Decolonising the curriculum

Develop as a teacher

Decolonising the curriculum is the process of recognising, challenging and dismantling the white-western male-elite domination of knowledge taught in the academy. This process leaves open the potential to re construct knowledge in partnership with diverse cultures and create inclusive ways of knowing and teaching.

Decolonising curriculum calls for a huge cultural shift, a complete re-organisation of power and re-imagining what, how and by whom knowledge is constructed, shared and taught. The issues are complex and multi layered (hooks*, 2003; Behari-Leak et al, 2017) embracing research methodologies, the funding and production of academic knowledge, publishing protocols, the writing and delivery of curricula and the staffing and organisation of higher education institutions (Bhopal, 2018; hooks, 2003; Loke, 2019). Decolonising the curriculum cannot happen in isolation, it calls for a whole and cross institutional approach.

Feminist activists and critical pedagogues began this work decades ago and students across the globe are now taking action to make decolonisation a meaningful reality (El Magd, 2019; Swain 2019). Their action has inspired the development of a Race Charter by Advance HE (details available from the Race Charter by Advance HE website) and led institutions to muster a concerted effort to make radical change.

The implications are personal (Felix and Friedberg, 2019), practical and political (Bhopal, 2018) Done correctly this can lead to the fairer, brighter future we at the University of Hull aims to create. A prolonged and self-conscious commitment to decolonisation can lead to ensuring a system where all those who engage with the university can do so with dignity, safety and respect (hooks, 2003). The University of Hull's values - 'Progressive, Inclusive and Empowering' - puts decolonisation at the heart of all we do.

Key points to consider when thinking about decolonising curriculum

Adapted from the Decolonising Curriculum Networks at the London School of Economics, 2019 and Keele University, 2019

1. All races, ethnicities, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and disabilities have a right to understand what our roles and contributions have been in shaping intellectual achievements and shifting culture and progress.
2. Recognise our world is shaped by a long colonial history where elite white men dominate, most disciplines give disproportionate significance to the experiences, histories and achievements of this one group.

*bell hooks chooses not to capitalise her name

3. Understand decolonising curriculum is more nuanced than merely including texts written by minority authors, or including minority voices in curricula. It concerns not only what is taught and how it is critiqued, but how it is taught.
4. Recognise the university reproduces colonial hierarchies; confronting, challenging and rejecting the status quo; and reimagining them and putting alternatives into practice is integral to decolonisiation.
5. Think about how race, gender, disability and class all demonstrably impact student attainment and experiences of exclusion from the university environment.

What can I do to decolonise the curriculum?

- Keep your knowledge of the issues at play current using the University of Hull Equality and Diversity and Unconscious Bias training (or equivalent for collaborative provision). Think about applying the principles explored in this training to all your work and teaching at the University.
- Consider how different frameworks, traditions and knowledge projects can inform each other, how multiple voices can be heard, and how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning.
- Create a sustained collaboration, discussion and experimentation among teachers and students and think about what might be done differently.

What can I do on my degree programme and/or module to decolonise the curriculum?

- Introduce and/or include the idea of colonial thought across curriculum and problematise knowledge production.
- Contextualise the subject matter in your curriculum: who produced the knowledge, when, why, and how? Can this be integral to the scholarly critique of the work? e.g. in your lecture slides, can you include photos of the authors of the references you use to show the diversity of voices?
- Acknowledge the absence of alternative voices, opinions or experiences from the canon or discipline.
- Practice inclusive teaching and assessment design, building resources that are accessible to students with diverse neuro-profiles and/or from backgrounds under-represented in HE.
- Build research-based teaching into curriculum, and co-design of curricula or teaching methods.
- Some examples of how different disciplines have worked to decolonize the curriculum at the University of Brighton can be found in these collections: *Class Schedule* and *Decolonising the curriculum*.
- If you are looking for resources or articles for use in your teaching, the digital platform Exact Editions has collaborated with a selection of publishing partners to create a brand new, freely-available Black Lives Matter learning resource, available here: https://institutions.exacteditions.com/links/blm Cambridge University Press also have a collection of free chapters and articles on race and power which is updated quarterly: https://www.cambridge.org/core/what-we-publish/race-and-power and there

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is a selection of sources covering the black freedom in the US here: https://blackfreedom.proquest.com/

References and further reading

Slides download from the Teaching Excellence Academy's Great Debate session on Decolonising the Curriculum

Slides from the Teaching Excellence Academy's Great Debate session on the nature of academia: Is good academic writing white, male, 'western' and 'middle-class'?

Why is my curriculum white?

Discussion on the BBCs Moral Maze exploring the complexities, challenges and misconceptions regarding decolonising the curriculum

Behari-Leak, K. Mesehela, L., Marhaya, L. Tjabane, M. Merckel, T (2019) Decolonising the curriculum: it's in the detail, not just in the definition. The Conversation

Bhambra, G.K., Gebrial, D. & Nisanciogiu, K. (2018) *Decolonising the University* London: Pluto

Bhopal, K. (2018) *White Privilege: The myth of the post racial society* Bristol: Policy Press

El Magd, N.B. (2019) Why is my curriculum white: decolonising the academy. NUS Connect

Felix, M and Friedberg, J (2019) To decolonise the curriculum we have to decolonise ourselves. WonkHE blog Retrieved September 2019

hooks, b (2003) *Teaching Community: A pedagogy of hope*. London: Routledge.

Loke, G (2019) Dismantling Race in Higher Education. Advance HE blog

Schucan Bird, K. & Pitman, L. (2020) How diverse is your reading list? Exploring issues of representation and decolonisation in the UK *Higher Education* 79: 903-920 https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-019-00446-9

Swain, H. (2019) Students want their curriculum de-colonising: are universities listening? The Guardian on line.

SOAS: Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit Retrieved March 2021- aimed at programme / module leaders

Stone, R. & Ashton, S. (2021) How not to decolonise your curriculum, WonkHE https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-not-to-decolonise-your-curriculum/

University of Keele Decolonising the Curriculum Network aimed at programme / module leaders

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