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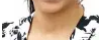UCLan, UK

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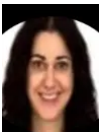Pete Cooling
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Beyond Breaking the Chains:
Decolonisation as transformation

The eruption of anger that came about after the brutal murder of the African-American, George Floyd in 2021, was translated into a worldwide Black Lives Matter movement which has had long lasting repercussions in the UK. There is

injustice has emerged into the mainstream and within higher education. This is exemplified by the new research centre, the Global Race Centre for Equality (GRACE) at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

The aim of this paper is to focus on efforts in transforming decolonisation in the School of Social Work, Care and Community at UCLan. Awareness of the need for decolonisation is an important first step to inclusivity in the curriculum. However, inclusivity is not an end in itself as, in the context of the UK, minority groups might be paradoxically included and excluded at the same time.

The complexity of attempts to truly decolonise the curriculum should begin with simple measures, such as reviewing reading lists for students. However, the successful interpretation of inclusivity requires a whole system approach to change, which is nothing less than a radical transformation of structures, norms, routines and habits which many ethnic 'Anglo-Saxon' teaching staff at university carry with them, often unconsciously. We say 'Anglo-Saxon' in inverted commas and in the knowledge, as described a long time ago by Fanon (1967), that people of different ethnicities are also capable of colonised behaviour, among themselves and towards different ethnicities, as part of the struggle to speak the language of Fanon's 'white world' (p. 15). At the same time, it is also true that all people of colour are objects of difference compared to white people in the Western world. This is the point made by Robinson (1995, pp. 1-2) who chooses to include different ethnicities under the term 'black'.

This article discusses the development of an innovative strategy for change being developed at UCLan.

Context

The authors are committed to transforming the curriculum to ensure equity of experience, increasing student satisfaction and directly addressing student attainment gaps. Evidence. both internal and external. suggests that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students do not

a Decolonisation Working Group (DWG) in full awareness that this is not a quick fix which will upend oppression and discrimination. The new curriculum development framework and equality, diversity and inclusion strategy seeks to instil a sense of belonging in all students, and the work of the DWG is directly aligned to this and the University's wider strategic mission. The DWG has several workstreams, covering reading and study materials, communications, research, good practice case studies and a symposium with staff and external facilitators which link together and include staff and students.

Case Study and Discussion

The workstreams of the DWG reflect the complexity of the decolonisation agenda. We acknowledge the immediate need to critically re-assess reading and study materials and the requirement to proactively include ethnic minority positions and experience in programme and course design. We work with the knowledge that easy fixes are not enough, since the institutional and social racism that may lie beneath issues of colonisation may run deeper than we know or are able to acknowledge without breaking the mould that created such situations and circumstances.

Breaking the mould is never easy. The need for sustained re-education for our institution as a whole, is reflected in the literature on decolonisation that challenges even the 'good' strategies that might be adopted by those with white privilege. For example, Tuck and Young (2012) call the pursuit of social justice 'a "move to settler innocence" or something akin to "settler harm reduction' (quoted in Dumontet et al 2019, p. 199).

According to 'dR Works', an organization of trainers, educators and organisers who work to 'build strong progressive anti-racist organisations and institutions', white supremacist cultural systems include qualities such as perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, only one right way, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress is bigger and more, objectivity and the right to comfort, (Okun, accessed 13.03.22). Many such qualities are perceived as positive by many cultures and ethnicities.

that the 'white way' is not necessarily the best way. The system as it stands, the 'white' system, is not necessarily reasonable or just. Nobles (quoted in Robinson 1995) called this the essential differences in worldview between American European frameworks and the African perspectives. The suggestion is that African philosophy is opposed to the American European in the following ways: groupness v. individuality; sameness v. uniqueness; commonality v. difference; co-operation v. competition; collective responsibility v. independence.

The DWG at UCLan has taken an innovative approach utilising the ideas above in reassessing our processes, systems and procedures. The idea is to re-educate for change through the vehicle of the symposium model to examine in-depth cultural transformation.

Decolonisation: A Symposium

The symposium will be facilitated by two external experts in the field to ensure a degree of independence from the potential defensiveness of the institution. Mia Liyanage, from Goldsmiths, University of London, and Dr Neo Pule, a South African academic use pioneering research methods to encourage decolonisation among young black student leaders in Africa. Utilising local and global knowledge, a pro-active interest in the field and a range of learning possibilities will ensure an in-depth appreciation of the facts at our disposal and a learning process centred on experiential learning. This range of knowledge and experience can significantly challenge institutional frameworks and thinking patterns. The five key policy recommendations will form the basis of our learning (Liyanage 2020) include:

1. Get educated about decolonisation and end its conflation with equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives.

2. Reprioritise: decolonisation is both pedagogically necessary and academically rigorous.

3. Fund BAME research.

4. Tackle discrimination, hostility and unconscious bias

Our journey begins by concentrating in the first instance on two strands. First, by becoming informed, as in recommendation number one; and second, by beginning a process of tackling unconscious cultural tropes, recommendation number four. The former will be presented in a keynote presentation by Liyanage, and the latter by Pule, in the form of experiential events using social dreaming and the 'Listening Post' as participatory experiential methods.

Learning through experience

Social dreaming is used by Pule to work with black student leaders (Pule and May 2021), allows for the expression of difficult ideas from the shared social unconscious, so that unconscious racism and prejudice might find a forum for the expression of feelings and thoughts that can be revealed and aired for debate. This is a technique that has also been used by Karolia and Manley (2018; 2020) in investigations of British Muslim identities. They will assist Pule in the hosting of the social dreaming events which align expert local and international experience. Pule will then conduct a 'Listening Post' which provides an opportunity for revealing the social unconscious, but without the use of dreams. A Listening Post group meeting takes a 'snapshot' of society at a particular moment in time which has recently been linked methodologically with the idea of a social dreaming matrix (Cummins 2018, pp. 134-138). It seems especially appropriate, therefore, for our symposium to align the two methods. Through learning from experience in using these methods and reinforcing this with empirical knowledge as presented by Liyanage, our symposium hopes to go beyond the mere tracking of good intentions to a path of deeper commitment to cultural transformation.

Conclusion

The Black Lives Matter movement has triggered change in the form of various initiatives include the Global Race Centre for Equality (GRACE). Meanwhile, the new Decolonisation Working Group is introducing meaningful change into the social work curriculum. The aim is to take on the challenge of root change as opposed to superficial quick fixes. We

(Douglass 1857, web page).

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