Decolonising Initial Teacher Education and anti-racist education in 'white spaces': feelings of uncertainty and optimism

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Abstract
This research, conducted jointly by history and modern language teacher educators working in a higher education institution, evaluates the impact of a project to 'Decolonise Postgraduate Teacher Education', started in summer 2020. This project involved the creation of an action planner aimed to cultivate tutors' and student teachers' racial literacy and empower them to tackle racism in school. The research explores the impact and challenges of the project from the perspectives of the student teachers and tutors involved and establishes the next steps to decolonise the programme. A self-study approach was adopted, as the tutors' and student teachers' perceptions were recorded in diaries. One finding from the research is that the project had a positive impact on the participants' racial literacy and allowed them to look critically at resources and curriculum. The research also identified many challenges in decolonising subjects in secondary schools; for instance the considerable variation in approaches taken by different departments and the underrepresentation of individuals from ethnically diverse communities on the course, but also in the wider teaching and teacher educator workforce. Finally, the research revealed areas where more progress was needed, for example supporting student teachers further in recognising microaggressions and dealing with racist incidents.

Key words
Decolonise; curriculum; teacher education; anti-racist education

Research background and context

The decolonising movements, that began in universities worldwide, call for a greater representation of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the curriculum, as well as better awareness of the contexts in which knowledge has been produced and selected (Bhopal, 2015; El Magd, 2016; Mohamud and Whitburn, 2016; Charles, 2019; Lyndon-Cohen, 2021; Doharty et al., 2021). Although the movement has long roots, for many, it was the aftermath of George Floyd's death acted as a catalyst to what was needed: immediate action. Beyond uncovering overt racism, it also triggered discussions and debates about covert systemic racism and colour-blind racism, and what was needed to tackle them: action and critical reflection (Phipps, 2019).

This paper reports on a case study, focussed on a teacher education programme for secondary school teachers in England. In this context, the 'Decolonise the Curriculum' movement, despite facing issues and criticism (Doharty et al. , 2021), has the potential to build momentum within school settings. This is despite significant barriers to a decolonised school curriculum remaining (BERA, 2020), not least the continued statutory emphasis on Fundamental British Values within the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011). In addition, the post-2014 curriculum places the responsibility for decolonising the curriculum with teachers (BERA, 2020), and although the government department for education has pointed out the opportunities for a decolonised curriculum that schools could adopt (DfE, 2020), the movement has implications in terms of workload and the training of the teacher workforce (Bhopal, 2015; Lander, 2014; Kohli, 2014, Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). This was highlighted by the Runnymede Trust report *Race and Racism in Secondary Schools* which states that by 'their own admission, many teachers are ill-prepared to teach in ways that promote anti-racism, and this can include BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) teachers' (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, p. 2). Racial literacy, therefore, needs to be placed at the centre of teacher training (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020) as low levels of racial literacy are seen by teachers

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to be the consequence of inadequate teacher training (Lander, 2014; Kohli, 2014; Bhopal, 2015). Whilst the issue is complex and decolonising teacher education will not on its own offer a comprehensive solution to tackle the problem of racism in education (SOAS, 2017; Keval, 2019; Cartwright et al., 2020; Panford, 2021), it is essential to develop student teachers' awareness of systemic racism, racial literacy, and confidence in their ability to teach in a way that promotes anti-racist education (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020).

In this context of growing awareness, a project to decolonise their one-year postgraduate teacher education programme was launched by the researchers. The higher education institution where they operate is in a region that does not have high levels of ethnic diversity. The proportion of people with an ethnic group other than white in the region is 3.5% (the national average is 18.3%, ONS, 2021). Across the region, this varies from 1.4% in rural areas to 9.2% in the city where the higher education institution is located (NCC, 2021). The post graduate teacher education programme works with more than 80 schools, urban, coastal and rural, from across their partnership, that reflect these levels of ethnic diversity. In this context, schools, and indeed the programme itself, are predominantly 'white spaces'. The project to decolonise this post graduate teacher education programme began with the introduction of an action planner that aimed to cultivate the racial literacy of the student teachers on the programme, who are working on teaching placement in these 'white spaces'. A further aim was to initiate individual professional and personal reflection on the role of initial teacher education in building an anti-racist society (London and Vauzour, 2020). The action planner was shared with the programme's team of teacher educators to stimulate reflection and preliminary actions and implementing change was made a priority in two curriculum subjects, history and languages. The research in this study explores the impact of the action taken since 2020 to decolonise the post graduate teacher education programme at this higher education institution.

Research questions

Firstly, the research aimed to evaluate the impact of the actions taken to decolonise the post graduate teacher education programme on student teachers and tutors' perceptions and understanding. Secondly, it aimed to explore the challenges faced by tutors and student teachers during this process. A further aim was to establish the next steps for decolonising the programme and the development of racial literacy in secondary schools.

Methods and methodology

Data Collection: Online diaries & personal journals

Decolonisation of the curriculum and anti-racist education are potentially sensitive and controversial subjects (Lander, 2011; Tuck et al., 2012; Joseph-Salisbury 2020; Doharty, 2021) so online diaries and personal journals were selected as they allowed participants to express their perspectives, respected the sensitive nature of the subject matter and accounted for the position of power the researchers held as academic supervisors (Seidman, 2005). The data came from two sources: anonymous online diaries from languages and history student teachers, and tutors/researchers' own pedagogical journals. Both diaries and journals were recorded over a six-month period, that coincided with the centre-based taught part of the training and the second school placement, until completion of training and award of Qualified Teacher Status. The diaries documented student teachers' understanding and experiences of decolonisation and captured their level of confidence and feelings during this time. To complement the student teachers' diary entries, the researchers completed pedagogical journals in their respective roles as modern languages and history tutors, detailing pedagogical initiatives to decolonise the programme, when and how they were implemented, how they were received, and what refinements could be made to these initiatives. These entries also allowed the researchers to reflect on their own positionality as white female academics and practitioner researchers.

As a self-study, the research adopted qualitative research methods, which 'tend to be associated with researcher involvement' and 'a holistic perspective' (Denscombe, 2014, p. 238). The very nature of a self-study generates strong questions regarding the influence of the researchers' own biases and assumptions on the interpretation of the data (Loughran, 2007), so collaborative interactions (between the two researchers, but also with student teachers and colleagues) were central to the process (Vanassche, 2015), to increase the study's validity and credibility (Klein et al., 2018).

Participants: student teachers & subject tutors
Only those student teachers on the history and modern languages post graduate teacher education programme were part of the pilot. All student teachers on both courses were invited to take part in the study. There was no intended sample size, and all entries were considered, whether the participants had written several entries or not.

Data Analysis: thematic analysis
The diaries submitted by student teachers were analysed separately in both subjects before findings were compared in a subsequent phase of analysis. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was selected due to its flexibility and the fact that the researchers' position and subjectivity are recognised as an integral and necessary part of the process. RTA involves the researchers drawing upon their experiences, knowledge and positionality and 'critically interrogating' how this influences their interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 4). The student teachers' diaries were analysed first to avoid an excessive focus on a single narrative (the researchers' own perspectives). Holistic coding (Saldana, 2016) was used to gain an understanding of issues, ideas and patterns. The codes identified in the student teachers' diaries were then used to analyse the data from the researchers' journals and generate, develop and review themes in a recursive and deductive analytical process, to 'capture the patterning of meaning across the dataset' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 78).

Ethical Considerations
Researchers have ensured that this study adheres to their institution's ethics policy and the British Educational Research Association's set of ethical principles (BERA, 2018). Considering the nature of the study, it was particularly important to 'maximise benefits and minimise harm for participants' (BERA, 2018). The study was approved by the higher education institution's Research Ethics Committee.

Limitations
This small-scale study drew on a voluntary sample from the history and Modern Languages cohorts of student teachers on the programme (6 respondents and 11 overall entries from history and 6 respondents and 12 overall entries from Modern Languages out of a cohort of 40 possible participants in total). One of the promises of the diary method was to explore individual and group variations over time, however, with fewer repeat responses, some of the benefits of conducting the research over an extended timeframe were lost (Alaszewski, 2006). Given the smaller sample size and the self-study nature of the study, the potential to generalise from this research is limited (Denscombe, 2014).

Findings and discussion
The voice of student teachers captured in the study was engaged, cognisant and diverse, and many important themes were generated from the analysis of the data:

- A worthwhile endeavour
- Underrepresentation and 'white spaces'
- White default and tokenism
- Perpetuating stereotypes
- Covert racism and microaggressions

- Uncertainty and optimism

Analysing these themes allowed the researchers to explore the positive impact of the project (a worthwhile endeavour which seemed to lead to student teachers' awareness, optimism and empowerment), as well as the challenges encountered in particular in white spaces (where stereotypes, covert racism and microaggressions go unrecognised and unchallenged), and more importantly, the next steps into continuing to progress towards embedding anti-racist education in Initial Teacher Education. These will be discussed in more details in the conclusion.

Engagement and Participation

Whilst participation in the study was optional, the sessions about decolonising the Curriculum and anti-racist education were compulsory for students. It is significant that, as evidenced in the tutors' journals, engagement in sessions was good, and that there were some visible positive impacts of the work to decolonise the programme on student teachers' performance in school. For instance, one of the mentors highlighted a student teacher's effort to decolonise the curriculum as one of their strengths on their placement evaluation. However, two thirds of the cohort did not participate in the study. This silence could be interpreted in a variety of different ways. In the literature, this silence has been analysed as a way to protect the 'normative position of whiteness' and its power (Mazzei, 2008; Solomon et al., 2005). Some students might also be reluctant to recognise the importance of anti-racist education, not realising that in a racist society, this default position can still be considered as an 'act of abuse and violence' (Aronson et al., 2020). Participation in the study might also have been limited by conflicting priorities and high level of workload (Basit, 2006). Further research would be needed to identify barriers to participation; nonetheless, recognisable themes emerged from the data collected.

A worthwhile endeavour

There was a consensus in the responses that anti-racist education and the decolonisation of the curriculum is important, valuable and worthwhile. This was consistent across all responses. There was no evidence from the teachers that they felt that teaching about race was not their responsibility (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). One participant commented that they were *'pleased to see that there was a focus on decolonising the curriculum within this course'* even if they *'didn't expect there to be'* and another felt that *'overall the course [had] done a lot to promote anti-racist education'*. The wider focus on cultivating racial literacy (rather than just concentrating on the curriculum) was also acknowledged positively. Another participant commented that the programme *'[improved] the anti-racist literacy of some people on the course that may not be as well versed on the topic as others'.* It is also worth noting that the effort made to decolonise the programme through the action planner and follow up actions have been visible and that student teachers felt it had had a positive impact. A participant noted for instance that in a *'task where [they] had to pick controversial issues (…) most people immediately opted for race'* and another noted that they felt '*more motivated and inspired to continue [their] work to decolonise the curriculum'.*

It was perhaps unsurprising that the respondents, who had self-selected, agreed on the importance of decolonising the curriculum. However, this theme was also supported by the tutors' own experiences captured in their journal throughout the year. For instance, one tutor commented on the high response rate from student-teachers to a survey leading up to the lecture by the Black Curriculum (a British community interest company which mission is to 'address the Eurocentricity found in local and national curriculums'). It was also evident in tutors' diaries that they witnessed high levels of engagement from student teachers during specific seminars dedicated to anti-racist education.

Underrepresentation and white spaces

The theme of the underrepresentation of individuals from ethnically diverse communities on the course and on placement also featured prominently in responses. Firstly, some respondents commented on the whiteness of the student teacher cohort and the difficulties of discussing race in an all-white setting. Whilst acknowledging the demographics of the region, a participant felt that *'22 white people discussing race (and how to teach Black history) [had] a certain irony to it'.* Participants suggested *'targeting marketing to a more diverse community of applicants', 'involving the voices of those who may have been oppressed in the past/on their placement'* and *'involving more lecturers of minority backgrounds'* as next steps to mitigate this.

Tutors were aware of the limitations of their positionality (Aronson et al., 2020) and whilst they had taken steps to mitigate these limitations, such as working with the Black Curriculum (a social enterprise who aims to address the lack of Black British history in the national Curriculum in the UK), they recognise that decolonising the curriculum has to be a joint project where white and non-white staff and students needs to work together (Razra Memon, 2020) and this will inform the next steps in the project.

One of the other challenges encountered by student teachers was working within a predominantly white community on placement (Lander, 2011). This is a very different undertaking than discussing issues of race and racism in a diverse classroom and community (Bhopal and Rhamie, 2014). A participant noted that '*teaching predominantly white children about race in Norfolk can feel kind of awkward, especially if you're getting silly comments from the student (e.g. why does that apply to me)'.* Being the voice of minorities can be all consuming (Smith, 2007) and a respondent also noted that they '*felt exhausted talking about racial injustice and sharing [their] experiences with people who had difficulty understanding*'. Another respondent acknowledged that they were '*not as active as [they] could have been in educating about race*' as they '*did not feel confident to do this in a majorly white space'.* This lack of confidence was echoed in another response where the student reported that '*as a student teacher it feels rude to point out potential pitfalls in your placement school's curriculum. This can often leave you in an uncomfortable situation where you are stuck delivering a lesson which you know could involve more stories and shift the focus of students from an Anglo-centric view to a global one*'.

A participant also reported that they often heard teachers, including mentors*, 'complain about the measures being put in place to combat discrimination … [as] unnecessary and counterproductive'.* This student teacher *'believed that by being open about these issues and applying changes, [they] would be perceived as a problem'.* In mainly white spaces, racism is normal (Bell, 1992) and therefore 'difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). This can make the additional workload generated by any meaningful changes to the curriculum and content of lessons (BERA, 2020) appear unnecessary to teachers in a mainly white space (DiAngelo, 2012). Whilst a student teacher highlighted that the resistance seemed linked to '*not wanting to add extra work to their current workload and being comfortable as teachers, rather than not wanting the world to become a better place',* it is still problematic, and potentially representative of racial apathy and colour-blind racism (Forman, 2004).

Whilst some reluctance was overt and explicit, in other cases, the feelings of reluctance perceived by student teachers might also have been caused by lack of confidence, preconceived ideas and prejudices (Brownsword, 2019). When discussing their upcoming placement in a rural school with their placement mentors teaching in a city school, a student teacher described feeling '*uneasy when [they] discussed the possibility of far-right beliefs, ignorance and discriminatory behaviour as possible challenges'*. Whilst it is important to consider potential challenges, there might be an overly negative perception of how discussions around issues of race and racism would be received in these white rural

areas. These prejudices can create fear and lead to student teachers' avoidance of engagement with anti-racist education. At the end of placement, the aforementioned student noted in a subsequent entry that their experience on placement was a positive one and that they *were 'proud to see that the school was taking steps to improve their education on vulnerable groups and fight discrimination'.*

Another participant also acknowledged the '*low levels of ethnic diversity'* in their rural school but also noted that the curriculum had been designed *'in a way that … emphasises social justice and examines power relations throughout history. As such, many topics examined issues of race within wider issues of discrimination throughout history.'* The emphasis here is placed on helping pupils to see the 'bigger picture' in relation to race and discrimination and this highlights the fact that such work is possible and can be well received in mainly white contexts.

White default and tokenism

Anti-racist education needs to be embedded in the school experience, rather than limited to tokenistic actions (Dar et al., 2018; Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). Well-meaning, bolt-on interventions can lead to an over-simplified view of the issue of race, which can perpetuate stereotypes and turn into racial micro-aggressions (Doharty, 2019). A prominent theme in diaries was the danger of a 'bolt on' or tokenistic approach to anti-racist education and whilst articulated in different ways depending on the subject, all called for a '*more holistic approach'*.

For instance, a respondent noted that '*too often the effort is made to teach explicitly about a minority group for a small period of time, and then sadly educators often switch back to the 'white default'*', and that '*BAME figures and voices [are] only paraded for specific lesson or period of time, instead of there being a conscious effort to present BAME narratives throughout the year'.* Another respondent expressed anger at the '*white-washing'* of the curriculum past and present and worried that '*there's so much out there that people are not aware of*'. For instance, a participant noted that they '*only learnt about African history in relation to the slave trade and, embarrassingly, [their] knowledge remained limited until only a couple of years ago'*. The same participant asked students *'what they already knew about African history, and students could only link that enslaved people originally came from West Africa'.*

To remedy this, a participant referred to a need for the whole school curriculum to take an anti-racist focus and for other departments in school to '*take responsibility'* for this. However, another respondent described attending a '*CPD* [continuous professional development] *session on decolonising … run by [their] mentor who was unfamiliar with it. … [they] felt like a lot of teachers felt like it is a tick boxing experience.*' Incidentally, the same student teacher noted the lack of observable signs of anti-racist education in classrooms during both of their placements.

This was also discussed as a concern by the tutors as whilst they had been able to devote greater time and importance to anti-racist education, they had not yet been able to '*make anti-racist rhetoric systemic*' in their course and more work needs to be done to embed anti-racist education into school placements. In this respect the research served to highlight the extent of what is required (Cartwright, 2021).

Perpetuating stereotypes

One of the ways to embed anti-racist education is to ensure fair representation of all races in the educational system, for instance through a curriculum, lesson activities and resources that avoid perpetuating stereotypes and challenge them (Doharty, 2019). However, respondents noted that the tokenistic approach to diversifying representation has led to problematic representation in textbooks. One participant observed '*the portrayal of a Japanese girl wearing a kimono and holding a parasol talking about how much she loves rice''* and *'the portrayal of an African boy who talks about living in*

a shack'. This participant commented that it is important to develop '*portrayals of BAME characters that are rich and varied'* and to teach children that *'BAME people have lives that are as complex and varied as those of white people'.*

This problematic representation was a point explored during the subject specific session on Decolonising the Curriculum and this had a positive impact as student teachers critically evaluated resources in use in their placement school. Another participant also described how they generated a class discussion about the lack of diversity in their school resources by '*using predominantly or solely images of BAME people in lessons that require visuals relating to people'.* This was a way to give pupils from white backgrounds an insight into the perspective of people from an underrepresented ethnic background and an opening into the necessary dialogue around race and whiteness (Lander, 2014).

On the other hand, another respondent highlighted the importance of racial literacy when referring to teaching a diverse curriculum to a more diverse class (Lander, 2011; Joseph-Salisbury 2020), as it had '*left [them] feeling a little unsure of [themselves]*'. This diary entry goes on to reflect on the responses of a Black student in their class. The student teacher noted that '*how Black people were being portrayed in the lesson'* had a visible effect on the pupil's engagement and that *'it seemed that as soon as he realised [they weren't] about to demean Black people or make them appear to seem inferior he reengaged'.* This highlights the importance of taking into consideration context and pupils' background and experience, and how an unfair or reductive representation can be a painful and uncomfortable experience for pupils (Doharty, 2019).

Covert racism and microaggressions

Whilst Joseph-Salisbury (2020) described racism as 'deeply embedded in secondary schools', only a minority of participants reported witnessing or suffering from racial aggressions/micro-aggressions.

Firstly, one student teacher praised the support received from both tutors when an issue around racial micro-aggression arose between two student teachers at a placement school. Taking a clear stance against covert racism seems to have challenged the 'colour and power evasive discourse', which states that 'addressing race directly creates more problems than it solves' (Pearce, 2014, p. 401). In this instance, tutors felt they were able to support student teachers in resolving the situation and ensuring the other party understood why this constituted a micro-aggression.

Two respondents described several occurrences of racial (micro-)aggressions from pupils. For instance, they reported the repeated use by a pupil of an ethnic slur, stereotypical and reductive portrayal of Black people or blackness, and pupils of colour being upset by racist incidents happening outside their lessons. The participant noted that some incidents were dealt with in an effective and proportionate manner, with appropriate education and sanctions. The student also noted that they appreciated the pupils' *'willingness to educate their classmate'*. However, in another case, the student teacher felt that incidents were '*blown out of proportion'*. Whilst it is a possibility, it could be another expression of the 'colour and power evasive discourse' (Pearce, 2014, p. 401). Another respondent described a comment made by a pupil about race and rape as '*probably the most difficult moment of [their teacher training] year'* as they *'felt uncertain in the moment of whether to react angrily and send [the pupil] out of the lesson as [they] had been advised to by some teachers, or to address a potentially triggering comment in detail in front of the entire class'.* As described by Joseph-Salisbury (2020), unclear or inexistent school policies regarding racist incidents often leave individual teachers to deal with them independently, and unfortunately, their ability to do so effectively will depend on their level of racial literacy.

One of the difficulties of dealing with incidents of racism is that some might stem from ignorance, but others are subject to interpretation and context (Basit et al., 2007). Both respondents above found it

particularly difficult to navigate the boundary between what constituted a racist incident or not. It is also very likely that some incidents of racism go unnoticed in predominantly white spaces, as highlighted by the fact that only two students reported witnessing micro-aggressions. In the future, it will be important to use case studies to prepare student teachers to recognise and react to potentially racist incidents in a fair and proportionate way.

Participants also reported in their diary entries occurrences of racist micro-aggression from school staff. For instance, a senior member of staff in school did not attempt to pronounce a name saying, '*I'm not even going to try'.* Whilst understanding the complication in pronouncing unfamiliar names, the student teacher reporting this incident felt that the manner and tone the teacher used in this instance was *'disconcerting'*.

A participant also reported an occurrence of a positive portrayal of colonisation by a language teacher. The participant commented that *'when we speak about murder or rape, we would not attempt to present it positively, so we should not do the same to teach about crimes of humanity, like colonisation or slavery'*. Language teachers should acknowledge the terrible consequences of colonisation for the colonised, even when celebrating the variety of countries and cultures where a language is spoken in order to encourage pupils to study a widely spoken language.

Beyond the need for student teachers to learn to recognise these micro-aggressions and deal with them proportionally, Joseph-Salisbury highlighted that teachers need to be aware they might unwillingly upset individuals from ethnically diverse communities (2020). The participants responses highlighted the complexity of the issue and the need to open the dialogue and show empathy. In the future, it will be important to explore this aspect of their practice further on the course.

Uncertainty and optimism

Throughout their responses, the participating student teachers referred to the challenges of teaching about race and the challenges presented by racism itself. Firstly, some respondents felt *'unsure'*, *'nervous'* or *'apprehensive'* when teaching about race. One stated that they were *'probably quite ignorant (as a white person) of how much it can hurt to hear how people of your race were treated'*. Only one respondent felt '*fully confident*' when teaching about race. A participant noted the complexity of articulating issues to do with race in a way that was accessible to pupils: '*I struggled to articulate a good response here (…) I found difficult to properly explain the power dynamics at play to year 7s!'.*

Secondly, student teacher and tutors alike found it difficult to know how to deal with the complexity of race and the language to use when discussing race. The use of appropriate and sensitive language was frequently cited by student teachers as a difficulty. One described '*uncomfortable moments*' when they realised they were '*getting it wrong'* (e.g. using the term 'slaves' rather than 'enslaved people'). This fear of '*getting it wrong'* and feeling embarrassed was, for one student teacher, potentially '*inhibiting discussions about race and [their] confidence in answering questions about this'*. Another participant highlighted the need to **'***check in with BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color] students in [their] lesson'.* The language used to talk about race is constantly evolving and teaching this can be especially challenging, for instance when explaining the nuance of race as an historical construct (Apps, 2021). It was clear from the research that student teachers need this modelled explicitly in their taught sessions in the higher education institution and that some specific scenario planning would be beneficial.

It is unsurprising that the student teachers faced challenges when teaching about race and dealing with racism. However, their reflective, questioning approach to these challenges was obvious. In several diary entries, there was a hesitancy in their responses and the student teachers were tentative

in their suggestions for improvements to their own practice. The majority did seem to view their development as the process of learning and unlearning advocated by Joseph-Salisbury (2020). None of the respondents commented that, as a result of the challenges faced in their teaching, they no longer wanted to pursue a decolonised curriculum.

On the other hand, the responses did highlight contrasting experiences between the departments that student teachers were placed in. Some commented that their placements gave them '*a head start … towards really putting principles of decolonisation into practice and considering them within [their] teaching*'. Others felt their '*placement school could do more to decolonise their curriculum, however as a student teacher it feels rude to point out potential pitfalls in your placement school's curriculum'*. One respondent directly contrasted their placement schools. Their history department on first placement had followed a '*traditional curriculum that felt 'set in stone'*'. However, in their second placement school, the curriculum provided many opportunities to teach diverse topics and the student teacher was *'hopeful*' and '*excited*' to teach a decolonised curriculum. The student teacher ended by saying that '*I think this is something I will definitely talk to my mentor about to get their thinking behind it'*, highlighting the importance of the role of the school-based mentor to the student teachers' planning. Responses highlighted that whilst anti-racist education and decolonising may be a priority in the taught content at the higher education institution, it is not necessarily a priority in school departments. These observations from the student teachers demonstrate the importance of the power of each department to design and enact their curriculum and the varied or limited role that student teachers have within this process.

Overall, whilst the findings seem to point towards the fact that there is still a great deal to do, progress has been made and a feeling of motivation and optimism was palpable throughout the student teacher entries. For example, one student teacher commented: *'I left the course feeling more optimistic about the future, as long as efforts to make a positive difference continue. I feel more motivated and inspired to continue my work to decolonise the curriculum.'*

Conclusion and next steps

This article is focussed on the conclusions shared by both subjects. By providing an insight into the real problems and needs of our students this study has provided a new understanding of how these barriers might be overcome. Responses consistently showed that decolonising the teacher education programme and anti-racist education is important and valuable, whilst also recognising the challenges involved. The acknowledgement of schools as predominantly 'white spaces', the stereotypical resources and instances of covert racism, confirmed to participants the need for anti-racist approaches. For example, the discussions in seminars were reflected in the student teachers' teaching practice and the reflections in their diaries, and there were regular references to the resources and readings provided. Participants were able to consider school practices and resources critically and identify where improvement was needed. This suggests that the input from the centre-based taught sessions had an impact on the participating student teachers' development. Whilst respondents expressed feelings of uncertainty and discomfort, they recognised this as part of a learning process.

One factor critical to this learning process was the variation in approaches taken by the individual departments, mentors' levels of racial awareness and racial literacy, and the variable quality of the resources they worked with. This means that whilst the work undertaken in the higher education institution had an impact on the participating student teachers' reflections on approaches to decolonising the curriculum, not all student teachers were able to enact this within the school departments they were teaching in. However, there is potential to provide student teachers with more space to embed anti-racist education in their subject. For example, this could be done through clear communication with the mentors regarding the course priorities, by continuing to work at weaving anti-racist tasks into school placements, and by sharing resources and collaborating with mentors, as

well as opening the dialogue between mentors and student teachers on the topic of race and racism. This would also support mentors to recognise, support and evaluate trainees' efforts in embedding anti-racist education. Another challenge is clearly the underrepresentation of individuals from ethnically diverse communities on the course itself and in the teaching workforce and the school communities in the region (pupils and parents). The lack of diversity on the post graduate teacher education programme is a difficult issue to resolve and a review of the marketing and recruitment strategy is necessary to support recruitment from ethnically diverse communities and as described by a participant, '*really widen the discussion around non-racist education*'.

It could also be argued that the fact that a significant number of student teachers did not take part in the study reflects the student teachers' indifference or resistance to decolonising the curriculum. Whilst this was not supported by the evidence in the tutors' own journal entries, it remains a possibility. In the future, it is important to engage in dialogue with the 'silent ones' to identify barriers and address them (Reyes et al., 2018).

Throughout this research, the authors have sought to examine their own positionality and white privilege. Their hope is that they have listened to and consulted others from a range of backgrounds to notice real problems and needs, in line with Paulo Freire's pedagogical principle that 'attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects that must be saved from a burning building' (Freire, 1968, p. 39). That said, it is essential, and suggested by respondents, to continue the work to involve more '*the voices of those who may have been oppressed in the past/on their placement'*, through case studies, paid guest speakers and testimonials, but also through *'more lecturers of minority backgrounds'*.

In addition, it was striking that participants aimed to increase content pertaining to colonised and marginalised peoples. In their focus on the 'what' to teach there was very little consideration of 'how' this could be taught in a decolonised way, for example though greater consideration of pupils' perspectives and a focus on the co-creation of a curriculum (Freire, 1968). It is possible that there needs to be greater focus in centre-based taught sessions on how a decolonised pedagogy might be enacted in schools. With this in mind, the term 'anti-racist education' might be a more accurate framing of our aims for the course, to encompass both curriculum and pedagogy.

The research has been valuable in shaping the steps for the continuation of this project. It has provided the student teachers' perspective, something missing from the original action planner. The obvious commitment of the student teachers involved has also reaffirmed the tutors' commitment to the project. Most importantly, the research has confirmed that there is no one clear path or end point to decolonisation as it 'is an on-going, and an unending process; it is a collective journey and one that has not yet arrived' (Dei, 2016, p 37).

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