

Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of East London: Position Statement on Anti-Racism and Decolonisation

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Scope and Purpose

This position paper aims to set out our understanding of important issues around “race” (racialisation), inequality and decolonisation in the context of our Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of East London (UEL). When we write about the programme this encompasses the wider tutor team, trainees and interns. The paper was written to crystallise our thinking and set out actions for change. The process of change is ongoing, and this position paper represents one step in our journey of decolonisation.

A Note on Terminology

In this paper, we have included the term Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) when referring to research and demographic data because this is the term used by original authors and by UEL. However, we recognise that the way in which groups who are discriminated against are described is important and that the term BAME can be viewed as problematic (see Inc Arts UK, 2020).

The University of East London Context

UEL is located in the London Borough of Newham where 72 per cent of the population is projected to be BAME (GLA, 2020, as cited in London Borough of Newham, 2020). This is reflected in our university’s student demographics, where approximately 70 per cent of students identify as BAME. However, this is not reflected on many postgraduate programmes

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including our Professional Doctorate and other Doctoral programmes in the School of Psychology.

Race and inequality are a central focus at all levels of our university. In 2019, UEL established the innovative Office for Institutional Equity whose goal is “to create a culture and environment where institutional equity is embedded into the hearts and minds of every individual and is automatically considered in everything that is done” (Office for Institutional Equity, n.d.).

UEL is one of seventeen UK universities to hold the Race Quality Charter Mark Bronze which demonstrates a commitment to making systemic changes that improve the representation and progression of ethnic minority students and staff. Notably, Times Higher Education (2020) ranks UEL as the second in the world and first in the UK for reducing inequalities. Initiatives within the university include The Equity Collective – a forum with a focus on inclusive and anti-racist pedagogies. Recently the university removed a statue of Sir John Cass, who had links with the slave trade, and changed the name of a building named after him. Priorities for UEL include reducing the Degree Awarding Gap, increasing diversity among staff and adapting curricula with a focus on decolonisation and inclusive practices (University of East London, 2019a, 2019b).

In the School of Psychology race, inequality and decolonisation are increasingly embedded in teaching, research and other knowledge exchange activities. This is mainly due to colleagues who encouraged us all to ask “How are we complicit with coloniality?” The assumption is that our positions and power within the contexts and structures in which we work make us complicit. We, the programme team, recognise this assumption as true and welcome the challenges that follow from this.

It should be noted that the Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at UEL has developed an explicit focus on race and a commitment to challenging structural inequality. This is explored by Wood and Patel (2019), who explain steps that have been taken by the programme such as a teaching focus on “Whiteness” in each year of the programme, ending with a workshop on “decolonising White psychology”. We recognise the need for our Programme to demonstrate this type of commitment.

We have recently published a volume of Educational Psychology Research and Practice which focuses on this: Volume 6 No 1 2020 — University of East London (UEL). The papers in volume 6 of EPRaP focus on Educational Psychology and inform this paper. We had planned the “special issue” before events in 2020 because we had already recognised the need for action. We also recognised the tensions inherent in examining topics as “special”, rather than having an embedded and ongoing engagement, but felt on balance that this provided focus and a clearly delineated platform for authors. The response from colleagues, including some who are still in training, was inspiring. The resulting papers from Dr Rebecca Wright, Dr Judith Kusi, Dr Tracy Robinson, Shahinaz Mahdi, Dr Dannika Agyeman, Dr Hannah Lichwa, Dr Aisha Mclean and Dr Antony Williams are an important contribution to our professional understanding and constitute a call to action.

Systemic Considerations

A transformational model of decolonisation recognises the multiple and interconnecting systems of knowledge and cultures that affect higher education programmes (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018). In this position paper, we recognise that we exist within complex systems, including our professional bodies. We have statutory roles and professional responsibilities that are regulated. For example, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) requires that we challenge discrimination in our work (Health and Care Professions Council, 2018).

Since the death of George Floyd in America in 2020, psychology has increased its engagement with its role in racism and discrimination. Chief Executive of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Sarb Bajwa recently stated that “We (the BPS) are institutionally racist” (Bajwa, 2020, p. 22). Dr Nasreen Fazal-Short, the Chair of the BPS Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce, is currently leading on the development of a 5-year plan to address this institutional racism (Fazal-Short, 2020). The Division of Educational and Child Psychology has recently produced a “pledge to challenge structural racism” in the profession (British Psychological Society, Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 2020). The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) has produced resources for “equality and diversity” (Association of Educational Psychologists, n.d.). These initiatives are welcome but must not lead to complacency; change must be bottom-up as well as top-down. Groups like the Educational Psychology Race and Culture Forum, Black and Ethnic Minority Educational Psychology (BEEP) Network and TEPs’ Initiative for Cultural Change are engaging educational psychologists in vital discussions about race.

Anti-Racism and Decolonisation on Our Programme

As a programme, we recognise that we have not done enough to recognise structural racism, oppression or be proactively anti-racist. We, therefore, seek to further “decolonise” our curriculum and engage in more focussed anti-racist activities.

Decolonisation has many meanings (see, e.g., Tuck & Yang, 2012) but in the context of our curriculum it “refers to thought and action within the university to redress forms of disadvantage associated with racism and colonialism” (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018, p. 3). Decolonising means both drawing on BAME authors and questioning accepted Euro-Western models and theories of psychology (Uwadiae, n.d.).

We have expanded our knowledge through reading, discussion and two audits. One of the audits was carried out using the SOAS guidance on decolonising the curriculum (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018). The other associated audit was led by the School of Psychology librarian and reviewed core reading lists. The race of each author was investigated using information available on the internet, including the pragmatic but limited approach of visually identifying race.

In a joint years 2 and 3 day in June 2020, we asked Trainees how our programme can develop to acknowledge, challenge and change structural racism in our profession, our education system and our wider society.

These processes enabled us to reflect on elements of established practice to build upon:

- The approach of our programme is grounded in principles of social justice, beneficence and autonomy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). These have provided powerful but generic direction in challenging inequality and prejudice, particularly in our work with children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. Our attention has not been specifically on race which has been, perhaps, subsumed by broader issues of inclusion and social justice.
- Teaching sessions on cultural competence, relating to both our work with children and families and to assessment practices
- A focus on critical psychology, which we view as a central paradigm in the process of anti-discriminatory practice and decolonisation (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986; Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1988; Williams et al., 2017), as well as the Intersectionality perspective (Crenshaw, 1989)
- Our research teaching which includes an explicit focus on participatory approaches. Our trainee research often has emancipatory aims and recent graduates

have focused explicitly on race and the experience of BAME participants in their studies (e.g., Farrugia, 2020)

We identified a lack of racial diversity on our programme:

- We are an all-White programme team of course-directors and academic and professional tutors; field-work tutors do include those identifying as BAME
- Models and theories of psychology drawn upon in teaching and assessments are predominantly Euro-Western
- The reading list audit showed that only one non-White author was included in the core reading for the programme

Trainees asked that the programme:

- Acknowledges and challenges structural racism further
- Includes more non-Western/indigenous literature. This is to include: White privilege, culture, implicit bias, different groups and decolonisation
- Creates space for reflection on trainees' own identity and practice as well as discussing race in supervision
- Focuses more on cultural competence, while ensuring that race isn't confined to particular teaching sessions
- Investigates recruitment to reduce barriers to becoming an educational psychologist

Next Steps

This process of reflection and exploration has led us to an action plan which we are putting into place. Decolonising can be seen as a journey (Uwadiae, n.d.), and this is reflected in our planning; we will continue to review and extend the plan. We are working to an associated implementation plan for monitoring our progress. Table 1 outlines the areas for change that have been prioritised and actions we plan to take over the academic years between now and 2022.

Table 1*UEL Professional Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology's Plan for Decolonising the Curriculum*

Area for change	Action
Programme governance, communications and engagement with UEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Propose anti-discriminatory practice and the decolonisation process to become standing item(s) at Programme Operations Committee meetings to promote monitoring and reviews of progress ● Programme position paper to be shared with Programme Operations Committee ● Discussion and review of key issues within this paper with each cohort of trainees at business meetings and with other relevant stakeholders, e.g., Field-Work Tutors ● Key information about the programme to include an explicit focus on anti-racism and anti-discrimination ● Closer alignment with the work of the UEL Office for Institutional Equity ● Programme team representation on the School of Psychology's White Anti-Racist Collective
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Programme to align all recruitment approaches to best practice identified by OIE ● Programme Team to commission and attend training relating to race, inequality and decolonisation ● Programme Team to take a reflexive approach to anti-racism and decolonisation, including an increasing awareness of the role of Whiteness on the programme ● Supervision training for placement supervisors (for Year 2 and Year 3 trainees) to include anti-discriminatory practice
Recruiting trainees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hold an annual open evening which foregrounds programme content and initiatives related to anti-discriminatory practice and decolonisation ● Review shortlisting criteria and the interview process in order that they include a focus on anti-discriminatory practice ● Create a plan for outreach with the local community, e.g., local schools, to increase awareness of opportunities in psychology ● Link with UEL programmes below level 8 via information and engagement events to support the awareness of UEL students of our programme and ways in which they can successfully pursue progression ● Review and encourage mentoring, reverse mentoring, internship and apprenticeship programmes to widen BAME accessibility to our programme
Audit of curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Programme team to audit curriculum content across academic, research and placement components ● Curriculum content to be reviewed by development and diversity strand leader and feedback given to module leader

Area for change	Action
Curriculum content	<p data-bbox="545 257 638 293">Year 1:</p> <ul data-bbox="590 313 1375 728" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="590 313 1375 369">• Clearer focus on individual and institutional discrimination, particularly racism, in sessions relating to social justice <li data-bbox="590 392 1375 448">• Wider inclusion of theories and practices relating to philosophy and child development that do not come from a Euro-Western tradition <li data-bbox="590 470 1375 504">• Critical theories and practices to be introduced during induction <li data-bbox="590 526 1375 582">• Introduce teaching session on race and Whiteness in educational psychology <li data-bbox="590 604 1375 660">• Placement tasks to develop understanding and practice related anti-racism and anti-discrimination <li data-bbox="590 683 1375 728">• Clearer focus on identifying and working with issues of discrimination, race and inequalities in the placement portfolio <p data-bbox="545 750 638 786">Year 2:</p> <ul data-bbox="590 806 1375 1120" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="590 806 1375 884">• Broaden the focus on participatory and emancipatory approaches to research to include transformative research — research that confronts social oppression <li data-bbox="590 907 1375 963">• Introduce participatory approaches to research in the context of indigenous research methods <li data-bbox="590 985 1375 1041">• Placement activities to include casework that demonstrates anti-oppressive or anti-discriminatory practice <li data-bbox="590 1064 1375 1120">• An increased focus on Social GRRRAACCEEESSS (Burnham, 2012) and guidance such as “race talk” (Sue, 2015) <p data-bbox="545 1142 638 1178">Year 3:</p> <ul data-bbox="590 1198 1375 1556" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="590 1198 1375 1254">• Increased focus on race and unconscious bias in organisations across the module, including a session on this topic <li data-bbox="590 1276 1375 1332">• Assessed “future practice statement” to include a focus on anti-racist practice <li data-bbox="590 1355 1375 1411">• A critical psychology text included as core reading (Williams et al., 2017) and critical theories to be included (e.g., Smail, 2005) <li data-bbox="590 1433 1375 1512">• Placement portfolio assessment on critical reflection to include a focus on privilege, cultural diversity and race as well as limitations of Euro-Western theory and models <li data-bbox="590 1534 1375 1568">• Placement activities to include working with diverse groups <p data-bbox="545 1590 1375 1668">Across all modules we will continue to review module reading lists, teaching content, tutorials and research supervision to include a greater focus on:</p> <ul data-bbox="590 1691 1375 1951" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="590 1691 1375 1724">• Topics related to race and decolonisation <li data-bbox="590 1747 1375 1780">• BAME authors <li data-bbox="590 1803 1375 1836">• Indigenous and non-Euro-Western models of psychology <li data-bbox="590 1859 1375 1892">• Critical frameworks <li data-bbox="590 1915 1375 1951">• A greater focus on reflexivity about “race” and racism throughout the programme

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