The first step to decolonising the curriculum is to decolonise our academic minds

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Decolonisation has become a buzzword across the education sector – with movements demanding change of curriculum and content in many countries. Whilst the decolonisation movement has garnered support of some staff and students, it has also encountered fierce opposition, with some alleging that "classic, canonical" works are being replaced by those of "lesser" value. These opponents seem to hold White, western knowledge as superior to forms of knowledge originating in Asia or Africa. Moreover, they seem to falsely accuse the decolonisation movement of replacing White authors with those from the Global Majority. These opponents fail to acknowledge the hierarchical power relations and the prejudices and beliefs of White dominated institutional staff and students.

Hence, this workshop attempts to unpick the principles underpinning the movement and highlights how it can go beyond curriculum reform through critical self-examination of attitudes, assumptions, dispositions and practices of academic staff and institutions. In doing so, it will also address the cobwebs lurking in the minds of the opponents of decolonisation. Clearing the cobwebs in the minds of academic staff would entail self-reflection and understanding of our identities and the power relations that play out in the HE sector.

Critical education and self-reflection for teaching staff would enable us to recognise our own racial inclinations, and to be aware of the culture and practices which are normalised in HE and in society. Through confronting our own prejudices (Cobbs 1970) we could become aware of the stereotypes and false assumptions we hold and understand how we might inadvertently reproduce racist practices. This call for a pedagogic practice which requires HE staff to turn the critical lens on themselves takes on board the Macpherson Report’s recommendations that institutions examine their policies and practices to tackling racism and disadvantage. The aim is to restructure pedagogic relations based on mutual understanding and respect.

Dr Chrissie DaCosta is committed to tackling the barriers to education that some students encounter in higher education. These barriers are the attitudes and mindsets of White-dominated HE staff and students who tend to hold false assumptions about students from the Global Majority and their academic abilities. She draws on the work of bell hooks, Joyce E King and others to argue for a pedagogy of respect for all. A fundamental principle underpinning her approach to teaching and learning is that academic ability is universal