

Dreaming, dismantling and decolonising: Pedagogies for Social Justice Project plan 2023-2028

Vision and values

Education is one of the most powerful tools we have for creating a more just and equitable world. As bell hooks (1994) reminds us, education is a practice of freedom, and so our classrooms and educational spaces should be recognised as hubs for infinite possibilities and dreams. However, engaging with education in ways that help to liberate ourselves and others, demands a rethinking of the ideas and structures sustained by culture, media, policy, social environments and education itself.

As a project we are driven by diverse dreams in which education can be a catalyst for liberation and the university a space to create social change. We honour and acknowledge the work and sacrifice of those who came before us as they have laid the foundations of the work that we are able to do now.

Although we do not yet know what a decolonised, anti-racist and socially just institution looks like, we can still organise in ways that embody decolonial relationality and are built through developing trust and care. This type of relationality is at the heart of our work as it enables us to work toward dismantling the traditional hierarchical relationships between students and staff. Ultimately, developing new types of relationality makes us better equipped to address other forms of coloniality and co-create new and multidisciplinary ways of thinking and being in the university.

Dedicating time and space for students and educators to learn and unlearn together is fundamental to any effort towards social change in the university (Stein, Ahenakew, Jimmy, Andriotti, Valley, Amsler, and Calhoun, 2021). Fostering decolonial and anti-racist atmospheres requires us to nurture our relationships to one another, embody criticality towards dominant ways of knowing and being and inspire us to dream beyond systems of injustice.

Context

In the Pedagogies for Social Justice project, redressing colonial harms begins with recognising our context. We acknowledge our positioning in the heart of British imperialism, and the histories of colonial violence and occupation that Britain is responsible for and continues to benefit from. Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to “coloniality” as the “long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (2007: 243). Therefore, doing decolonial and anti-racist work requires us to be reflexive about how we may be complicit in upholding logics and hierarchies that deny Indigenous and other racialised systems of knowing and being. We also understand that decolonising is more than intellectual and emotional work. It involves the repatriation of land, reparations and an end to colonial occupation everywhere. We stand in solidarity with the communities engaged with these struggles.

The project began as a student : staff partnership in 2019 at the University of Westminster. It is located at the nexus of research and teaching and of theory and practice. Since 2019, the project team has worked with the Steering Group – composed of Westminster students and staff, as well as external members – to produce pedagogic tools (eg. reading lists, glossary and podcast), to host events (eg. DAR Study Group, Festival for Decolonial Learning) and engage in research activities (eg. 3-day participatory research workshop, 2021 and 2-day international workshop, 2022). Since its founding, the project has grown in terms of external and internal engagement with its tools and events, securing funding for pedagogic and research interventions, while developing its international network. As our project’s activities, scope and connections have grown, we are now articulating our ambitions for the next 5 years.

Objectives

1. To foster spaces of enquiry and change, specifically to address systems of oppression in higher education.
2. To build generative and mutually supportive alliances with community groups and grassroots organisations in the UK and internationally.

3. To engage with decolonial pedagogical methods and use them to challenge traditional research and knowledge production approaches in higher education.
4. To produce liberatory research and pedagogic tools that are useful for colleagues and collaborators working towards social justice within and without the university.
5. To develop the flow and exchange of ideas between decolonial theory and research and decolonial pedagogical practices in local, national and international contexts.
6. To initiate and lead international dialogues and change making around decolonial methods for higher education.
7. To establish a culture that enables decolonial pedagogical research partnerships between students and staff to flourish at the University of Westminster.

References

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