

RADICAL FUTURES TOOLKIT SERIES

Decolonised Education

SHADO MAG X NO MORE EXCLUSIONS X ADVOCACY ACADEMY X
DECOLONISING MY CLASSROOM X EARTHLY EDUCATION

Introduction

EDUCATION HAS NEVER BEEN NEUTRAL

In recent years, discussion about the global impact of colonisation has become more mainstream. Across the world, students, staff, and parents are confronting how colonial systems continue to shape today's classrooms, policies, and curriculums.

The problem is rooted in the fact that many of our educational institutions were built by empire, for empire. They have long been shaped by and contributed to white supremacy, cultural erasure, and hierarchical knowledge production.

The consequences?

- Curriculums that centre Eurocentric narratives and erase others.
- School policies that criminalise and marginalise.
- Generations of young people being raised to be compliant with the status quo.

Inspired by *Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), we approach education and schools through a decolonial lens, aiming not just at reforms but "empowering the oppressed to reclaim their humanity and achieve liberation."

DID YOU KNOW?

Friere's work was banned in several countries, including Brazil, parts of the United States, and apartheid South Africa. This is because it promoted critical consciousness and challenged systemic oppression.

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What is a 'decolonised' education?

TO DECOLONISE EDUCATION MEANS:

- *Disrupting Eurocentric knowledge production.*
- *Confronting power structures in and beyond the classroom.*
- *Constructing education systems that are just, equitable, and liberatory.*

“Decolonising the curriculum is the process of recognising, challenging and dismantling the white-western male-elite domination of knowledge taught in the academy”

**Decolonising curriculum in education: continuing
proclamations and provocations**

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What does it actually mean to decolonise education?

WHAT IT'S NOT

- ✗ A one-off diversity module.
- ✗ Adding Black or non-Western authors to 'supplementary' reading lists.

WHAT IT IS

- ✓ Rethinking how we define, share and validate knowledge.
- ✓ Dismantling classroom hierarchies.
- ✓ Changing who gets heard and how.

IT'S ABOUT

- ⦿ Re-evaluating and diversifying curriculums.
- ⦿ Revolutionising pedagogy and assessment.
- ⦿ Redistributing power between students and teachers.
- ⦿ Continuous commitment and collaboration between students, staff, families and communities.
- ⦿ Grounding education in justice, liberation and care.

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How did we get here?

TRACING THE GENEALOGY OF THE DECOLONISING
EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN THE UK & BEYOND

1930s:

The **Négritude movement** emerges - led by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Damas, African diaspora students respond to encounters with racism in French educational institutions

1960s-70s:

Inspired by the **Black Power movement**, African-American students stage protests and occupy campus buildings, demanding reforms to racist policies in universities.

1968-70s:

The **Black Consciousness Movement & SASO (South African Students' Organisation)** push against apartheid education and systemic racial oppression in South Africa.

1970s-1980s:

The **Black Parents Movement & Black Supplementary Schools** emerge in the UK, grassroots efforts aimed at providing culturally affirming education to Black children.

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How did we get here?

2015:

Rhodes Must Fall campaign begins at the University of Cape Town, calling for the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue - sparks a global movement to decolonise universities.

University College London's 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' campaign challenges lack of diversity in UK university curricula .

2019:

The Black Curriculum launches in the UK to challenge the exclusion of Black British history from the national curriculum and promotes an accurate, inclusive account of history.

2020:

The resurgence of the **Black Lives Matter** movement globally brings renewed calls for decolonising education and surge in anti-racist education work, sparking widespread curriculum reviews and activist campaigns.

Please share any other important moments or milestones in the history of the decolonising education movement in the comments.

2024-onwards:

Columbia University Gaza Solidarity Encampment launches, demanding the university divest from Israel. Leads to proliferation of Palestine solidarity encampments at over 180 universities around the world.

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What can decolonised education look like in practice?

A decolonised approach challenges both the historical foundations and ongoing impact of colonialism in education. It also encourages us to address broader systemic inequalities, and reframe and challenge our ideas of knowledge production as a whole.

CURRICULUMS:

- Critically evaluate materials for bias, erasure and colonial framing.
- Include diverse, community-rooted knowledge (e.g. Advocacy Academy's 'Voices' Project).

PEDAGOGY:

- Move beyond lectures to participatory, relational and culturally relevant teaching.
- Centre Indigenous and non-Western knowledge production, including oral histories, storytelling, community archives.

ASSESSMENT:

- Go beyond exams to include multiple ways of knowing and learning styles.
- Redesign tools to reflect justice, not just 'attainment'.

POWER:

- Build collaborative lesson plans.
- Flatten teacher-student hierarchies.
- Create school decision-making structures and processes that are truly democratic, not just performatively 'inclusive'.

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Lost Lessons: Advocacy Academy is good!

Lost Lessons is a campaign by the Advocacy Academy, calling for a curriculum that represents the UK's diverse population. They wish to ensure the Department of Education introduces national curriculum reform with statutory content across all subjects to supply young people with the tools to be well informed adults who are able to thrive in modern day multicultural Britain.

This is timely: In 2025, there is a state Curriculum and Assessment Review – an opportunity that is only offered every 20 years.

Lost Lessons also aims to equip teachers with the skills needed to promote discussion around colonialism, race and belonging in the classroom.

So far, members of Lost Lessons have amplified the campaign during meetings with MPS, at the annual Festival of Education, at a Parliamentary conference, and even in a Christmas card to the Secretary of State for Education.

They're not alone in their mission: aligned organisations, such as Mission 44, are

working for a similar cause, and 80% of secondary school teachers want to teach more diverse, enriching texts for GCSE English.

The Lost Lessons Campaign is passionate about students becoming active members of their community in order to strengthen unity across the country. They are calling for the introduction of a module (crafted by youth/community experts) that teaches students how to engage with their local area, giving them the tools to take on leadership roles on issues that they care deeply about.

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WHAT WE CAN DO:

In Conversation with young people

(DECOLONISING MY CLASSROOM)

A decolonised education cannot exist in a conservative, oppressive and essentially culturally imperialist system. But here's what we can do in raising and teaching young people, whilst we work towards the end of empire.

Children are able to understand incredibly complex concepts if we give them time, encouragement, guidance and consistency.

Encourage curiosity about people, places and communities as frequently as possible. As a responsible adult, talk about the history and

development of everything – food, music, buildings, clothing, religions. **EVERYTHING!**

Encourage critical questions:

Who benefits? Why is it like this?
What's missing?

NOTE
The next four slides focus on practical approaches and interventions designed specifically for supporting young people in schools

Freire poses two models of education: the 'banking' model and the 'problem posing' model. He critiques the 'banking' model of education - where students are passive recipients of information from teachers. Instead, he champions the 'problem-posing' model - where learners are encouraged to question processes and facts, and interrogate the context and co-construct knowledge

When schools don't teach this way, communities must step in. And if you don't know the answer, remember this:

- 1 It happens to teachers every day
- 2 Be bold enough to say 'I am not sure about that, let's find out together.'

WHAT WE CAN DO:

In Conversation with schools and teachers

(DECOLONISING MY CLASSROOM)

PART 1

If we are committed to a truly revolutionary and liberatory education for all, we must hold school practices, policies and procedures to account.

Akala (2018) states that “*the system, mirroring Britain’s history of empire, often prioritizes producing compliant workers.*”

- Challenge school policies rooted in compliance, not justice (e.g. harsh punishments, racist hair policies)
- Ask for printed copies of policies (safeguarding, behaviour, attendance) - paper trails matter!
- Push for restorative justice to be practiced, not just mentioned.

WHAT WE CAN DO:

In Conversation with schools and teachers

(DECOLONISING MY CLASSROOM)

PART 2

School leaders often buy in standardised curriculum packages (SCPs), which are designed to reduce teacher workload, but the quality of these varies greatly.

Whilst these schemes do save time, **they are often missing nuance** and a view of how people belong to different socio-political classes and their impact on their lived experience.

Teachers are not in a position, through either a lack of time, deprioritisation by school leaders, or a deeply embedded commitment to the banking model of teaching, to question the content that they are teaching and miss opportunities to apply a decolonial lens.

This leads to significant periods of a young person's education where colonial and culturally imperialist narratives are not challenged over time, leaving pupils with a lack of understanding about the complexities of the history and world around them.

Disciplinary knowledge in subjects such as History, Geography, Science, Art and RE end up being taught from a narrow colonial lens, leaving parallel narratives and histories out of the picture.

Marlon Lee Moncrieffe is a leading thinker in this field; he writes about decolonising school curriculums extensively and has written many publications about this over 10 years.

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WHAT CAN WE DO:

Getting our schools in conversation with community

Contact the leader of EDI at the school and make it explicit that they have a collective responsibility to mark diverse occasions (Diwali, Eid, Notting Hill Carnival, Lunar New Year etc.) that are central to the local community's culture and identity.

Ask the school to organise Culture Days where children can dress up in their cultural dress, listen to music/perform dances and share food. This already takes place in many schools and is always seen as a great way to connect with the community.

Invite speakers into the school to speak to groups of students about specific units of study e.g. links to historical events, language exchange or oral histories

NOTE

Schools can be a great support in promoting this work but often this is not a priority. It usually falls on the shoulders of one or two staff members who are committed to equity and social justice and try to affect change as individuals. No single teacher or school can do this work alone.

School Exclusions

WHAT ARE THEY?

School exclusions are a form of **drastic disciplinary action** that remove children from the classroom and, too often, from education altogether...

We understand the term 'exclusion' in its broadest sense, it can be:

- Fixed-term or permanent
- "Internal" and informal (isolation booths, behaviour units - solitary confinement inside schools)
- "Managed moves" (relocation to other schools)
- Off-rolling (disappearing pupils from school rolls through coercion and intimidation)

THE STATS (2023/24):

- **Suspensions are at an all-time high, increasing by 21% and nearing 1 million instances**
- Permanent exclusions are up **16%**, nearing **10,000**. These figures are a stark reminder that school exclusion is not an exception, it is a central feature of the education system.
- Children eligible for **Free School Meals (FSM)** were **four times more likely to be suspended**, and five

times more likely to be permanently excluded than their non-FSM peers.

- Children with **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support** were **22% more likely to be suspended**. This confirms that school exclusions are not legitimate responses to individual behaviour; they are indicators of systemic failures that punish children already subjected to persistent structural oppression, compounding the very inequalities schools should be working to dismantle.
- According to the government's latest figures, **the education sector made their highest ever number of Prevent referrals between April 2023 to March 2024**. This surveillance database, part of the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy, is systematically racist and Islamophobic. Almost 5% of the referrals were children under 10 years old.

The Exclusion to Prison Pipeline

Exclusionary disciplinary practices in schools – such as suspensions and expulsions – have been widely identified as key contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline, a term used to describe the process by which students are pushed out of educational environments and into contact with the criminal justice system.

WHO IS MOST AFFECTED?

- Students of colour
- Students with disabilities
- Students from low-income backgrounds

PRUS (PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS) AND 'ALTERNATIVE PROVISIONS':

- Penalise and isolate children from peers & family
- Reinforce racist, ableist stereotypes
Drastically reduce their opportunities in education & life
- Act as a fast track to prison - diverting money towards punitive carceral measures (costing often 3x more per pupil than schools) & away from early interventions

ETHNIC DISPARITIES (2023/24):

- Gypsy & Roma pupils face the highest rates of suspension (39.1%)
- Travellers of Irish heritage and Black and White Caribbean students shared the second highest rates of permanent exclusion
- The UK government has now removed racial descriptors from data - an attempt not to address disparity, but to obscure it.

EXCLUSION IS NOT A 'FAILURE' OF POLICY, IT IS THE OUTCOME OF AN EDUCATION SYSTEM BUILT ON CONTROL, COMPETITION, AND COMPLIANCE - UNDER THE GUISE OF 'BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT.'

What are the alternatives?

No More Exclusions (NME) campaigns for an end to all forms of school exclusion and segregated learning, contending that such practices are inherently harmful and serve to traumatisate children who are already at a disadvantage due to socio-economic, racial, or disability-related factors.

NME advocates for a transformative approach to discipline that centers inclusion, equity, and the holistic well-being of students.

KEY COMPONENTS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS INCLUDE:

- **Restorative justice**, which provide a structured space for students, educators, and other stakeholders to discuss conflicts, acknowledge harm, and collaboratively develop resolutions;
- **Peer Mediation**, which empowers students to resolve disputes constructively with the support of trained peers;
- **Community Service**, which allows students to repair harm through meaningful contributions to their school or local community.

Moving away from exclusionary disciplinary practices and **toward restorative, inclusive approaches** offers a viable path to **dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline**. By reimagining discipline through a lens of equity and care, schools can become environments that nurture every student.

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CASE STUDY

National Union of Students Divest to Decolonise Campaign Guide

In 2022, the NUS launched a toolkit to help Students' Unions and campaigners push for divestment from university institutions linked to colonialism and imperialism.

WHY DIVEST?

Many UK universities have financial links to companies responsible for colonial violence – from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to the exploitation of Indigenous lands. These ties are reflected in:

- University buildings funded by colonial wealth
- Partnerships and sponsorships supporting colonial interests

Universities don't just fund these industries, they also give them a **social licence** – a way to appear legitimate so they can continue their operations.

EXAMPLES OF COMPLICITY INCLUDE:

- Investments in companies upholding colonial and imperial practices
- Career partnerships with colonial institutions (Army cadets in schools for example)
- Research collaborations with harmful companies
- Bank accounts with institutions founded to fund colonialism and slavery
- Sponsorships funding academic posts and awards, masking complicity with 'positive social impact'

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HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Quick Guide

(FROM NUS' DIVEST TO DECOLONISE TOOLKIT)

RESEARCH YOUR INSTITUTION

1

- Research your institution's investments using tools like Fossil Free Scorecards.
- Submit Freedom of Information requests.

NEGOTIATE

2

- Email key decision-makers (Vice-Chancellor, Finance Director or Sustainability Manager).
- Request a clear, minuted meeting.
- Be explicit about divestment demands.

ORGANISE

3

- Contact groups like SOS UK, People & Planet, dED_UCATION, CAAT, Friends of the Earth for support.
- Build a campaign group with students &/or staff.
- Plan your next steps (motions, petitions, direct actions), using the NUS campaign guide.

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Further readings & resources

TOOLKITS & RESOURCES:

What About The Other 29? And Other FAQs: Demystifying Abolition in the UK Education System - No More Exclusions

The Divest To Decolonise Toolkit - SOS, CAAT, dED, NUS, People & Planet

Cracks in the Curriculum - Serpentine Galleries Jacob V Joyce and Rudy Loewe

BOOKS:

(Educators & teachers)

- ❖ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - Paulo Freire.
- ❖ *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* - bell hooks
- ❖ *Decolonising the University* - Gurinder K. Bhambra
- ❖ *Black Lives Matter at School: An Uprising for Educational Justice* - Jesse Hagopian and Denisha Jones
- ❖ *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* - Jesse Hagopian
- ❖ *Solidarity with Children: An Essay*

against Adult Supremacy - Madeline Lane-McKinley

(Learners & activists)

- ❖ *Natives* - Akala
- ❖ *Black History Is For Everyone* - Brian Jones
- ❖ *Lessons in Organising: What Trade Unionists Can Learn from the War on Teachers* - Gawain Little, Ellie Sharp, Howard Stevenson and David Wilson
- ❖ *The New Age of Empire* - Kehinde Andrews
- ❖ *Against Apartheid: The Case for Boycotting Israeli Universities* - Ashley Dawson and Bill V. Mullen

(Academics & researchers)

- ❖ *Decolonising Curriculum Knowledge: International Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Approaches* - Marlon Lee Moncrieffe
- ❖ *Decolonising the History Curriculum: Eurocentrism and Primary Schooling & The BERA Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum* - Marlon Lee Moncrieffe

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Further readings & resources

- Learning Whiteness: Education and the Settler Colonial State - Arathi Sriprakash, Sophie Rudolph and Jessica Gerrard
- Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education - Henry A. Giroux
- Our History Has Always Been Contraband: In Defense of Black Studies - Colin Kaepernick, Robin D.G. Kelley and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
- Stringing Histories - Geneva Virasami

ARTICLES:

- "The selective curriculum of British history: and how it excludes Black and non-Eurocentric education" - Pasqueline Agostinho, shado mag
- "Why reimagining our education system will be key to our climate solutions" - Larissa Kennedy, shado mag
- "If exclusion is retribution, abolition in education is freedom!" - Simmone Ahiaku, shado mag

PODCASTS & AUDIO

- Unlearn Something Podcast
@unlearnsomethingpod - Hosted by

@iamsharonmorgan and
@decolonisingmyclassroom

- Developing Ideas (NUS Scotland) - Episode 8 - Decolonising Education: Past and Present - Sara Khan, NUS Vice President of Liberation and Equality & Sara Bafo, Welfare and Liberation Officer from Goldsmiths Students' Union
- The Resistance - An Underground Educators podcast
- Evalaurene Jean Charles
- Black British English podcast
- Ife Thompson
- The SLT Podcast (Serious Leaders Talking) - Rene, Ziggy and Jordan
- 2cool4school - Yannick
- Make it Plain - Kehinde Andrews
- E047 Zahra Bei: U.K secondary education, pupil referral units (PRUs) & No More Exclusions
- Surviving Society

TO WATCH:

- Dismissed - Daniel Rusteau.
- Subnormal: A British Scandal - BBC

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Definitions

DECOLONIAL APPROACH: an approach that actively resists and dismantles colonial systems and hierarchies, and centres the histories, knowledge systems and voices of the oppressed.

CURRICULUM: a structured set of learning experiences, content and materials designed to guide teaching and learning within educational institutions. A decolonised curriculum critically examines whose knowledge is included or excluded and seeks to represent diverse perspectives and histories.

SYLLABUS: A detailed outline of the topics, content and learning objectives for a specific course of subject, usually prepared by individual teachers or departments. It is a subset of the broader curriculum.

PEDAGOGY: the methodology of education, which focuses on how knowledge is transmitted and skills are shared in educational contexts. From a Freirean perspective, it should emphasise dialogue, critical reflection, and co-creation of knowledge between teachers and learners to challenge

oppression and promote liberation.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: the processes by which knowledge is created, validated and shared. It involves power dynamics that determine which ways of knowing are valued or marginalised.

ANTI-RACIST: an active, continuous commitment to identify and challenge the beliefs, actions and systems that uphold racism.

EUROCENTRISM: a worldview that presents European culture, history and values as the norm or superior - minimising, distorting and villainising the perspectives of others.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: an approach to addressing harm that focuses on accountability, dialogue and repairing relationships, rather than punishment or exclusion.

SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS: a form of drastic disciplinary action that removes children from the classroom, learning environments and even education systems, often disproportionately affecting marginalised communities.