

Decolonising Education Collective

Staff and students in the Department of Education discuss the vital work of decolonisation

The Decolonising Education Collective (DEC) is a group of students and staff in the Department of Education who meet fortnightly with the shared imperative to influence action to decolonise our curriculum. Our group has discussed priorities for intervention in the curriculum, pedagogy and decision-making processes as well as the barriers to these goals, such as the enduring legacies of colonialism and denials of racism, not to mention the time required to address fundamental questions regarding knowledge and pedagogy. In this article,

we present some of the individual transformative reflections from members of DEC discussing the work of our group, why it is important, and what we believe the University needs to prioritise in order to decolonise (and support decolonisation of) programmes of study. The group has been involved in a Departmental social media takeover, leadership in a compulsory project for all first-year students, organising a decolonising discussion group and the development of the trialling of decolonisation case studies by student mentors used in staff teaching and learning workshops and conferences.

Danny, 3rd Year Psychology in Education (PiE) student:

I am surprised every meeting that DEC continues to grow, exponentially, with a variety of voices that share a similar 'pain' and 'hunger', be they 1st year students or experienced lecturers. The DEC's growth reinforces in me the belief that its goals are real and genuine, that have previously been felt in silence but are now finally being shared with a belief that something will happen, now that all this energy is out there working to effect change.

Constantino Dumangane, Jr, Lecturer, Programme Leader, BA in Sociology and Education; MA in Social Justice and Education, member of the Centre for Research in Education and Social Justice

The DEC provides a respectful and 'safe space' for issues regarding discrimination, marginalisation and Empire within Higher education to not only be discussed – but also be tackled. From inception it was clear that students felt that the experiences and identities of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals were historically and systematically excluded within the institution. As a lecturer and researcher of race and social justice inequalities in education, though I am not surprised, it is still frustrating to listen to many BAME students share their counterstories of isolation and frustration about being 'other'. Consequently, they also expressed experiences of being typecast by predominantly homogenous student bodies as the expected voices to 'speak up' on behalf of all BAME people when race or decolonisation issues were raised in course settings – as if there were one collective BAME voice, which there is not. This must stop. DEC is not just a



listening forum – but also a space where active work occurs to ensure that the culture and curriculum within York’s Education Department is welcoming, inclusive and validating of the educational contributions of people from multiple ethnic backgrounds. DEC’s goal is to aid the Education department on its journey to functioning in a way that is racism-free, not dominated by one particular ‘Empirialistic’ voice and representative of all students and staff experiences.

Georgia Ramsay, Curriculum Area Leader for the Geography PGCE:

I have found the opportunity to be part of discussions regarding decolonising the curriculum a valuable experience, in an environment that feels safe and where there is a huge respect for listening to the views of other people in order to learn. I am looking forward to the Department working together in a variety of ways to bring about real positive changes in the courses that we deliver, in order to celebrate diversity and model equality.

Anjie Shah, 2nd year PiE student:

As the Department of Education we should be setting an example for other departments to follow which is why we need to alter the way we teach and what we teach to be more inclusive of students from all backgrounds. Embedding authors from BAME backgrounds into reading lists is such a simple yet effective way for BAME students to feel as though they have someone to relate to in the fields they are studying. BAME students should feel the course reflects them and their experiences the same way it does their white peers. The DEC meetings have been a safe space for me. I’ve felt heard and have learnt so much about my peers, but also hearing the views of lecturers and what they’ve already been doing has provided me with a lot of comfort. Although our Department and universities across the board have more work to do, this feels like a small step in the right direction and has really helped me to feel more a part of the department and I’m excited for what we’re going to achieve.

Lynda Dunlop, University of York Science Education Group:

I was interested in the DEC as a place to understand and discuss what decolonisation means. The group quickly became focused on how to bring about change. It has created new types of relationships between staff and students around a shared sense of purpose. My involvement with the DEC has prompted deeper reflection on how the legacies of colonialism are evident in

PLANNING FOR SEMESTERISATION DECOLONISING PEDAGOGIES

As the department prepares for structural change as a result of semesterisation, DEC invites the department to use the opportunity to **plan for decolonised pedagogies.**

Perceived barriers to decolonising pedagogies include **cost**, student **expectations**, fear of being **racist** amongst white staff, **insecurities** amongst staff and students, and the extent to which all staff believe that decolonisation is a **priority.**

DECOLONISING EDUCATION COLLECTIVE (DEC)

Decolonised pedagogies require **resourcing from the university beyond current levels.** Just as science departments have specialist resource needs for laboratory spaces, mathematics have computing needs, the education department has a **specialist need to create the educational conditions for decolonisation.** We should be University leaders on these processes. This requires:

CURRICULUM TIME & FREEDOM

- To use **texts and experiences** from students’ own **linguistic and cultural** background and to value expression in ways that go beyond academic conventions.
- To **explore beyond** intended learning outcomes and go beyond the needs imposed by accreditation bodies.



PROGRAMME REVISIONS

- To incorporate the ability to **speak about race and culture** into core **programme learning outcomes and assessments** to ensure all graduates of DeptEd at York can do this.
- To encourage more **authentic assessments** of students’ educational capabilities.



SMALL GROUP TEACHING

- To develop the rapport and relationships between staff and students needed to create **brave spaces** to discuss difficult and/or sensitive topics and for staff and students to **make mistakes and facilitate active critical pedagogy.**
- This will require significant rethinking in terms of **module planning and workload allocations**, particularly for current UG stage 1 and 2 modules.



STAFF TIME

- To revise **reading lists, images, materials** and other teaching **resources.** And to design **new modules** with decolonial approaches explicitly at their core. This can build on the work of the **internships** funded by Careers and the department this summer on mapping good practice.
- To **train and be trained** in language and sensitivity to enable safeguarding.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

The Decolonising Education Collective (DEC) is a group of students and staff in the Department of Education with the shared imperative to influence action to decolonise the curriculum in the Department of Education. The group has discussed priorities for intervention in the curriculum, pedagogy and decision-making processes and the barriers to this associated with the legacies of colonialism, denials about racism, not to mention the time needed to address fundamental questions about knowledge and pedagogy. DEC meets fortnightly during term time on Zoom. Everyone is welcome. To obtain the meeting link, email lynda.dunlop@york.ac.uk.

feature

chemistry education and to re-examine how I talk about chemistry, its histories, and how it is practiced and used in the present. This work needs to be seen as essential and resourced as such.

Kemi, 2nd year Bachelor of Arts in Education (BAE) student:

The work being conducted by the DEC is imperative to the University of York's sustainability. The increasingly diverse undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts demand a much more liberated standard of curricula than would once previously suffice. The University needs to be trailblazing Decolonisation work if they are going to continue to attract talent in a competitive globalised education market – notwithstanding their moral and ethical duty to do so.

Cara, 3rd year BAE student:

Being a part of the DEC has raised so much awareness to the importance of having a diverse and inclusive learning environment. The work it is doing is so important and an essential starting point

for creating an education that is reflective of all cultures and theoretical lenses. I'm so happy to be a part of this group and have found the discussions we've had invaluable for my own understanding, as well as for the progression of a decolonised curriculum.

Zahraa, 1st year BA in Sociology and Education (BASE) student:

When talking about the curriculum it seems like a big process that students do not have control over. When I first learned about how the curriculum is racist, I thought we should have a diverse curriculum that speaks up for people and those who are disadvantaged, not speaking against them. There is a need to change the way we learn about racism. And this should be a priority shift towards diverse learning and teaching by having more practices, including lectures and seminars where students have to attend and thus have to learn about these topics.

Vanita Sundaram:

The actions that can be taken to

decolonise the curriculum have to be situated in a context that is honest, self-aware and politically conscious about racism (and can only be as successful as that context allows). There is a persistent culture of disbelief around racism and race-based discrimination in universities and in wider society, which needs to be addressed as part of interventions and initiatives to decolonise the curriculum. How can we achieve truly embedded decolonisation work in a cultural and educational context that may be characterised by disbelief/minimisation/trivialisation around these issues, and is still institutionally racist?

Helen Granger, PGCE Maths Leader:

I attend the DEC to listen to the issues raised. I find myself challenged during each meeting as I reflect on how the discussion of topics relates to my teaching. I am finding this reflective space so valuable in considering the learning environment I wish to foster, and how I can proactively remove the barriers to that being achieved.

Smriti Safaya, 2nd year distance PhD student:


The DEC embodies an action-oriented entity with practical, tangible and insightful ideas to address the endeavour that is decolonizing the curriculum at a department scale. I joined to listen and learn, and I've been humbled by the earnest motivation for change that comes from students and staff alike. Although I'm not in the UK to address these issues directly, I can apply this in my context as an educator in international schools currently in Hong Kong – so it's exciting that the work the DEC is doing is influencing change beyond the UK!

Zara Sharif, 1st Year BAE student:

A decolonized education department is one where diverse and decolonized teaching and learning is so natural I don't even notice it. It's a department where I can always feel comfortable discussing race, but don't ever feel that I am burdened by it. The DEC gave me a space where I can always discuss race without discomfort or fear, where I can connect with other students like me and see that I am part of a community within the department that's much wider and more welcoming than I imagined. The Department and the University still have a long way to go, but I know that there are people who will advocate and do the hard work of decolonizing even after I graduate.

UNIVERSITY OF YORK DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DECOLONISING EDUCATION COLLECTIVE



FORTNIGHTLY WEDNESDAYS 12PM ON ZOOM

All staff and students in the Department of Education welcome.
To join email lynda.dunlope@york.ac.uk

Venessa Sambai Usek, MA Social Justice and Education:

As an international student I would like to see diverse perspectives on the educational issues in relation to my course. This can be reflected in the reading list with writers from the Global North and South, in lecture content and context, lecturer-student engagement, and a safe learning environment. The DEC is a great starting point for the Department of Education to walk the talk. I am proud to see the partnership between students and lecturers in discussing issues related to decolonising the curriculum, and also finding ways to engage with these issues as a collective.

Eleanor Brown, member of the Centre for Research in Education and Social Justice:

This is an area that I have been grappling with through my research for a few years now, but it has been inspiring to be able to come together with other staff members and students to discuss the importance of these issues in our teaching and the wider environment within the Department. Calls to decolonise are gaining traction, but the overwhelming number of fronts that need to be tackled to even begin to address this mean that it is in danger of being dealt with superficially or not at all. The DEC represents a first (baby) step towards the enormous task of creating an environment, curriculum and pedagogy in the Department that moves us towards decolonisation, and hopefully it will provide a foundation for the work that will build on these conversations for many years to come.

Sihem Salem, PhD student and GTA:

The DEC group has been a great opportunity to learn how we can create inclusive experiences for students in increasingly diverse learning environments. Though practice seems somewhat difficult at the moment given that teachers and students might be unaware of how they can actually approach diversity for inclusivity. Organising training and workshops for both has been suggested as a fruitful way for decolonising the Education Department. I'm looking forward to seeing the brilliant ideas that we have been discussing in the DEC transformed into actions. Together we can drive our Education Department towards a more inclusive culture!

Priscilla Adjei-Twum, 2nd year BAE student:

When I first heard about the new DEC

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Kemi, 2nd year Bachelor of Arts in Education (BAE) student

group, my first thought was that finally there will be an opportunity to be heard and have a seat at the table for the thoughts, feelings and experiences of ethnic minority groups who often go unnoticed. The DEC has shown me that if you want to see change, you have to start the process and be consistent. There will be results, even if the task at hand seems extremely challenging. This has awakened my desire to make a difference where I can – and not only on issues or topics that pertain to me directly.

Vicky J. Chang, MA Social Justice and Education:

The DEC has been such an encouraging space to be in bi-weekly. I have been interested in decolonising the curriculum since I started working as a middle school science teacher eight years ago. I specifically chose my program at York to learn how to do that. While I've been able to learn a bit of how to do this through my modules, it's encouraging to know that I am not the only one both passionate about, and working towards, decolonising our curriculum.

Sarah Olive, Senior Lecturer:

The group has been fantastic for helping this literature and cultural studies scholar realise that decolonising the curriculum goes way beyond decolonising the literary texts, literary criticism and critical theories that I teach. Before the group started, I developed a Histories folder in the departmental instagram account @deptedyork to collect together resources and texts on decolonising, anti-racism and related issues coming out of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020. I had screenshotted these and shared them to our Stories. Making them Histories means that these otherwise fleeting images are preserved in our account and can be accessed by followers and visitors to the account at their convenience. Early on Daniel took the initiative to transcribe these posts as a Google Doc so that they're accessible and convenient to use (since hyperlinks are included where possible): an important, intersectional reminder

that while images can be an attractive way to communicate, they will not work for all. DEC has been a great impetus to keep spotting and sharing via our Instagram and Twitter accounts University and City-wide events and resources relevant to decolonising.

Paula Mountford:

The DEC has offered a safe and challenging place to listen to our students and learn about their priorities and concerns. It has provided a platform to prioritise decolonising the curriculum issues, ideas, opportunities and collaborations. It is an active group, tackling issues, and collaborating to form change in practice, systems, processes and pedagogy.

Elpis Pavlidou, Lecturer:

I was born with a privilege that comes with the colour of my skin. But the colour of my voice is always my choice. The DEC presents an unprecedented opportunity, a momentum to choose to reflect upon my practices and importantly to act upon them. As a psychologist I have experienced and struggled with the distortion which colonialism and racism have caused to our view and understanding of the human psyche, as reflected in research paradigms and the interpretation of knowledge. As a mother of a biracial child, I am moved and utterly proud that the 'birthplace' of such an initiative for York University is the Education Department. The commitment and drive of students and colleagues who joined forces in the DEC have restored my faith in the future of Higher Education; one that is truly inclusive for this generation and those to come.

For further information on the work of the DEC, please contact:

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