

## Reflections On Teaching Anthropologically And Fostering Belonging As Anti-Racist Allies In A 'Widening Participation' University: An Ecological Approach.

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### Abstract

This article critically reflects on anti-racist and anthropological teaching practices in a widening participation university. It argues that to make meaningful change to entrenched racism and awarding gaps in higher education, lecturers must take action and work towards embedding anti-racism into every level of the university structure. We propose using an ecological model with lecturers at its heart as a practical tool to support this work. Lecturers can begin by examining themselves and bring their vulnerabilities and openness to change to their different fields of connectivity – with students, with the curriculum, with academic structures, and with colleagues, across the institution. Such work helps challenge sedimented beliefs and practices and moves the institution toward becoming a more inclusive or pro-belonging university for students and staff alike.

**Keywords:** Anti-racism, dialogue, belonging, critical race theory, ecological model, reflection.

### Introduction:

In this article, two white cisgender female anthropologists come together to discuss their practices of teaching in a widening participation university. Widening participation initiatives aim to address differential 'access and progress' (Connell-Smith & Hubble 2018, p. 4) between students from varied social and economic backgrounds. Within this context, The University of East London, where we teach in public health, positions itself as an 'engine of social mobility [...] to further widen access to transformative higher education' (UEL, 2020, p. 9) to its students; 70% of whom are racialised as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (UEL, 2020, p. 1), or as we use in this paper, Global Majority. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) is an increasingly contested term due to its homogenising and othering nature. We instead use the term Global Majority to recognise Black and Brown people as the majority population of the world (Riaz *et al.*, 2014; DaCosta *et al.*, 2021). Most of the students in our degree programmes identify as members of former British colonies, e.g.: Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, Uganda, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, though at undergraduate level, they are home students, with British or European passports. Public health is a highly political discipline (Singer *et al.*, 2019), where inequalities are most responsible for disparities in health outcomes (The Kings Fund, 2020; Marmot *et al.*, 2020). Being from widening participation and ethnically diverse backgrounds, our students are more likely to encounter health inequalities in their daily lives. Therefore, what we teach and reflect on together is not just theory, but also explanation for their life experiences. Our article emerges from critical reflection about teaching students for empowerment. As Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 192) affirm, 'oppressed people need education in order to become critically aware [so that they can analyse and oppose] their own subordination'. This mandate, together with regular discussions and reflections on how to decolonise teaching, curricula and assessment to be reflective of our students, is what drives us to transform our practice and offer this framework for others to do the same.

Anthropology has not only made significant contributions to the field of public health, but also it has been argued that 'the lack of routine and systematic use of anthropological theory and methods has been detrimental to the field of public health' (Hahn & Inhorn, 2009). Anthropology has informed clinical practice in health since the 1940s, with ethnographers helping care providers understand how health behaviours vary by and within cultures (McElroy, 1996, cited in Campbell, 2011), exemplified by Kleinman's 'Explanatory Model' framework (1978). More recently, anthropological health theory aims to address questions about 'what determines health and illness [and] how and why societies vary in their health care systems, illness beliefs and illness experiences' (Singer *et al.*, 2019, p. 8). A key goal of public health is to improve health, but many students of public health have not yet considered what health means to the communities they aim to serve or questioned the assumptions

behind the public health research they are assigned to read. Bourgois (2002, p. 259) argues that while public health practitioners such as epidemiologists receive training in quantitative methods they often lack education on 'how social power relations propagate illness in identifiable patterns across vulnerable populations', which social and medical anthropology can offer. Public health students need to be taught anthropologically and to use the style of critical engagement that underpins anthropology – taking into account cultural, political, and economic contexts – to more effectively interpret data. To lack the critical engagement that underpins anthropology risks ineffective public health practice that maintains oppressive hierarchies of power or widens health inequalities.

We have each taught or currently teach anthropology; we also aim to teach anthropologically. As a comparative study of people and their social and cultural worlds (EASA, 2015), anthropology's fundamental practice is situated around 'engaging in a dialogue between the self and the other' (Coleman & Simpson, 2004 cited in Djohari, 2011, p. 21). This is done practically, through specific methods, and theoretically, via critical analysis. This dialogue asks that we step outside of our own cultural and theoretical assumptions toward understanding a diversity of historical, cultural and experiential phenomena (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p. 88, 92) and granting these 'the same significance [we] recognise in [our] own' (Benedict, 2005 [1934], p. 37). To teach anthropologically means to engage in dialogue with our students and facilitate them to speak for themselves as unique individuals with 'multiple' (Zuñiga *et al.*, 2007, p. 10), 'complicated, internally diverse or contradictory' (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 77) identities and alliances. This is not just about giving students a voice, but also about embracing the possibility of change in our selves and our practices as teachers. The comparative aspect of anthropology often lies between our selves, beliefs and ways of life (Wagner, 1981) and those with whom we engage. Therefore, through an intention to teach anthropologically, we can reflect on the failings of our higher education (HE) systems, our roles in these failings and undertake practical changes that validate our students' histories, cultures and experiences within it.

We propose an ecological approach as a tool for colleagues to utilise in unpacking their own identities, their relationships with students, their curriculum and approaches in the classroom, as well as their wider work within their university outside the classroom. This is to move beyond cursory enactments of 'diversity' toward creating an anti-racist and pro-belonging epistemological pedagogy. Colleagues can use the model alone or with students and other colleagues to map their current strengths as well as to identify areas for future opportunities and collaborations.

### **Privilege, Positions and Problems**

White people experience white privilege through greater access to power and resources than their Global Majority counterparts (McIntosh, 1988) and many Global Majority students experience both microaggressions and overt racism in UK HE (Gillborn, 2005; Arday & Mirza, 2018). While this is not to say all white people living in Britain enjoy access to HE, as many face oppressions such as classism, sexism and ableism, it is to acknowledge that once in HE, many white people are facilitated by white privilege and white supremacy (hooks, 1989, pp. 112-119) toward greater academic success. This is borne out statistically. Among Global Majority students there is a long-recorded university awards gap<sup>i</sup>, which means universities are awarding white students higher class degrees than their equally qualified Global Majority counterparts even when class and parental education are taken into account (Advance HE, 2019b). This is often referred to as the 'BAME attainment gap', which for the past several decades has reinforced the deficit model of Global Majority students (Morgan, 2020). The deficit model does not critique the 'multiple, intersecting factors' such as 'unconscious and implicit bias, stereotype threat<sup>ii</sup> and lack of expectation held by staff for students' (Wilson, 2017, p. 117) but blames the students, who are 'seen as substandard in their socialization practices, language practices, and orientation toward academic achievement' (Gonzalez, 2004, p. 20).

Decades of feel-good diversity activities such as Black History Month or tick box unconscious bias training for staff do not meaningfully redress intersecting power imbalances (Ahmed, 2012; 2017) and often fail to name racism or colonialism. These slick 'shams' (Mirza, 2018, p. 20) of diversity lead to a sense that universities are progressive and diverse spaces for students, when in fact among UK degree entrants, continuation rates are 91.3% for white students compared to 82.8% for Black students (Advance HE, 2019b, p. 110). And for those students who do continue, 80.9% of white students are awarded first class or 2.1 degrees compared to 56.3% of Black students – an awarding gap of 24.6% (Advance HE, 2019b, p. 110). Nationwide 0.6% of all professors and 3.1% of heads of HE institutions are Black (Advance HE, 2019a, p. 59). Although there is burgeoning recognition within disciplines (i.e.: RHS, 2018) work remains to be done across HE to reorientate staff practices, management ethos and guiding epistemologies away from whiteness.

Anthropology does diversity as a core epistemological aspect of the discipline – through ethnographic practices and culturally relativist approaches with people often unlike our selves. Anthropology emphasises the ‘underlying social relations and the informal workings of structures, networks, and interactions that produce and reproduce inequality’ (Mullings, 2005). Anthropology can also help us move beyond merely telling students that yes, race is a social construct, and crucially, can assist them in seeing how structural racism permeates the fabric of the world around them. Anthropology does have a complex relationship with racism, previously fuelling ‘scientific racism’ that upheld racialised hierarchies, which justified the horrors of colonialism and eugenics (Mullings, 2005). But anthropology also holds significant anti-racist and social justice traditions (ABA, 2020; Benedict, 2005 [1934], Boas, 1940; Davis, 1941; Farmer, 1999; Harrison, 1987; Hurston, 1935; Drake & Cayton, 1962 [1945]; Scheper-Hughes, 1990; Street, 1987), and affords us useful dialogic and self-reflective tools in the classroom to help decolonise and disrupt the current white supremacist system. By using these tools in our public health modules, to be discussed below, we question whose truth we are learning, problematize positivist state and international NGO definitions of ‘health’ and teach our students to reflect on their assumptions that may perpetuate rather than overcome ‘hegemonic’ and ‘damaging discourses’ (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.11), for example, around sexism and homophobia. We use ethnographic texts that centre a multiplicity of counter-hegemonic voices in the classroom and enable students to engage meaningfully with varied local groups and communities using ethnographic techniques.

## **Methodology**

We frame this paper within an ecological paradigm. Drawing on the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century structural anthropologists, LeCompte and Schensul (2010; 2016) offer that the paradigm highlights ‘systems of mutually reinforcing and sustaining components’ (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 72). They suggest that ecological research promotes adaptation over conflict to understand the persistence of social systems as well as how these can change. LeCompte and Schensul (2016, p. 138, 142-3) further offer that models can assist us in understanding complex systems by enabling individuals to think about the causes of a given situation and where best to intervene. By adopting such an approach, we are neither looking to compartmentalise problems nor to suggest we have created a definitive account. We are suggesting that using the model can highlight where particular aspects of problems lay and create the possibilities for change in those areas.

Working with the ecological metaphor, we start with our selves to consider our praxis, as reflection and action for change (Freire, 1996, p. 33). Moving through the levels, we consider lecturer relationships with students, approaches to teaching, engagements with students and staff outside formal learning, and initiatives in the higher structures of the university (see Figure 1). We centre educators because they can either ‘work in ways that legitimize and reinforce the status quo or in ways that liberate and transform the possibilities people see in their lives’ (Brookfield 1995, p. 207). To this end, student voices<sup>iii</sup> are included across different levels to articulate their experiences of these possibilities. In elaborating the model, we aim to reveal that each field, while discrete, is ‘dynamically interacting’ (Lee, 2017, p. 262) with other fields, showing that change is feasible, especially when beginning with our selves.

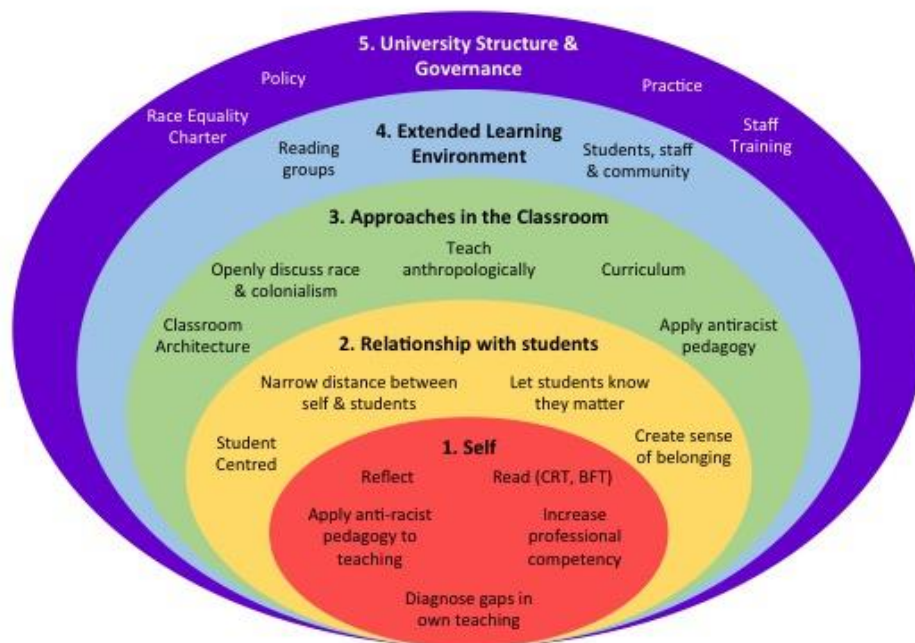


Figure 1

### Self (Level 1)

At the centre of the model is the self. Self-reflection is a critical starting point as white academics working with students who are predominately racialised as Black and Brown. Without critical reflection working to unpack white fragility<sup>iv</sup> (DiAngelo, 2011), white educators risk reproducing these power imbalances in the classroom and being complicit within a culture of white supremacy in post-colonial Britain. Taking an ecological approach, we begin by interrogating our own beliefs. From this perspective, initial desires to ‘make a difference’ and champion ‘diversity’ can be interpreted instead as salvation ideologies that perpetuate power imbalances. Upholding deficit model thinking, which blames ‘isolated and individual’ (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1242) students for their outcomes, blinds us to recognising that success or failure in HE is ‘social and systemic’ (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1242) and reproduces inequities for Global Majority students (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). As white lecturers in one of the UK’s ‘most diverse universities’ we have come to understand that an anti-racist practice must be a core component of our professional competence. The work does not end.

The first step in the approach, then, is to identify gaps in your knowledge and understanding and actively seek to re-educate yourself. For anyone serious about changing their teaching practices reading a range of Critical Race Theory – Bell (2008), Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 1996), Delgado and Stefancic (2018), and Gillborn (2006) – Black Feminist theorists – Ahmed (2012, 2017), Davis (1990), Collins (1999), hooks (1989), Lorde (1977), and Sharpe (2016) – and critical pedagogy – Alexander (2008), Cowden and Singh (2015), Freire (1996), hooks (1994), Singh (2011), and Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) – is essential. These will assist you in engaging in ‘ongoing critique of the West’s most confident, characteristic discourses’ (Clifford, 1986, p. 10) about its ‘universal hegemony’ (Hesse & Hooker, 2017, p. 445) over other knowledge bases. In countering western histories of erasure, Tuhiwai-Smith states that ‘*coming to know the past* [is] part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation’ (2012, p. 36, italics original). Coming to know our collective pasts of whiteness, in examining our selves and seeking beyond self-affirming rhetoric, we move into spaces of discomfort and become open to alternative interpretations. Part of the process has been engaging in ‘difficult conversations’ with those harmed by white privilege (Zuniga *et al.*, 2007), taking this out of an abstract realm and into a personal encounter. As hooks (1994, p. 61) advocates, linking everyday, personal experiences to ‘processes of self-recovery [and] self-realization’ enables practice and theory to converge and new understandings about our selves and our role in upholding anti-racist practices and epistemologies to emerge.

## **Our Relationship with Students (Level 2)**

The next level in our model attempts to articulate the type of relationships we try to foster as co-creators of the classroom experience (hooks, 1994). Following Freire (1996, pp. 74-75), we position ourselves as ‘teacher-students’ in dialogue with ‘student-teachers’ with the view that in this environment we each learn from one another. Within the anthropological canon, this can be understood as ‘cultural poetics’, ‘an interplay of voices’ and ‘of positioned utterances’ (Clifford, 1986, p.11), where we do not ‘compartmentalis[e] our Selves’ (Djohari 2011, p 26) as separate from our students, but actively engage with them.

This dialogic engagement begins at the outset of each module. For example, Anna, who leads on an Anthropology of Health module, asks each student to introduce themselves on the first day of class. In a classroom of 100 students this takes up most of the class time, yet it feels invaluable to welcome each voice and identity into the space. In one of these introduction sessions, students named 28 nations with which they identified. Many students volunteered other important cultural identities such as language, ethnic group, parenting status and religion. Students fed back that those introductions were often the first time a teacher asked them their names or where they are from – a small gesture but one that signifies each student is important and is an active contributor to the classroom experience rather than a passive receiver of information. Teachers also introduce themselves and share personal information that mirrors what students have shared, for example being immigrants to the UK and parents. In addition to aiming to break down the teacher–student hierarchies, it is also important to call attention to racialised power hierarchies that exist in HE. Although not always comfortable, Anna also names her whiteness and opens a dialogue on racialisation, privilege and racism, to be continued throughout the module. Lee notes that to be human is to be vulnerable, but these vulnerabilities are differentiated by ‘social positionings, particularly with regard to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and constructions of ability’ (Lee, 2017, p. 262). The intention is that by breaking the silence on race and privilege, more open dialogue throughout the module can take place. It also means demonstrating to our small minority of white students that reflecting on their whiteness is important. Calling out these privileges does not erase them, but it creates the opportunity for us to unpack our experiences and connect them to wider dynamics in the public health sector and UK society.

In addition, early on in the module, Anna and her students engage in a value creating exercise to collectively determine our expectations of each other through dialogue, capturing our aims and values to refer to later, especially if conflict arises and we need to remember. Cohorts vary in their desires but frequently ask to be respected, listened to and supported. They expect to treat each other with respect even when they disagree. Anna encourages students to be open and curious with each other, themselves, and the module. Similar to entering the field, where researchers learn to see through their participants’ eyes and learn about what matters to them (Schensul & LeCompte, 2016, p. 45), teaching anthropologically involves a rebalance of the hierarchies and power structure of the classroom.

This ‘interplay of voices’ (Clifford, 1986, p. 11) is not confined to introductory sessions, but continues throughout the delivery of each module. When undertaking a mid-module review focus-group with undergraduate students, Julie’s students reflected on how they experienced both non-discursive and discursive teaching. One student mimicked what they understood their non-discursive lecturers might be thinking while teaching:

Don’t interrupt me. Don’t question me! Sit there and listen, because I am the lecturer. I know what I am talking about, so don’t say anything (2020).

Several students responded, one stating that they would be ‘grilled’ if they asked a question, while another offered that ‘there’s not enough time to have an input,’ because the lecturer will fill the class with their agenda, leaving no time for any interaction or input from students. A further student summarized, saying, ‘you can’t approach them, you can’t ask questions... Everybody just swallows everything inside’.

There are many challenges to fostering dialogue in the classroom, including navigating high staff-student ratios; working in spaces designed for didactic learning, such as tiered lecture theatres; or in unfamiliar environments, such as online learning platforms; and a fear that engaging in dialogue will prevent necessary content from being delivered. Overcoming these challenges can be achieved, however, through a shift in practice and intention. Some options include creating small student discussion groups, whether in-person or online; giving students the chance to share amongst themselves, balanced with teachers dropping in to listen and provoking through

questioning; hosting class debates; developing group tasks; and ensuring there is time for students' individual or collective feedback. These suggestions can be situated within pedagogical theory on creating discursive classroom spaces, in which five tenets – of being collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful (Alexander 2008, p.113) – offer a framework through which lecturers and students can better position and place discursive learning.

Classes that facilitate students being able to ask questions, talk to one another, and learn from one another, open up the learning space to shift away from information transmission to meaning making (Miller 2003) and concept formation (Kozulin *et al.*, 2003) as a sociocultural process. In Julie's mid-module review, when commenting on discursive learning, students offered a variety of positive responses. One student noted that they felt most engaged when the topic under discussion resonated with their life experiences, 'because I actually have an understanding of what you were talking about.' The student who felt that they had to swallow their ideas and questions, shared that in dialogic learning, 'we can express our feelings, how we felt [about] a question, what we are doing [and what] your questions [are doing] to move us forward.' While personal experiences and feelings may seem out of place in academia, it is through personal responses to ideas, and how these sit within their current understandings, that enable new formulations to take place. Another student summarises what dialogic learning brings, saying:

Not everyone sees things from the same perspective. So the fact that, especially here, we can discuss different ways to look at something or approach something, it helps all of us get to the same place (2020).

Creating a dialogic classroom means valuing each student's uniqueness of perspective and experience. Brookfield (2017, p. 15) tells us that students 'come to understand that authentic collaborations will happen only if teachers spend considerable time earning students' trust by acting democratically, fairly and respectfully toward them.' Even if we push students to think of themselves as co-creators or collaborators in the classroom with more shared power, it will not work if we do not authentically value each student (hooks, 1994) and foster a strong sense of caring – or even love – between us. What does love mean in the HE context? 'Love in this context means willing the good of another, and offering active care for the whole person' (Brooks, 2019). Love or deep caring for students is something that takes a certain amount of vulnerability, openness, and time – three things that can be difficult to do while working within the current pressurised system of HE institutions in the UK. Love is also not the same thing as coddling students; lowering expectations or protecting students from growth are forms of racism (Cole, 2019; Wilson, 2017). Miller (2003, pp.296, 312) notes that teachers' deep respect for learners as human beings with burgeoning confidence and abilities is significant in enabling students to be able to learn effectively. It is important to strive to deeply understand and listen to students, to create opportunities for dialogue and connection, and to reinforce a shared sense of purpose and excitement.

### **Our Approach to Teaching / Classroom / Curriculum (Level 3)**

In this level, we consider the structural changes we are working towards in designing our modules, such as using critical and anti-racist pedagogical methods (hooks, 1994; Cowden & Singh, 2015), culturally sustaining assessment (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017) with careful attention to why and how we award marks to students, and a more diverse and critical curricula. We also consider the architecture of power, evidenced in the layout of the classroom. The overall aim is to not only close award gaps between our white and Global Majority students, but also to narrow the distance between students and teachers and see graduates of all backgrounds empowered to work towards dismantling unjust systems after completing their degrees.

One approach we use is to speak with students about the pedagogical methods that underpin our teaching and why. Anna and her final year BSc students sat in a reading circle and read aloud from *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks, 1994), reflecting together on the pedagogical approach by US feminist professor and author bell hooks, who powerfully calls for 'education as the practice of freedom [instead of] education that merely strives to reinforce domination' (hooks, 1994). Students shared that they better understood why actively participating and shaping their own learning journey is more effective than passively listening to didactic lectures – a noticeable shift from previous complaints about a lack of PowerPoint slides. Many students appreciate sitting in a circle or in small groups, which redresses some of the power imbalances between teacher and student, and encourages both visibility and a sense of belonging.

In thinking about what these types of learning experiences enable, one student reflects that:

It falls in line with what you are discussing, which is about social determinants... Because being there, because being around people, interacting and putting energy, positive energy from each other as we work... is very important for our own wellbeing as well (2020).

Responding to students' excitement of taking more control over their learning, Anna discussed with students what they would prefer for a final summative assessment, which led to replacing a timed exam in favour of creative presentations. Following a Critical Race Theory approach to teaching (hooks, 1994), students were able to pair their lived experiences and authoritative knowledge (Jordan, 1993 [1978]) with the skills and theories assessed. These intimate, personal and political presentations frequently leave both students and teacher welling up with emotion – they are academically rigorous yet transformative for all in the room.

Public Health England expects effective public health practitioners to be able to 'identify data needs and obtain, verify and organise that data' as well as 'critique published and unpublished research, synthesise the evidence and draw appropriate conclusions' (PHE, 2016). Through culturally sustaining assessments (Paris & Alim, 2017), students meet the public health practitioner requirements while also validating their experiences of health within theoretical explanations. From an academic skills perspective, the reading circles and small group activities scaffolded their oral presentation skills, leading to confident and creative presentations. Students reflect that not only does this approach lead to better understanding of theories and concepts and higher marks, but also a stronger sense of self and cultural pride. Some students realised after nearly three years studying together they shared powerful life experiences, such as undergoing female circumcision as children, experiencing HIV stigma, or surviving domestic violence. There is a feeling of liberation and bonding through sharing these stories, rather than continuing to hold them in silence.

Recently more attention has been paid to decolonising the curriculum, even with popular media recognising its importance (Turner, 2019). We note that it is important to take into account our community of learners, so that we can develop curricula in which Global Majority researchers and research agendas feature strongly. This affirms non-western scholarship and works toward challenging the status quo on western arbitration of knowledge (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, pp. 66-68) and topics of importance. This shift also offers academic mentors, as scholars, upon whom students can model their work and aspirations and from whom students can learn how to navigate their way forward in HE. After listening to the personal account of a Black female professor's journey through academia, one undergraduate student commented that, 'it was inspiring reading material with [this academic] and hearing first-hand her experiences' (personal communication, 2018); the student elaborated that the encounter encouraged her to persevere and maintain belief in herself and her aspirations.

Students' life experiences, while not homogenous or representing entire groups, illuminate structural power imbalances of intersecting oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism and colonialism. As Freire (1996) and other critical pedagogues argue, 'oppression is best apprehended from the experiences or vantage point of the oppressed' (Leonardo, 2004). In short, our students become powerful student-teachers (Freire, 1996, p. 74) when their unique voices, ways of knowing and experiences are shared and valued.

#### **Connecting with Staff and Students Outside the Classroom (Level 4)**

Moving up a further level, we consider transformative work that takes place outside the classroom, but within the university space. In response to students' reluctance to engage in critique in their academic writing, Julie pioneered the *Many Voices Reading Group (MV)* to facilitate engagement with academic mentors from whom students may wish to gain inspiration. This extracurricular group has met biweekly throughout term time since 2016. It has developed much since its first iteration, including garnering interest from a widening circle of students, academic and non-academic staff and people from the local community (Botticello, 2020). To overcome the exclusions perpetuated by white structures of power – as knowledge and process – underpinning HE, a new approach, one based on dialogue and equitable sharing, was needed. The readings for *MV* are in large part taken from autobiographical/political essays and poetry; we have read Ta Nehisi Coates (2015), Angela Davis (2003), Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017), Safia Elhillo (2017), Roxane Gay (2017), Ken Saro Wiwa (2005), Bryan Stevenson (2014), Hibo Wardere (2016), Benjamin Zephaniah (n.d.), among many others. The readings and ensuing discussions reveal that far from being isolated instances, the autobiographic example helps connect personal experiences with wider 'historical and social processes' (Sharpe, 2016, p. 8). By emplacing these personal narratives within structures of power and disempowerment, *MV* group participants come to realise that their life



situations are the result of the structures perpetuating white supremacy (hooks, 1989) and not the results of their purported merits or deficiencies.

Various colleagues suggested readings they knew and the *MV* curriculum was thus devised and continues to develop through this democratic, participant-led process. In keeping with the equitable positioning of the group, no one needs to read in advance of coming. The readings are printed and made available in each session, and we all sit together, in a circle, and begin to read aloud, embodying the words of the author as we speak them with our individual voices. The content is often challenging and can trigger different responses from the students, depending on their personal experiences. When reading one chapter from Roxane Gay's *Hunger* (2017), in which she shares her struggle with the shame of having been raped as an adolescent and found safety in food and a larger body, one student revealed that:

Reading it was hard due to its content. Though it is beautifully written and captivating, it was very brave of the writer to be so open. We all have a relationship with food both positive and negative at times. I could relate with the food side of it, which was hard to read (2018).

Yet as the student relates, speaking others' words can create a situation of recognition, as in that moment, we connect to the person whose life experience we voice and potentially find something of this within our selves. When shared collectively, with support before, during and after, as needed, engaging with relevant though difficult topics collectively enables different forms of discovery, through dialogue with oneself, with the author and with others in the room. This was not always easy due to the heterogeneity of students and staff assembled, who are coming from different social positions, racialisations, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, abilities and experiences of cultural practices. Disagreement will often arise. In reflecting on this aspect, the above student expresses her appreciation for the validity *MV* engenders:

It teaches us that we all have a voice... It is [an] opportunity to learn from each other and [whether] in agreement or disagreement [with] the reading, [we can] still be respectful of everyone and listen to each other despite our differences (2018).

Wilson (2017, p. 118) reveals that students have shared with her how *MV* facilitates student learning in their core curriculum, because it engages in 'key concepts they can identify with'. She also notes that because the content speaks to and excites the students, they 'carry on discussing social justice issues long after the sessions finish' (2017, p. 118). *MV* strengthens alternative histories and experiences and offers a supportive space to give voice to those who have been oppressed, whether as authors in the texts or participants in the room. As a result, we have seen how students have grown in confidence in the classroom through cultivating a sense of belonging by being seen, heard and validated in *MV*.

### **Anti-racist Pedagogy Training and the Equity Collective (Level 5)**

At the highest level of our model, this section considers work with colleagues at the level of policy and practice. For several years, many academics have been involved in working to reduce the 'attainment gap'. Julie was part of The Race Equality Charter Mark self-assessment team, led by Professor Marcia Wilson, with whom the team worked closely. The team conducted institutional research on the 'representation, progression, and success of minority ethnic staff and students' (Advance HE, 2020) at our university. In 2019, it was awarded a bronze Race Equality Charter Mark. In the wake of this award, there has been an increased awareness of anti-racism at our university. An Office for Institutional Equity, which sits at director level, was created to address inequalities within the institution by implementing sustainable cultural changes at the policy level. Goals of the office include ensuring anti-racist teaching practice and awarding gap reductions are tied to staff annual Professional Development Reports (PDRs). As a precursor to this policy, colleagues interested in anti-racist and decolonial practice in HE have come to form the Equity Collective (EC). There are several boards and committees that serve similar purposes around equality and diversity but the EC is specifically looking at learning and teaching theory and practice across the institution.

With members of the EC, Anna has developed and delivered anti-racist pedagogy training to teaching staff across the University. What makes this training unique compared to typical diversity training is that it aims to take colleagues on a developmental learning journey. It also places emphasis on participation and reflection, as opposed to tick box exercises such as online unconscious bias training, which tend to be didactic and solo in nature. In the first of three half-day workshops, colleagues facilitate discussions and reflections on racial literacy (Jones, 2019) and white supremacy in HE (Cole, 2019). We closely examine the university-awarding gap and



unpack long held views arising from a deficit model approach to teaching widening participation students (Morgan, 2020). Anna facilitates a *MV* style-reading circle where colleagues take turns reading aloud from the 2018 Race Equality Charter survey responses of our staff and students – their voices exposing race-related bullying on campus, white-washed curricula, ambivalence about diversity from some non-ethnic minority staff and students, as well as some bright spots in inclusive practice. In the second session, anti-racist pedagogy and decolonizing education are more deeply explored, using teachings from Critical Race Theory, anti-racist teaching and critical pedagogues. Finally, several weeks after reflection and practice, the third session creates a space for dialogue and sharing about what has and has not worked and how to continue the work going forward. Many staff have shunned these workshops, not wishing to delve into the unsettling work of unpacking privilege and understanding the effects of racism embedded in approaches to teaching, curricula and assessments. However, for those who have attended, these workshops have been extremely valuable for engaging in uncomfortable conversations about race and power, increasing self-reflexivity among participants, and making positive structural changes towards a more inclusive or pro-belonging university for Global Majority students and staff.

## **Moving Forward Toward Future Possibilities and Solutions**

Throughout this article, we have elaborated on a model that proposes change to begin with us and from that position, articulates potential influences across different levels of practice within the university. Through those changes, whether already established or still works in progress, we can begin shifting the sedimented foundations of inequity and exclusion within anthropology and across HE more generally. In one of her many books dedicated to raising consciousness in academia, bell hooks (1989, p. 25) states that,

True politicization – coming to critical consciousness – is a difficult, trying process, one that demands that we give up set ways of thinking and being, that we shift our paradigms, that we open our selves to the unknown, the unfamiliar [...] If we do not change our consciousness, we cannot change our actions or demand change from others.

Her message resonates with the framework we have adopted. In moving forward, we must continue to reflect on what we need to change in our selves, facilitate for our colleagues, in curricula and in wider structures in the university so that students are supported in an environment that values their experiences, skills, and knowledge bases and helps them to achieve their potential. A pivotal means for undertaking this change is dialogue (Friere, 1996; hooks, 1989; Spivak, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Having uncomfortable conversations leading to uncomfortable realisations causes us to question whether success is the result of privilege or merit, bias or worth, system or individual, and how we can work to ‘dismantle’ (Lorde, 1997) this system and replace it with one that encourages, supports, promotes and recognises all participants.

As this paper has shown, anti-racist teaching is not a process one can embark upon alone. Indeed, the model is predicated on dynamic interactions (Lee, 2017) occurring between different levels – and the people with roles to play in any of the levels – to effect change. In this collaborative paper, we have suggested one such mechanism that could facilitate the transformation of consciousness needed to transform the structures they uphold (hooks, 1989). We advocate that starting with the self can lead to new solidarities and strengths from which to work with others toward institutional change. To eradicate white privilege will require much effort across every level of the university to unmask the racism, white supremacy, and the intersections of discrimination and disadvantage underpinning the system, toward creating a physical and conceptual space where all can achieve recognition (Opara, 2017) and belonging. Moving forward, we look to consolidate the engagements we have begun, taking these beyond the walls of the university, working with local groups and schools, toward creating new realms of possibility on what diversity, inclusion and belonging can be.

## **Notes**

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<sup>i</sup> At our institution, some colleagues argue we abandon the term ‘attainment gap’ and instead refer to the ‘university awarding gap’ highlighting structural and institutional barriers to progress over personal or individual barriers (Morgan, 2020).

<sup>ii</sup> According to Steele, stereotype threat is ‘the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype’ (2011, p. 276-7).

<sup>iii</sup> This article draws on student centred research undertaken in 2017/2018 and in 2020/2021. Ethical approval was granted for each by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), under the application numbers UREC 1718-08 and ETH 1920-0236, respectively.

<sup>iv</sup> 'White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation' (DiAngelo, 2011, pp. 54).

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