

## TOP TIPS: DECOLONISING CURRICULA

### 1 PURPOSE

These “Top Tips” for decolonising curricula have been compiled from the outcomes of some reflecting-on-practice interviews with academic staff, ideas that were generated at a decolonising curricula workshop in December 2019 and, other conversations and discussions with staff and students. We are grateful to all staff and students who have participated in these dialogues and discussions. It is hoped that this resource will enable staff to reflect critically on their teaching and learning practices and consider how else to enhance these. This resource has been compiled by the [All In! Regularising Ethnic Presence in the Curriculum](#) project team based at the University of Nottingham.

### 2 STRUCTURE

The paper is divided into the following main sections:

1. Key principles
2. Curriculum planning and design
3. Teaching and learning strategies
4. Assessment
5. Issues and challenges

### 3 KEY PRINCIPLES

#### 3.1 Decolonising curricula involves:

- Acknowledging that conscious and unconscious bias, racism and other forms of inequality, minoritisation and marginalisation can underpin curricula
- Making concrete changes not tokenism

#### 3.2 As a form of teaching practice, decolonising curricula involves:

- Changing teaching and learning practices through collective dialogue, listening to the concerns of peers and accommodating diverse needs
- Arriving at a collective agreement about teaching and learning delivery and practices
- Making incremental changes (say, one change per module per year)

#### 3.3 Student engagement is integral since decolonising curricula:

- Is relevant to all students not just those from minoritised or marginalised backgrounds
- Requires listening to the voices of a diversity of students especially those who are minoritised or marginalised
- Can promote student social action and active citizenship

### **3.4 Decolonising curricula involves institution-wide engagement:**

- Forming an integral component of a University's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy and programme
- Extending beyond the jurisdiction of academics to include managerial and leadership engagement and commitment to act

## **4 CURRICULUM PLANNING AND DESIGN**

### **4.1 When planning and designing your curriculum, consider:**

- Introducing students to EDI from the outset rather than bottle-necking EDI at the end of a module or in the final year perhaps even introducing a foundation module on equality, diversity and inclusion
- Embedding the subject of decolonisation into core modules so that students are able to locate intellectual thought and contributions within historical and contemporary global contexts
- Communicating from the outset that EDI issues are of relevance to all students and staff not just those from BAME or other minoritised groups and that all students would be expected to engage in debates and discussions about equality, diversity and inclusion without fear of being judged
- Reviewing how students are introduced to the works of non-Western/European/canonical writers in the early stages of a module or programme and whether the canon is taught thematically rather than chronologically
- Reviewing how students can gain a better understanding of the inter-relatedness of historical and social phenomena such as decolonisation, oppression and racism
- Surveying and consulting students to get their feedback about what is covered in a module and where they think the gaps are
- Involving other colleagues and guest lecturers rather than thinking that an individual academic needs to be the expert in all subjects
- Creating greater synergy, trust and motivation to change academic practices by supporting and signposting colleagues who ask for help
- Establishing and maintaining effective communications with co-tutors of a module to ensure that a collective approach is taken to decolonising curricula

### **4.2 When developing your reading list(s), consider:**

- Incorporating a specific section on decolonisation (set text, required reading, recommended reading, supplementary reading, reading for the enthusiast and decolonial perspectives)
- Ensuring that the section on recommended reading includes writers of diverse backgrounds including literature by indigenous and Diaspora academics
- Including literature that analyses, contextualises and critiques the works of canonical thinkers and writers

- Using audio-visual resources (pictures, images, paintings, recordings) to reinforce messages about our diverse and contrasting global environment
- Directing students to resources that can be accessed online and through social media, YouTube and podcasts (e.g. “Women also Know Stuff” and “PSA Women and Politics Specialist Group”)
- Amplifying the works of contemporary writers and political movements in other countries to enhance students’ understandings about politics and other subjects
- Encouraging students to recommend literature and/or employing them to produce annotated bibliographies

#### **4.3 When incorporating fieldwork experiences into your teaching, consider:**

- Enabling students to gain a critical insight into the ethical, political, cultural and social issues involved in conducting research in other countries and communities by sharing your own experiences and insights as a researcher
- Examining the dilemmas of being treated as a Western, external expert in a different country context with local academics seen as suppliers of fieldwork data, information and contacts rather than as peers and co-researchers
- Exploring how you conduct yourself with local participants and manage social and cultural expectations such as disclosing personal information about your life
- Engaging students in discussions about how research can be action-orientated, empowering and benefiting local communities and not just a means of gathering data about others
- Creating opportunities which enable students to go on work placements in local communities to put into practice their academic learning and theoretical conceptualisations (e.g. parliamentary democracy)

## **5 TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES**

### **5.1 When you are teaching, consider creating learning environments in which:**

- Students are able to relate the teaching to their own lived experiences
- Students are empowered to ask questions, share experiences, values and beliefs and are able to express their own positionalities
- You exhibit an openness to learn from your students
- Discussions about subjects such as decolonisation can be facilitated without the need for extensive prior knowledge and preparation
- Technological tools (e.g. Piazza) can be used to make lectures and presentations more interactive and engaging

## **5.2 When you are teaching, consider how you embed the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion from the outset by:**

- Role modelling criticality, inclusiveness and diversity in your teaching and learning style
- Ensuring that module content and delivery is diverse, varied and inclusive enough to capture the interests of all your students and motivates them to participate in discussions and debates
- Acknowledging that individual and collective awareness of issues of racism and racial inequality may vary in a student cohort and that some BAME students say, may be more conscious about racist undertones in lectures, classroom dynamics and literature relative to some white students
- Recognising the constraints faced by some international students in engaging critically with the curricula and participating in extra-curricular activities because of potential repercussions on their legal status and circumstances back home

## **5.3 When you are teaching, consider how a wider range of students can engage with the content of your teaching by:**

- Juxtaposing canonical writings alongside the works of contemporary writers on subjects such as post-colonialism and feminism
- Locating and critically analysing the writings of early Western/European thinkers in their historical contexts and prevailing social norms
- Enabling students to question facts, unearth the history and the social perspectives and backgrounds of key thinkers and their ideas
- Using non-European events as starting points for analysing and understanding specific historical periods e.g. using the Haitian Revolution rather than the French Revolution
- Creating spaces to present perspectives from the Global South and subaltern voices to enable comparative analysis of subjects such as feminism
- Examining how feminist and subaltern voices can be integrated into subjects such as social policy and international politics

## **6 ASSESSMENT**

### **When setting student assessments, consider:**

- Assessment tasks that require students to cite diverse writers and thinkers
- Widening the choice of essay questions so that there is at least one option to examine canons in relation to subjects such as post-colonialism and feminism
- Setting assessment questions or framing seminar discussions that enable students to gather data, analyse cultural, social and political nuances and prepare evidence-based case studies

- Enabling students to generate and analyse country and regional case-studies on subjects such as development, industrialisation and urbanisation and how Western and non-Western schools of thought interpret these

## **7 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

**Decolonising curricula is a contested notion and a number of issues and challenges remain:**

- Contestation about the notion of “decolonising the curriculum” which is seen by some staff and students as a top-down directive to change
- Lack of effective control over the content and delivery of a module can limit the changes that some tutors are able to make especially if they are not the main decision-makers or are there just as guest lecturers
- Academic design of programmes and modules that hinge on canons can limit the curriculum changes that can be made as these could compromise a student’s ability to complete canon-focused assessments
- In failing to teach about contested issues such as racism, oppression and decolonisation, there is the danger that academia will generate graduates who have not yet grasped the significance of issues such as inequality, oppression and cross-community solidarity
- The difficulties of assessing accurately what the impact has been of any changes in teaching and curriculum on student attitudes and behaviours