



STUDENTS AS
CO-CREATORS

Curriculum Design Collaborations (CDC) Evaluation Report Guidelines

1. Where did the inspiration to do the project come from?

In the wake of the Black Lives Matters protests in the summer of 2020, Media students and graduates contacted course teams to share their lived experiences of systemic racialised inequalities. These included accounts of their time at Westminster, in particular in relation to their experience of the UG Media curriculum. This was a significant cultural moment both for the Media School, which had rarely been subject to so many outspoken critiques of its practices by students, and more generally in terms of UK HEIs having to confront the long overdue process of critiquing their curricula in the context of race, diversity and 'colonisation'.

The project also drew inspiration from alumni-driven social media-based initiatives, such as the #radiosilence campaign created by BA Radio alumni. These campaigns and initiatives highlighted possible avenues to help enhance interaction between alumni, current students and staff when decolonising the curriculum.

2. What did you set out to achieve?

The focus of this project was to begin to centre and embed student-voiced diversity into a new revised curriculum, and in so doing to 'decolonise' the heritage or legacy-related strands of curricula that inform a new degree structure. In 2021/22 current undergraduate Media degrees (BA Journalism, BA Radio, BA PR & Advertising and BA Digital Media & Communication) will converge into one degree, BA Digital Media. Drawing on insights and recommendations from student voice and experience, the aim was to frame key learning points for the new BA curriculum through the lens of race equality in particular, but also other forms of equality (taking an intersectional approach).

As a group we (i.e. staff and students) did not want to specify aims that were more concrete or specific at this stage given curriculum decolonisation is a huge task and involves, primarily, a deep dismantling of hierarchal approaches to pedagogy. As such, the group was cognisant that this was a tentative step towards starting an urgent conversation between Media staff and students and that in many ways it would be exploratory with regards to its outputs and achievements.

3. How did students and staff work together on this project?

Our primary aim was to set up a transparent and safe collaborative process in which students/alumni and staff could openly share their opinions and experience of undergraduate Media in the context of race equality (and as it intersects with gender equality and inequalities of class, sexual orientation, disability, amongst others). Speaking safely and with honesty about such matters was an absolute priority for this project, and hence we recruited two recently graduated Radio alumni – who felt more confident in critiquing the practices on UG Media – in addition to a L6 PR student.

Staff and students began by exchanging possible discussion points on key problematic areas in Media theory and practice curriculum design and delivery via an email thread. Staff members also circulated key readings for the group to undertake as part of this process, including foundational texts such as Tuck and Yang and more recent critical race theory scholarship. The ideas from the email thread were then condensed into a Padlet questionnaire to which members contributed (Artefact 1).

Building on the Padlet, the group agreed the best way forwards was a two-hour long online meeting in which problems and possible solutions could be discussed in depth. The meeting agenda aimed to put into practice a macro and micro approach: on a micro level, which aspects of module content or teaching/staffing were problematic from an equalities perspective and how they could be challenged or bettered; on a macro level, how the curriculum looked and felt to students of colour and how it impacted on their outcomes (and again how these could be bettered).

The meeting resulted in some very moving testimony and thought-provoking ideas (also captured in part by the Padlet). It was agreed that the best way forward to share these would be through creating short fictionalised composite characters (Artefact 2). Drawing on the practice of critical race theory scholarship, composite characters allow for the *real voices*, as it were, of lived experience to come through in analysis of issues pertaining to race and inequality. It was felt that this method would be safe and effective in circulating the thoughts, ideas and experiences captured in our discussions and would chime with our original aim to avoid making specific recommendations about curriculum decolonisation. In avoiding narrow recommendations our aim was to prompt Media staff to think for themselves about diverse student experiences in a more expansive and holistic way and to engage in discussions about how best to centre students of colour in curriculum design and delivery.

4. What kind of impact do you anticipate that your work may have on learning and teaching going forward (specific to your course/module or in a broader context)?

The artefacts are due to be shared shortly with Media staff, so it will be interesting to see its impact on curriculum design and delivery. It will be another three years before BA Digital Media has a full L4 to L6 cohort so, as noted earlier, this is a small step towards embedding student voice into the decolonisation process. Across the University there will now be EDI student ambassadors who are recruited from Sept 2021 onwards, so we are hopeful that our work here can be utilised in some way by the Media student ambassador to amplify student voice in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

5. Any lessons learned from working in partnership?

Yes. As noted in the staff reflections, it was a privilege to work with students on something so significant as lived experiences of race (in)equality and the need to decolonise the curriculum. For students it was a chance to hear of staff's lived experiences of race and racism in a way that is unusual in the traditional university space. This particular partnership therefore allowed for a unique challenge to be enacted in relation to the conventional hierarches of teacher/student and created a space for all members to let go, to an extent, of preconceived notions of how and why the curriculum has to be the way it is.