

Race matters: Towards an anti-racist praxis in higher education

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Foreword

Brazilian teacher, writer and activist Paulo Freire urged educators to “*unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be*”. The idea for this special issue of IMPact was conceived as a response to the increasing awareness of racial inequalities in higher education, and an increasing frustration at the apparent lack of progress. We sought to give a voice to those working at the front-line with staff and students, sharing practical, research-informed perspectives.

We open this special issue with an insider view of the Race Equality Charter (REC) application process. Drawing attention to both its transformative potential and the risks of enacting the REC in ways which entrench existing patterns of inequality, Dr Pathik Pathak presents an approach which seeks to address some recent criticisms of REC through a prefigurative systems change approach. Next Pete Crowson documents a development programme which aims to equip staff at his institution with the tools to address racial inequality and to embed anti-racist values in their practice. Pete shares this journey from conception to delivery, offering a detailed and reflective account of the project. Continuing the focus on staff development, sociologist John Bird deconstructs the fundamentals of unconscious bias training, urging the sector to reconsider its reliance on these training programmes and instead focus on the structural roots of exclusion driving racial inequality in higher education.

Activities to decolonise the curriculum have gained increasing attention recently. Oonagh Monaghan and Dr Hope Williard provide their own personal reflections and journey towards critical librarianship, emphasising the role of library staff and the power of student collaborations to drive the process of decolonisation from the heart of the institution. Finally we end this special issue with a co-produced paper from staff and undergraduate student researchers. Dr Xiaotong Zhu and colleagues report on the results of a student-led project which sought to understand one possible contributor to the noted differential degree outcomes between White and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students by considering the role of transitional challenges in the early months of degree studies.

We hope that this issue of IMPact will inspire conversations, reflections, and, most importantly, actions. Sincere thanks are due to all of the contributors and to the editorial team whose commitment, patience and hard work made this publication possible.