



What is Decolonising the Curriculum?



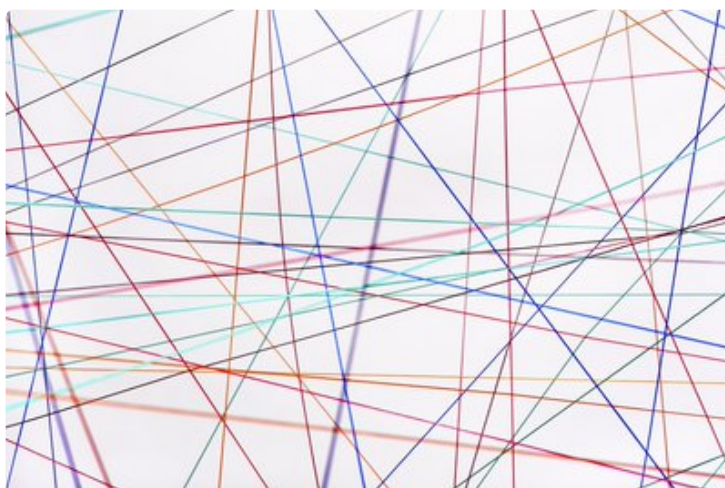
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Decolonising the Curriculum is one of the themes addressed in our [Becoming an Anti Racist Educator series](#). This week's Micro CPD offers a short introduction to this concept along with a few simple actions for staff involved in teaching, learning and assessment.

What does Decolonising the Curriculum mean?

Keele University's [Decolonizing the Curriculum Manifesto](#) defines decolonising the curriculum in the following terms:

'Decolonizing the curriculum means creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of the university on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, and with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world.'





A Decolonising project at SOAS highlighted three areas of focus:

- Looking at our shared assumptions about how the world is and how it worked, focussing particularly on dismantling colonial-era assumptions. For example, theories and practices in the field of development tend to perpetuate the idea that some societies are 'advanced' while others are 'backwards'. Is this justified?
- A discussion about who writes, what they write about and how they write about it. How, for example, do we treat the fact that most writings about international affairs reflect Western perspectives?
- An understanding of the need to have a more diverse student body in which all students are given the same opportunities to flourish and succeed. How, for example, do we address reports that Black and Asian students often feel alienated from particular topics or classroom dynamics?

The rationale for decolonising the curriculum is at once educational, psychological and societal.

What can I do?

While Decolonising the Curriculum is a long, complex and multifaceted process that does not lend itself to over-simplification, Dr Gerasimos Tsourapas ED&I Lead of the School of Government at the University of Birmingham, has shared the following advice for educators:

Begin by considering the following questions:

- Why do you design a curriculum, does the curriculum paint a specific picture of a field, what key points, and what key points do you expect your students to take away from this field of study?
- Who is your 'ideal' student, what assumptions do you make about their background, culture, language and schooling, and do some students represent the 'other' in your teaching?
- Do you believe your own identities affect your approach to the curriculum and could this be problematic?
- What principles and norms guide your selection of knowledge for your curriculum?
 - Specifically: Does your curriculum allow students to explore the historical context of your field of study and does it clarify why certain experiences and voices have been omitted from the field? Does your curriculum cultivate an appreciation of diverse perspectives on your subject? Does your curriculum encourage a critical approach to authoritative texts? Does your curriculum enable students to draw on non-English sources?
- What can you do to build an inclusive learning community where all students contribute, where you acknowledge and manage the fact that some topics or readings may be potentially traumatic and painful, and do you articulate your own social and intellectual position as a teacher?
- To what extent do your assumptions about the curriculum inform your assessment criteria?
 - Specifically: Are there assessment methods that can draw on the strengths of all students and demonstrate their true capabilities?



Good Practice

In reflecting on these questions, Dr Tsourapas suggests you may wish to incorporate the following examples of good practice around content, pedagogy & assessment, and climate & questions of power:

Content

- Recognise the importance of building a curriculum; consult a wider range of authors, textbooks, and journals, particularly those located in the Global South (as well as at the intersection of the Global South and the Global North historically)[1] in the effort of capturing a wider range of perspectives or debates.
- Consider using images of the scholars you quote in your lectures; debunk assumptions that research is male and white.

- Consider bringing critical perspectives to mainstream work to earlier sessions; re-organise material in order to bring different issues into the forefront.
- Be transparent on your choice of content and any historical biases within the field.

Pedagogy & Assessment

1. Identify and think about your own biases – we all have them – so that they do not unconsciously affect your approaches or your engagement with students.
2. Read work on pedagogy that tackles questions of diversity, coloniality, and inclusion.
3. Devise ways for students to practice in a low intensity setting before asked to perform.
4. Be explicit about your assessment criteria in terms of how they relate to learning goals.

Climate & Questions of Power

1. Include statements at the beginning of handbooks or seminars about course content; confront issues that may arise from potentially distressing topics.
2. Take time to get to know your students as individuals – not as members of specific groups.
3. Gather and respond to anonymous student feedback throughout the course of a module.
4. Consider how to give students opportunities to share their expertise and experiences; allow them to take leadership roles in the classroom.
5. When feasible, discuss with students the type of content they would like to see included and allow them to be involved in the pedagogical choices you make.
6. Encourage students to seek a diversified curriculum

Further resources:

[Strathclyde's Access, Equality and Inclusion Service](#)

[SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit](#)

[LSE Decolonising resources](#)

[Advance HE AntiRacist Curriculum Project](#)

What steps have you taken to decolonise the curriculum in your teaching? What challenges have you found? Is there anything in particular that you would like support and help with? Let us know in the comments below.