



**EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITIES AND
DILEMMAS ATTEMPTING TO DECOLONISE
UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULA**

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Workshop Objectives

- Provide participants with an overview of the decolonising movement and the drivers from a UK perspective
- Debate ideas of what it means to decolonise the curriculum/university/different disciplines?
- Gain an overview of the rationale, methodology *work in progress* research findings of the research project (UOM case study History)
- Explore the Advance HE EEDC and Student Engagement framework and its application to the research project
- Share practical ideas of moving towards decolonising curricula, i.e. staff development, working with students as partners, widening participation activities

Setting the Scene



Why Is My
Curriculum
White?

DECOLONISING SOAS

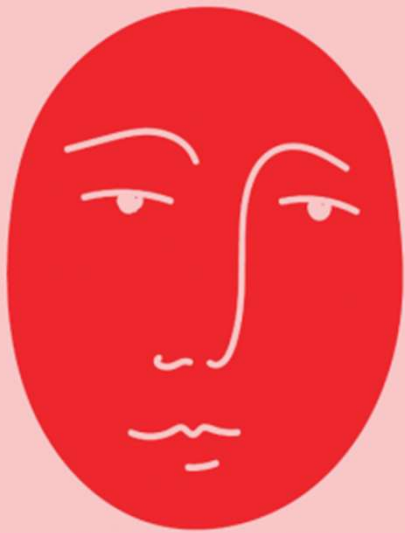
is
my
curriculum

too white?

Drivers



COMMON GROUND



Revisiting the past, envisioning the future:
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4 - 11 MAY 2018

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Students want their curriculums decolonised. Are universities listening?

Harriet Swain @harrietswain Wed 20 Jun 2018 09:00 GMT 700 52

In the year since the culture war over decolonising the curriculum raged in the media, universities are changing how they teach



When students at the University of Cambridge called two years ago for more non-white writers and postcolonial thought to be included in their English curriculum, there was a backlash. Only Oxford, which had already become the target of anti-



Race, Ethnicity & Equality
in UK History:
A Report and Resource for Change

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OCTOBER 2018

Hannah Atkinson, Suzanne Bardgett, Adam Budd, Margot Finn, Christopher Kissane, Sadiyah Qureshi, Jonathan Saha, John Siblon and Sujit Sivasundaram



NSS
National Student Survey

Decolonising?

SOAS define decolonising as,

- *“refers to thought and action within the university to redress forms of disadvantage associated with racism and colonialism”.*
- “in our usage, it connects contemporary racialised disadvantages with wider historical processes of colonialism, seeks to expose and transform them through forms of collective reflection and action”.
- “A background assumption for us is that global histories of Western domination have had the effect of limiting what counts as authoritative knowledge, whose knowledge is recognised, what universities teach and how they teach it”. (SOAS 2018, p.3)

Decolonising History

“Means having a rich number of resources that include scholars from the so-called Global South as well as Afro-Asian-American-Europeans. However, diversity cannot be a substitute to decolonising. Decolonising also means addressing unequivocally the issue of the low number of people of colour hired in these institutions to teach those histories. Who teaches matters as much as what is taught”
(Royal Historical Society 2019, p.10)

Research Context

- The project focus is based on fieldwork conducted at The University of Manchester with the History Department in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.
- The University of Manchester is **one of the most diverse Russell Group universities outside London**, with 27,508 undergraduate students and; **20% of the undergraduate student** population who identify as UK BME in 2017/18 (The University of Manchester Strategic Plan 2020)
- Between 2012/13 and 2016/17, **Black students constituted less than one percent** of all first-degree full-time new entrants to the BA in History at The University of Manchester.
- The academics are 90% White, with one South Asian Professor
- A White-centred and Eurocentric curriculum is a racial problem within the discipline (RHS 2019)
- The department acknowledges the need to diversify its curriculum in order to attract more BME applicants.
- Engaged in a range of CPD activities, staff recruitment campaigns, widening participation interventions, Student Magazine, Race Roots and Resistance Research Group to change the department culture and develop skills and knowledge of staff to undertake the curriculum development project recruitment of Professor David Oluşoga

Activity 2

- How diverse is the student and staff population at Queens?
- What are the trends reported in the NSS, Module, Mid Module evaluations concerning diversifying the curriculum?
- What are the current staff development opportunities to support diversifying the curriculum?
- Are there any extra curricula/student groups which focus on decolonising agenda?
- Can you think of any targeted Widening participation projects aimed at widening access for specific groups?

Research Design

- The aim of the study is to explore academic staff and students' thoughts and feelings and the process of working in partnership to co-produce an inclusive Year One Programme.
- Interpretive paradigm approach to **understand** and **interpret** and **describe** how students and academics attempt to embed equality and decolonise the curriculum (Meda et al 2019).
- Builds on a previous study exploring academic resistance towards decolonising the curriculum.
- Qualitative case study approach used to provide **rich data** on participants **views** and **experiences** (Creswell 2012).
- Focus groups, interviews, content analysis of course documentation and self reflection audit.
- Academics who lead on modules (Level 1 History)
- Opportunity sampling of undergraduate students (7 in total from year 2/3).

Advance HE Approach

Inclusivity

Diversity
inclusivity

Self-
Reflection

Enabling
potential

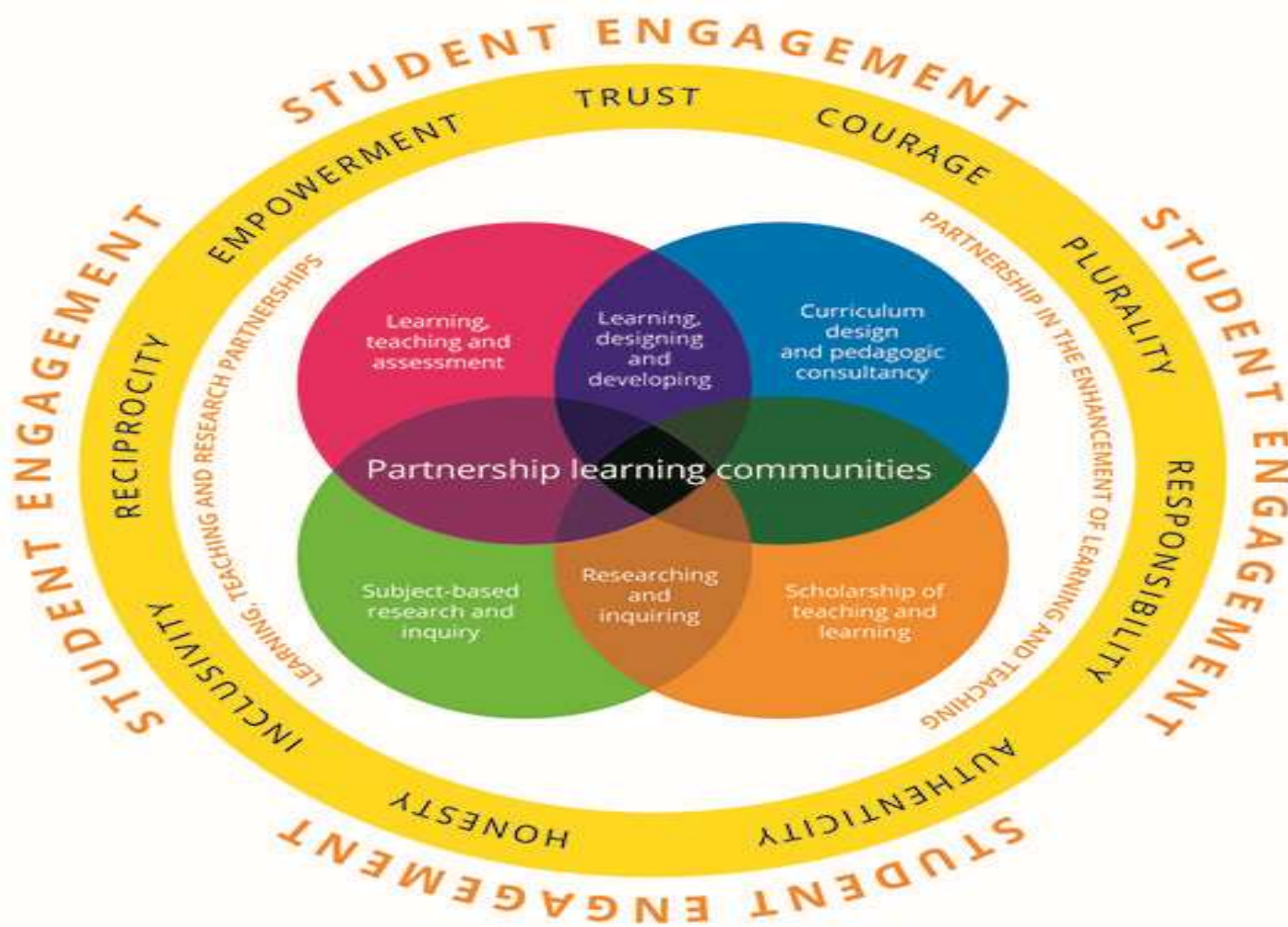
Nurturing
belonging
and
engagement

Diversifying
the
curriculum

Creating
interactivity

Practicing
self-
reflection
(staff)

Encouraging
self-
reflection
(students)



Pre Project Preparation

- Learning and Un Learning Whiteness Training (Away Day)
- Race Roots and Resistance Research Launch
- Race in Action Workshop
- Staff Briefings
- Pre project Survey (staff)
- EDCC Training with Advance HE
- What is a History Curriculum? Professor Rebecca Harris Reading University
- University Decolonising Curriculum Working Group
- What is a decolonial curriculum workshop (Goldsmiths, Oxford University, Liverpool John Moores, UOM).

Project Timeline

- March 19: Pre intervention focus groups with co researchers (students) and interviews (staff), curriculum audit
- May 19: Curriculum development meetings x 2 (Students and Staff)
- October 19 : Development * Development of module descriptors content analysis of module descriptors and course handbook
- December 19: Implementation * Implementation of new module specifications, post focus group and interviews

Opportunities (Students)

- *“So for example, African history is my area of interest and this year I was only offered one African history module. So I feel like, as I’ve been opened up to lots of different areas of history”.*
- *the colonial encounters module started out really strong with dissecting where the practice of studying history*
- *“Thanks for the opportunity to take part in this focus group, I've really enjoyed it”*
- *“It’s been a really interesting process so far and I am interested in seeing it pan out etc”*

Opportunities (Staff)

- *“make sure that race was integrated meaningfully into every aspect of that course”*
- *“thinking about assessment, that’s been prompted by this framework which has led in to subsequent conversations about really basic things”*
- *“so there are some really novel, innovative and quite diverse research topics that we focus on as a staff body and then are reflected in our teaching”.*
- *“your project specifically, is a really useful one for focusing and sharpening our attention”.*
- *“students are ahead of the curve and in general, population level academics could be slightly behind the curve”*

Dilemmas (Students)

- *“you’re still learning from a European perspective of these events, particularly with colonial histories, and you’re not taught about the atrocities that are committed by the British Empire so much as you’re taught about the trade how it benefited European colonialism”.*
- *“not being able to do any Middle Eastern history in third year because there just wasn’t the option to do it”*
- *“it tends to all come back to British values and Britishness and sort of purveying these myths of nationalism and how that all links together with whiteness”,*
- *“I just don’t think we learn about non-European history in the right way”.*
- *“I think the problem is that the university’s too scared to take risks with history and that’s what history’s all about”*
- *I feel like there's a bit of a tendency to have a token race issues week or a token black experience week”*

Dilemmas (Staff)

- *“an all-white teaching team which I view as problematic given the nature of what we are teaching”*
- *”Work load allocation model”*
- *“I think there is an issue because of our student body being so white and because that inevitably means that BME students are going to be in the minority”*
- *“having a bit of institutional continuity would be really helpful”*
- *“we literally don’t have enough people to do all the teaching in a given year, because of research leave, people getting a grant, people leaving, people retiring”.*
- *“just an awareness of the practical limits of what can and can’t be done, because this is, the course, unique and skills based”*

Reflections

- Lack of institutional drive, policy, training and guidance (reported in the survey)
- Changes in Leadership hampered meaningful progress
- Challenges in gaining staff buy in vs other commitments, sabbaticals, REF, short term contracts.
- Research culture vs teaching
- Lack of expertise (reported in the survey)
- Time needed to develop critical scholarship
- Students want a decolonised curriculum despite staff opinion
- Students are willing to work in partnership (small numbers)
- Balancing expectations vs reality
- Modules team taught
- Taken 2 years of building trust and building relationships with staff and students

Activity 3

Using the flip chart paper answer the following questions

1. What are the opportunities and dilemmas in your institution? I.e. resistance, student campaigns etc?
2. What are your training/development needs to enable you to move towards attempting to decolonise the curriculum?
3. What actions will you take forward after this session?

Points for Reflection

Suggested adaptations (Adapted from the SOAS Toolkit)

- Re-organise material in the syllabus to bring different issues to prominence; in particular through bringing various kinds of critical perspectives to the earlier sessions
- Consult a wider range of journals or textbooks for source materials, particularly journals located in the global South which may help capture different debates or perspectives
- Talk to colleagues / collaborate with other universities within your discipline who specialise in different research areas to get recommendations
- Read articles about pedagogy in your field which foster diversity, coloniality, inclusion and critical thinking, i.e. Critical Race Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.
- Talk to students about what kinds of content they would like to see addressed
- Consider how students can engage in the decolonising movement, reading groups, zines

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