

## Decolonising pedagogy and curriculum

# Debunking Decolonisation: a resource for students and staff

What is your subject or industry? What counts as knowledge in your discipline? Which parts of the world do you hear about and which are left out? How is colonial history connected to the way knowledge is produced in your subject? What can decolonisation of the curriculum achieve?

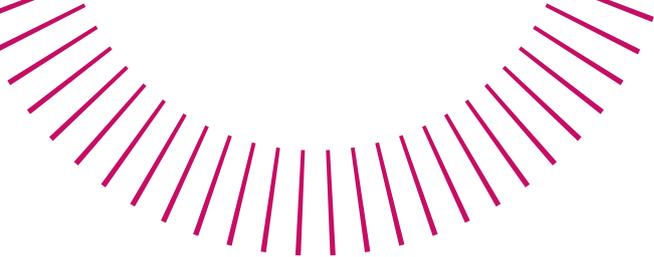
Decolonisation can change the student learning experience at university, so that diverse students can feel seen and represented in the curriculum, and all students can have a dynamic learning experience. This can give students agency and choice in what they study, and how they study it.

'History' and 'knowledge' are not neutral or universal. What counts as art, performance, fashion or media history are only versions of history. All disciplines have particular ways of producing and imparting knowledge that may leave out other viewpoints. Knowledge is deeply connected to power, status and hierarchies, and may overlook perspectives and approaches that don't fit the dominant approach.

Decolonisation is an effort to:

- open conversations about how history and knowledge are written and produced
- explore how history and knowledge are connected to power
- create opportunities for diverse ways of doing and knowing
- make learning collaborative, respectful, personal and collective

Students can step into the industry not just knowing one aspect of history in their subject, but with tools to understand and question how power works, and how they are affected by power. This means that students don't have to slot themselves into their industry but that they have the power to change and decolonise the industry, examine how industries work, question gaps in recruitment and promotion in work places, and encourage collaboration, creativity and interdisciplinarity.



What is your industry like? Are there all kinds of people that work in it, do all kinds of people hold positions of leadership? Do you see diverse skin colours, genders, sexualities, class and cultural backgrounds in your work place, or are you more likely to see one kind? Can you change your industry, and if so, how?

It is even harder to count how many times people ask me, where do I come from? I tried to explain to some that one place does not define me as who I am.

— Eva He (Student), *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum Zine 2*

## What does decolonisation look like in practice?

For a university to represent the diversity of its students and to examine how it produces knowledge, tutors and course leaders need to critically look at reading lists, formative and summative assessments, in-class discussions and examples used in class, and assessment briefs. Tutors need to examine what kinds of knowledge are usually omitted from the curriculum and how these can be brought back in. In this scenario, tutors would encourage and empower students to examine personal and cultural histories and other aspects of identity, and give students the agency to define who they are.

## What can students do to bring decolonisation to their learning experience?

Here are some questions to think about:

- Who are you in position to your art, practice or work? Are you encouraged to bring yourself into your practice and studies?
- What can you bring to your area of work or your industry that is currently missing or underrepresented?
- What is considered 'history' in your subject, and what histories are omitted?
- How do global flows of people and goods work in your industry and how is this connected to power?
- Can you respectfully, enthusiastically and creatively collaborate with students who come from different backgrounds, cultures, identities and points of view from your own?
- Can curiosity for diverse and global perspectives be part of the learning outcomes?

You can take practical steps. This involves not just examining your learning experience, but using practical tools that can promote decolonisation in the classroom and crits.

## What can you change in your course, studio and classroom?

Here are some questions to think about:

- Are your reading lists diverse? Do they include non-Eurocentric perspectives?
- Are the examples used in class diverse and global?
- Can all students bring in diverse examples from history and global flows that would make learning more dynamic and exciting?
- Can all students bring in perspectives that are not strictly seen as 'academic'? These may include social media resources, oral history, and life experience.
- Can all students choose to do research and creative projects that are not Eurocentric and that engage with diverse resources, identities and research questions?

Decolonisation is an organic and evolving process, rather than a fixed outcome. The questions and ideas listed above are triggers to kickstart conversations, and develop conversations that are already happening in a meaningful, conscious and consistent way. They should help students and tutors to work collaboratively, bring non-Eurocentric histories, knowledges and ways of working into the classroom and into research projects. They should help students and tutors explore the idea that diverse and global perspectives in learning make the learning experience more creative and dynamic for staff and students from all kinds of diverse backgrounds.

Collaboration is one risk that you have to learn...you'll tend to think that it is your work and your work alone until you reach university, that will teach you to branch out.

— Hussein Hamume, UAL Student Voices

## Reading and Resources List

Bhambra, G.K., D. Gebrial and K. Nişancıoğlu (eds.) (2018) *Decolonizing the University* (Pluto Press: London)

Crilly, J. Panesar, L and Suka-Bill, Z. (2020) Co-constructing a Liberated/Decolonised Arts Curriculum. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 17(2) 9

Dei, G. (2016). *Decolonising the University: The Challenges and Possibilities of Inclusive Education* *The Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies*. 11 (1) p. 23-61.

gal-dem 'an online and print publication committed to sharing perspectives from women and non-binary people of colour.' Available at: <https://gal-dem.com>.

Sabri, D. (2017) *Students' Experience of Identity and Attainment at UAL*, Available at: <http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/14370/>

*Shades of Noir*, Available at: <https://shadesofnoir.org.uk/about-shades-of-noir/>

University of the Arts London: Arts Student Union and UAL Teaching, Learning and Employability Exchange co-production (2018-2019) *Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education*, Zines 1 and 2: Available at: <https://decolonisingtheartscurriculum.myblog.arts.ac.uk>

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