern for decolonising the curriculum has at its heart more than questioning the established, historically embedded curriculum content. It involves the dedication to reflect, nurture and reward the modes of knowledge construction and forms of knowledge of the full range of students, and so enable considerable steps towards curricular justice (Connell, 2012), which Connell suggests is 'organized around the experience, culture and needs of the least advantaged members of the society'. This draws on their knowledge and aims for 'richness rather than testability' (Connell, 2012, p. 681).

Changing and decolonising the curriculum involves a widespread shift in what is deemed knowledge and curriculum informed by theories concerning epistemic justice, recognising, enabling and rewarding different knowledge forms, constructions, expression beyond those a North Western European tradition. Prior to the 1980s access movement, foundational thinkers, particularly Freire (1968) began to influence what became theory concerned with decolonising the curriculum. Freire sees education as oppressive and one way, arguing that learning is dialogic, there should be dialogue and cultural synthesis between teachers and learners, and forms of knowledge. Richard Shaull builds on his work, emphasising the coercive and collusive nature of education : 'There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the "practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover

how to participate in the transformation of their world (Shaull, 1970, in Mayo, 1999, p. 5). In the UK, the work of cultural theory critic Stuart Hall (1996), for example, was influential internationally and locally through the Open University, the largest institution with an access drive at that time.

There is now a burgeoning number of Southern hemisphere, and Eastern theorists and practitioners to whom to turn. One such, Bheki Mpofu (2019), argues that the aim of decolonising the curriculum is not substitution and erasure of one form of knowledge in favour of the other, rather a broader equality of focus, process and outcome which will eventually help shape learning, knowledge and the effects of such knowledge, i.e. this is not a gift from those in power, it is an exchange and cross-fertilisation between cultural constructions and expressions of knowledge.

In South Africa the DHET policy framework (July 2018) indicates that university teachers as curriculum designers and implementers must work from an understanding of the interplay between knowledge and power. They should, it argues, be able to question what knowledge, whose knowledge, and who and what is served through the selection and prioritisation of knowledge in the curriculum, and how such knowledge is taught. Decolonisation of the curriculum should take place at every stage, from early schooling through to and beyond the doctorate, into university senior management structures and governmental decision-making. Taking an approach based on decolonisation, Vandeyar (2019) suggests academics from different contexts and cultures need introductory information and immersion in the culture of the students they are now teaching and advocates for academic or educational development courses and guidance, with the necessary developments driven by a university commitment from the senior management.

Content is one area of necessary change, inclusive modes of teaching, learning and assessment which recognise different modes of knowledge construction another. Embedded in suggestions from the student co-researchers, academics and managers in our research is a need to recognise and afford equal weight to a variety of world views, forms of knowledge construction and its expression. This is not a perspective of generosity of inclusion, letting in the different voices and content, it is a thorough overhaul. It is not always suggesting like-for-like replacement, rather something more generous, rich and vital – inclusivity, diversity, metamorphosing.

Freire's (1968) arguments are fundamental to this – moving beyond the recognition of the pedagogy of the oppressed to something creative, diverse, inclusive, built on dialogue leading to a permanent radical change. This is not a sop to a moment of reaction but a radical, all-encompassing change – of the curriculum in the broadest sense – content, shape, underpinning views about how knowledge is constructed, shared, learned, transformed, teaching and learning practices, resources, contexts, and assessment practices. Support in itself is not enough, since the curriculum itself must change so that the students have their modes of knowledge construction and expression recognised. The core of this need is directly expressed in comments the students made about their own constructions of knowledge, content, approaches, first seen as irrelevant and or second rate, then when they realised their direct usefulness gave them the chance to get the best from

both systems. Freire's powerful political statement about the pedagogy of the oppressed underlines the argument, while Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1998) situates African practice, worldview, expression, language, and validation from expressions of knowledge in the discussion, and Jansen's (2009) broad and/or specific arguments about the translation of this into practice in South Africa moves us in this discussion into the specifics of the effects of history and the present in South African curriculum learning and teaching, and the heard or unheard voices of the African students. The decolonising changes to the broadest conception of curriculum in practice can and must be permanent, flexible and embracing diversity, not just a replacement, not just a change for a moment.

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# **CALL for Articles**

## **Decolonising the Curriculum** Teaching and Learning about Race-Equality **Issue 4 - December 2020**



**University of Brighton**

**You may submit your proposal by email to  
M.L.Moncrieffe@brighton.ac.uk**

**Please include: Title of proposed article  
Abstract of 100 words  
Name of author[s]  
Name of School[s]  
Email address[es] of author[s]**

**We invite articles/short provocations of 750 words maximum (including title and reference list) which develop on the following questions:**

**What is being done to decolonise course curriculum?**

**What are student responses, initiatives and suggestions on attempts to decolonise the curriculum?**

**What is being done to decolonise teaching methods, and foster teaching and learning on race (in)equality?**

**What are the challenges staff have faced in their attempts to decolonise the curriculum and teach about race (in)equality?**

**How can decolonising the curriculum assist with narrowing the BAME attainment gap?**

**The intended practical outcomes of the publication is:**

**To use and apply student responses, initiatives and suggestions on the importance of, and effectiveness of attempts to, decolonise the curriculum.**

**To collate and to disseminate best practice from across this University on decolonising the curriculum, with a view to developing opportunities for interprofessional and interdisciplinary networking in shaping actions for future action plans.**

**To provide instant and immediate access to all stakeholders at and beyond the university with examples of best practice for teaching and learning about race equality.**



# Decolonised Rhymes

## ANNIE WHILBY

*PhD Student, School of Applied Social Science*

Here's a simple equation:

Lower expectations for PoC students,  
Plus  
An unrepresentative curriculum rooted in colonisation,  
Equals =  
Attainment gaps.  
Less brown folks wearing graduation caps.  
Less brown folks making waves in society.  
Less brown folks gaining academic notoriety.

And I think it's a travesty,  
That students can reach the third year of their degrees  
Without confronting or being told to read  
The likes of Fanon, Hill Collins, Davis, Morrison and hooks,  
Yet in all these reading lists and all these books  
Is dead white man, after dead white man,  
After dead white man, after dead white man..  
And I won't go on.. coz you know I can.

This isn't an unconscious bias -  
The word unconscious is consciously adopted  
To absolve responsibility.  
All them white names weren't put there inconspicuously.

The sun hasn't set on the colonial empire.  
Philosophical underpinnings  
Pin us down like shackles.  
Academic repression,  
Perpetuates oppression.  
Perpetuating violence  
In the silence  
Of blackademia.

Rhodes must fall.  
And Rhodes must be analysed in context and subject to criticism.  
Dismantling statues alone won't dismantle systemic racism.

And I'm sure,  
If we taught the works and the likes of  
Tupac Shakur,  
There would be an abundance and more  
Young black men  
Interested in theorising critically.

A breath of fresh air from the stank of the strange fruit still changing in the libraries

Because if the only times  
We hear about our kinds  
Are intertwined in struggles and isms,  
Then how are we supposed to rise  
To further education  
Full of promise and hopes and ambitions?

How did people who looked like me contribute  
History?  
Science, Maths, Geography, Psychology?  
Colonialism cloaks these hidden figures  
And keeps young minds from growing bigger.

You know they say the glass ceiling  
Stops \*white\* women from achieving  
Anything \*white\* men can do?  
Well at least it's glass,  
So they can see through.  
What if that ceiling was made of concrete?  
I can tell you it tastes half of bittersweet.  
A lack of role models and people lighting the way,  
Leaving colourful minds to dwindle and decay.

But we're here to make a stand,  
And we can bring about change,  
If we could deconstruct and consider knowledge in different ways.  
Like how I'm inspired by poets living in our times,  
Who should be just as revered  
If not more than Shakespeare.  
Inspired by the likes of Stormzy, Dave and Akala,  
I've been guided to wear my knowledge and talents as my armour.

So if they say education  
Is the key to liberation,  
And if your keeping it colonial,  
You've got an obligation  
To explain to your students,  
Researchers and scholar-activists  
Why your keeping it white  
And you ain't bothering to challenge shit.

So stay down if you're down with the white institution,  
We're black and we're brown and we are the revolution.





**University of Brighton**

Published in July 2020

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