



DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

DECOLONISING DMU



DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

UHI LTA Connect Webinar: Decolonisation and Anti-Racism in the Classroom

Kaushika Patel

Director of Decolonising DMU



Setting the Scene

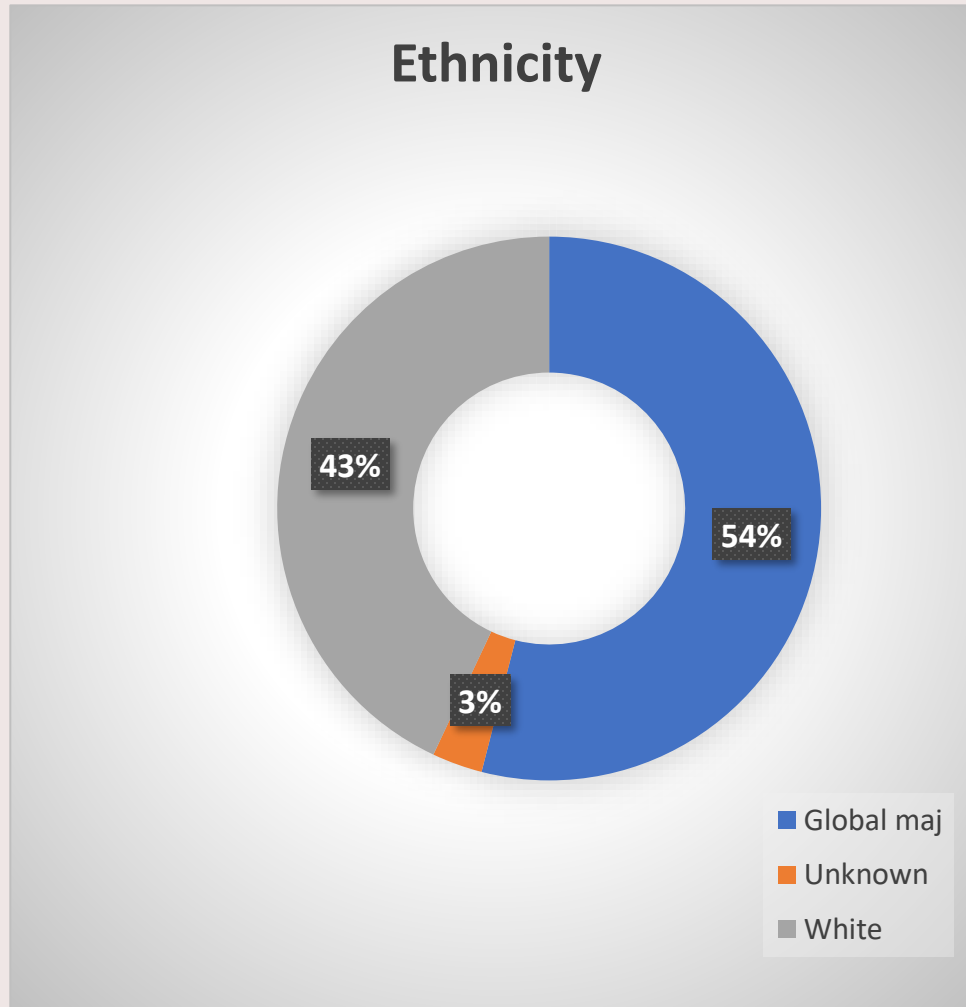
- Decolonising DMU: building an anti-racist university
- Mindset changes: disrupting/decolonising teaching and learning practices, spaces and experiences
- Accessible curriculum
- Students reflected in the curriculum – *resources, examples, relatable content, role models*
- Equip **ALL** students with the skills to positively work in a global & diverse environment
- **Terminology:** Black, Asian and Ethnically Minoritised, People of Colour, People of the Global Majority



DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

The Journey to Decolonising DMU

Our Campus Environment



- **DMU is located in one of the most diverse cities in the UK**
- **50:50 proportion of home students - regional v/s national**
- **DMU UK campus has circa 25,000 students from over 130 countries**
- **54% of DMU students are from BAME backgrounds**
- **Over 30% staff are from BAME backgrounds**
- **In 22/23 there was a 11.8% ethnicity awarding gap**



REMEMBER THE HEADLINES?

Can living abroad close the attainment gap for BAME students?

Universities' shame – unpicking the black attainment gap

Two contrasting gaps in black students' achievement

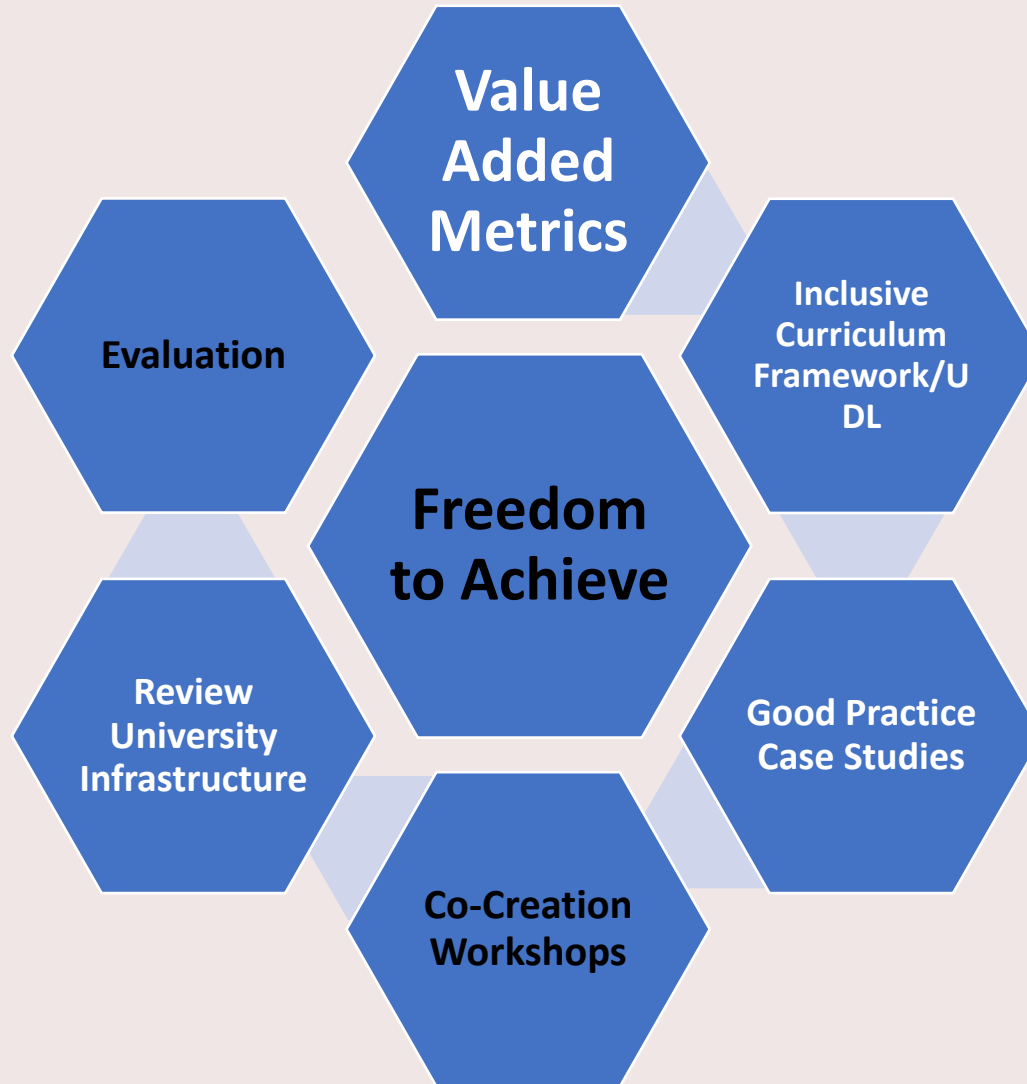
Black students are more likely than white ones to attend university, but less likely to do well once enrolled. What explains the gap?

'Attainment gap' varies dramatically between ethnic groups, analysis shows

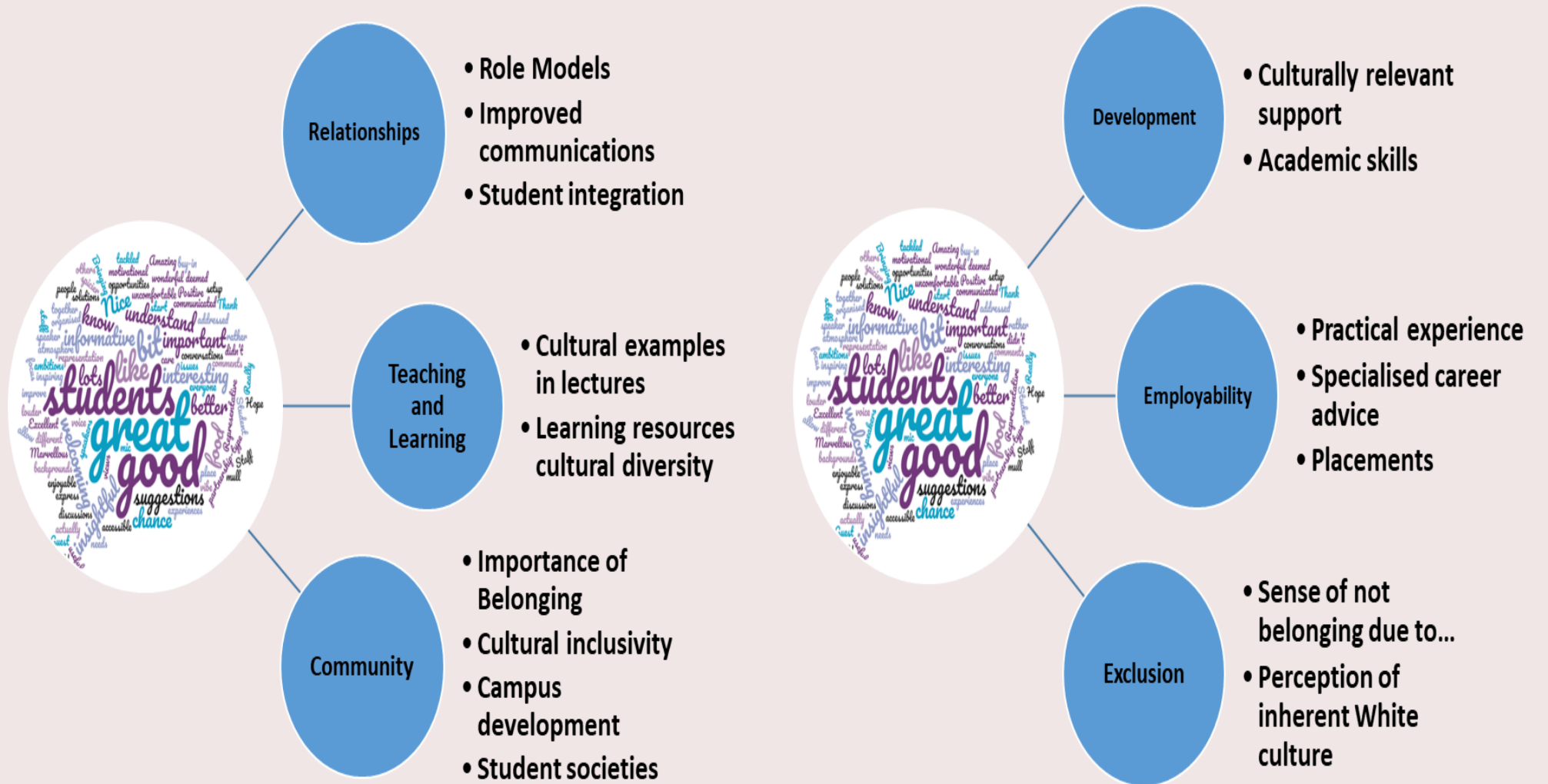
Decolonising DMU: Towards the Anti-Racist University



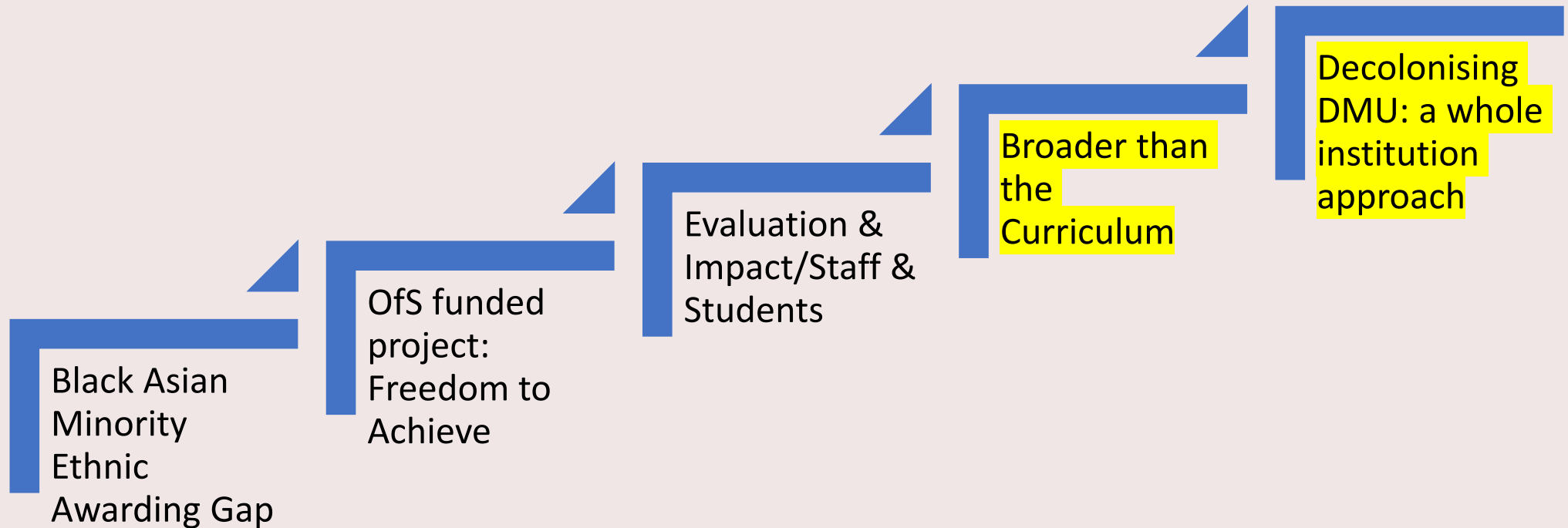
Freedom to Achieve



Evaluation outcomes



Decolonising DMU: Towards the Anti-Racist University





**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY**
LEICESTER

Decolonising the University and the Curricula



Decolonising curricula and the university

- The Rhodes Must Fall Oxford campaign asked:
“ what is excluded from my curriculum, by whom and why and what is the purpose of my education?”
- Content of University knowledge remains centred in a Eurocentric foundation
- Knowledge imparted, centres the global north as the ‘norm’
- Writers of the global north deemed as creators of true knowledge
- Leads to call from students of:
 - Why is my curriculum white?
 - Why isn't my professor black?



Beyond the curriculum.....Decolonising as a movement

- Gebrial (2018, 26) asks whether the purpose of our education system should be to perpetuate existing power structures and norms, or equip students with the critical tools to question them.
- Furthermore Rhodes Must Fall Oxford (RMFO) campaign makes connections between knowledge gaps, and the **structural, material inequalities they engender both within the academy and, most importantly, beyond the academy.**
- A decolonising movement also needs to understand its position as responding to **live issues of inequality, colonialism and oppression** – rather than just being a matter of legacies, or unearthing historical accounts for the sake of it. To do this kind of work in the university is to **dig where you are – where you have access** – rather than to view the university as the primary space where transformation happens. It is to enter the university space **as a transformative force, to connect what is happening inside the institution to the outside, and to utilise its resources in the interest of social justice.** (Gebrial 2018, 35)

Priorities

Institutional structures, cultures and practices:

- Understanding impact of racism
- Talking about whiteness and privilege
- Decolonising the self/mind as well as the institution
- Hearing the narratives/stories of those affected by a sense of 'not belonging'
- Positioning with the Access and Participation Plan and including work on University policies
- Effectively aligned with the Race Equality Charter



Decolonisation is:

- Rethinking the university
- Transformational thinking
- A challenge to where we are now
- The moral, ethical thing to do
- Catering for all
- Reducing racial disparity
- Increasing racial literacy for all



Strategic risks in talking about decolonisation

- **Culture**
 - Surfacing latent racism, including race-related incidents
 - Lack of institutional understanding: e.g. white privilege/fragility
 - Student and staff fears of being accused
 - Lack of institutional emotional resilience
 - Burden of responsibility falling to students and staff of colour
- **Business case**
 - Concerns that student and staff applications will drop
 - Just a 'phase' a new 'buzz' word/initiative
 - Concerns re partners perspectives, local/national/international
 - Reputational challenges? Loss of business?



Strategic hopes in talking about decolonisation

Culture


- Morally bold in language and action, as a societal challenge
- Acknowledge the existence of institutional racism and hate crime
- Centring the University's obligation to open debate
- Enabling a broader range of voices to be heard

Relationships

- Building communities of allies across DMU and wider
- Recognise and reflect the diversity of the university population

Accountability

- Hold senior teams accountable
- Active change to build an anti-racist university



Decolonising DMU...the team and governance

- **Since 2017:**
 - **25 core staff:** Fair Outcomes Champions: workload hours
 - **Over 30 staff** members in community of practice
 - **Approximately 180 student leaders** all paid for their work
- **Governance:**
 - PVC Education and Equalities
 - EDI Team
 - Race Equality Charter Action Plan



Institution

- Corporate actions, policies, procedure and ownership
- Institutional knowledge and data
- Representation
- Opportunities
- Places and spaces
- Communication, awareness and conversations



Staff

- Empowering and involving all staff
- Information, workshops, drop in sessions, training, events
- Toolkit/resource development
- Community of Practice – opportunity to shape the agenda



Students

- Raising awareness: through partnership with DSU, societies and MarComms
- Creating spaces that drive the conversation
- Student-led events/activities
- Engagement with society champions



Research

- Ongoing evaluation
- Supplementary research



Library

- Decolonise collection
- Culturally aware spaces
- Promote workforce diversity
- Raise staff awareness

Dissemination / Institutional links / Feedback Network / Links with others/REC



Decolonising DMU & the Race Equality Charter

- Decolonising DMU is the framework through which DMU have been successful in achieving a Silver award in 2023 for their race equality work
- Decolonising DMU were awarded a Collaborative Award in Teaching Excellence (CATE) by Advance HE in 2023
- Race equality work will continue within the framework of Decolonising DMU's 4 commitments:
 1. Equality of education and research
 2. Progression, talent and representation
 3. Governance and accountability
 4. Understanding , culture and behaviour

[Decolonising DMU – Decolonising DMU \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.decolonisingdmu.wordpress.com)



Decolonising the curriculum and beyond.....

- The decolonising approach is not just a pedagogic technique but also ways of:
- being,
- thinking,
- knowing,
- sensing,
- feeling,
- doing and
- living



DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY
LEICESTER

Co-creation and Change Examples



Curriculum activity

Thinking about relationships, personal development, community, and teaching and learning:

- what might decolonisation look like in your own practice?
- What things might you/your teams want to think about to decolonise their working practices?
- What things are you/your teams already doing to try and decolonise working practices?



Co-creation

- “The aim is to ensure that every student at DMU can achieve their potential and **can see themselves and people like them reflected in the course(s) they study.**”
- **Cocreation Guide:** [dmu-cocreation-guide-2019.pdf](https://www.wordpress.com/dmu-cocreation-guide-2019.pdf)
[wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com)



Programme level Co-creation

- **Teaching and Learning:** Cultural examples in teaching and culturally diverse learning resources
- **Development:** Culturally relevant support, academic skills
- **Relationships:** Role models, improved communication. Student integration
- **Community:** Importance of belonging, cultural inclusivity, campus development, student societies



UDL

Why flexible study resources?

All learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them.

For example, those with sensory disabilities (e.g. blindness or deafness); learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia); **language or cultural differences may all require different ways of approaching content which is culturally inclusive and allows learners to recognise their own identities.** Others may simply grasp information quicker or more efficiently through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. Also learning, and transfer of learning, occurs when multiple representations are used, because they allow students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts. In short, there is not one means of representation that will be optimal for all learners; **providing a wide range of inclusive and global options for representation is essential.**

Why flexible ways to learn?

All learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn.

There is a variety of sources that can influence individual variation in engagement including neurology, **culture, diversity, recognition of self, personal experience and history, subjectivity and background knowledge, along with a variety of other factors.** Some learners are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while others are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine. Some learners might like to work alone, while others prefer to work with their peers. In reality, there is not one means of engagement that will be optimal for all learners in all contexts; providing multiple options for engagement is essential.

Why flexible ways to show learning?

All learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know.

For example, individuals with specific learning difficulties, those who struggle with strategic and organizational abilities, **those who have language differences, and those with culturally diverse experiences and histories approach learning tasks very differently.** Some may be able to express themselves well in written text but not speech, and *vice versa*. It should also be recognized that action and expression require a great deal of strategy, practice, and organization, and this is another area in which learners can differ. In reality, there is not one means of action and expression that will be optimal for all learners; **providing culturally relevant options for action and expression is essential.**

Co-creation planning



Relationships are at the heart of the student experience at DMU. We encourage you to facilitate opportunities between students and staff for team building, group work and networking in industry as well as the chance to hear from guest speakers from all academic and ethnic backgrounds.

Teaching & learning refers to the cultural inclusivity of the curriculum and the extent to which it reflects the diversity of our student body. Creating opportunities for students to collaborate on learning materials, assessment styles and feedback methods gives students more responsibility within their own learning.



Community refers to the creation of an inclusive learning environment in which all feel welcomed, respected and represented. Co-creation within this theme might include working with students to organise extra-curricular activities within your programme.

Development of key skills both inside and outside of the classroom: feedback from students on what they feel they lack can open a door to co-creative practices and inform the direction of what skills may be focused on.



Co-creation planning

Collaborators



Programme or Module?

Dependent upon the theme chosen, you may wish to work across a whole programme or to work at module level.

All years or specific year?

Considering the year of the students involved will help to organise a suit time and to consider the finer details of the content of the co-creation, in line with student needs.

Staff involvement:

Which members of your team would be the most interested or the most appropriate to engage in a co-creation session.

Session Details



It is useful to consider what days and times would suit your students timetables. For example, you may wish to hold a session immediately after a lecture, so that students can be directed to it.

Day:

Time:

Location:

In which building do your students attend lectures/ seminars/workshops? Is there a regular area in which learning takes place where students will feel comfortable?

Considerations



Duration:

Our pilot sessions lasted for an hour each and we would recommend this as the minimum duration. What will suit your needs best?

Promotion:

How will you encourage your students to attend the session? What channels of communication are best for reaching your students? Could you offer catering, for example?

Potential Conflict:

Are there likely to be any hurdles in encouraging students to attend and participate in the session? Please consider these here so that your FOC can work with you to mitigate these.



DR OLIVIER DE CONDAPPA

PSYCHOLOGY

As part of their second year research methods module, Level 5 psychology students complete an assessed qualitative research report using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a new approach to our students, so two workshops are dedicated to practicing IPA on an existing dataset. These workshops presented an opportunity to incorporate further inclusivity within the Psychology programme by focusing on a topic that takes into account our learners' identities, experience and history: the Hajj Pilgrimage. Hajj is an annual pilgrimage that should be undertaken by all able Muslims at least once in their lifetime. Diaries written by pilgrims are analysed and discussed by students in the workshops, with a range of socially, culturally and globally relevant mixed media resources provided on Blackboard, and a tutor available to support students' learning. In terms of best practice, this approach highlights the suitability and adaptability of research methods training for embedding inclusivity into programme curricula. Topics can be chosen to reflect the demographics of the cohort, and changed easily from one year to the next by using readily available data (e.g. online diaries, blogs, public datasets etc.). Therefore, research methods training is an excellent opportunity for educators to enable more students to see themselves reflected in their learning.



SUMEYA LOONAT

BAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

International students studying on Business programmes are given the opportunity to co-create study skills resources to develop their learning by attending my drop-in sessions and workshops on English language and academic writing skills. Through student feedback from these sessions I produced a referencing guide for international students which took their learning perspectives into account by using contextualised examples and keeping the design, content and language simplified and accessible. Resources created are intended to be used as supplements alongside central university materials and have been very well received by module tutors and students within the Business and Law faculty. Academic skills workshops are also embedded into some Business programmes with a large international student cohort so that students can access contextualised academic support and while these sessions are not compulsory, attendance is always at its maximum!

DR BEN WHITHAM

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICS



In 2018 I asked two third-year students who had written essays on postcolonial theory for my second-year international relations module whether they would be interested in leading a staff-student reading group on Akala's book *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. They agreed, and found a couple more volunteers, so we had **four student leaders to facilitate the group**. Lecturers participated, but the majority of the group were students – mostly BAME students, though white students joined too – and academic roles were effectively reversed. I acted as the student leaders' administrator, organising room bookings and refreshments, running the mailing list and adding new members. The students provided the intellectual leadership and decision-making. They opened, led and facilitated each discussion. 15-20 regular attendees met fortnightly on a Thursday evening for two hours (though we often ran over!) to discuss a chapter from the book. In this relaxed space, controlled by students, they led us through sophisticated discussions of race and racism, as well as class, gender, sexuality and much more. In 2019 we are reading Afua Hirsch's *Brit(ish)* with a new team of third-year student leaders, who attended the Akala reading group in their second year.



Library and Learning Services Resources


- **Some specific databases:**
- Black Lives matter Springer nature for researchers (collection of books and journals)
- Black Freedom Struggle in the United States
- History Vault, Black freedom struggle in the twentieth century
- Making Open Access journals truly global
- Diverse leisure reading collection with global representation offering insight into cultures and lived experiences of people from around the world.
- Library Decolonising DMU guide including useful resources and decolonising reading list tools



**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY**
LEICESTER

Student Perspective

Quotes from students:



"tutors/teacher need to familiarise themselves with black students and learn to understand us instead of giving us a 1 year 'trial' period- where they challenge us to see whether or not we match up to the stereotypes or not. It makes us feel like we have to work hard to be recognised as a regular student."

"Firstly, we need to, as students speak to bring members of staff at DMU into the conversation so we can discuss."

"Faculties need to decolonise the reading list".

"People not sitting together at university in lecture is not a university problem it is a society issue."

" Bring people who can actually make a change into the conversation."



- ***Students suggested that conversations about race and racism should not be optional but a compulsory part of each students university experience.***
- *Student expressed that the tokenism approach used by COMMs breeds mistrust rather than fosters a sense of belonging. **Student want to see realistic images and communications that reflect their real experiences.***
- *Students also wanted VCs, Deans and lecturers to be in the room and hear their experiences.*



What does Decolonising DMU look like for students ?

Raising awareness: through partnership with DSU, existing student channels, societies and MarComms

Creating spaces that drive the conversation

Student-led events/activities

Engagement with society champions

Training



Recognition that.....

- This is a long and slow journey
- Need to educate people about racism and its impact on self society and the institution
- Creating places and spaces for the conversations is essential
- Needs to be an institution wide approach: Academic & Professional Services
- **Better outcomes for ALL, not only students and staff of colour**



Resources

- DDMU Toolkit: [Decolonising DMU Toolkit – Decolonising DMU \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- DDMU Podcast: [Decolonising DMU | Podcast on Spotify](#)
- DDMU website: [Decolonising DMU – Decolonising DMU \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- Journeys of Decolonising Conference Resources: [Reimagining Higher Education: journeys of decolonising – Decolonising DMU \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- Decolonising in HE Jiscmail List: The Decolonising DMU team have established a **Decolonising in HE** jiscmail list where we can create a network to support one another. The focus of the new Decolonising in HE list is on UK HE and the daily practice of decolonising.
- We are also working on plans for the network that include face-to-face networking and engagement, including an annual community conference, and these will be communicated via the network.
- If you are interested in joining the network, please visit: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/DECOLONISING-IN-HE. We also ask that you share the network with colleagues who may be interested in joining the network and future events.
- Please note that we envisage this new Decolonising in HE list complementing the established Decolonial Critique jiscmail list, which focuses on theoretical and applied approaches to coloniality/decoloniality within and beyond academia.



References

- Gebrial, D. 2018. “Rhodes Must Fall: Oxford and Movements for Change.” In *Decolonising the University: Understanding and transforming the universities' colonial foundations*, edited by G.K. Bhabra, D. Gebrial and K. Nisancioglu, 19-36. London; Pluto Press
- Bhabra, G.K, D. Gebrial, and K. Nisancioglu, eds. 2018. *Decolonising the University: Understanding and transforming the universities' colonial foundations*. London: Pluto Press.



**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY**
LEICESTER

Thank You