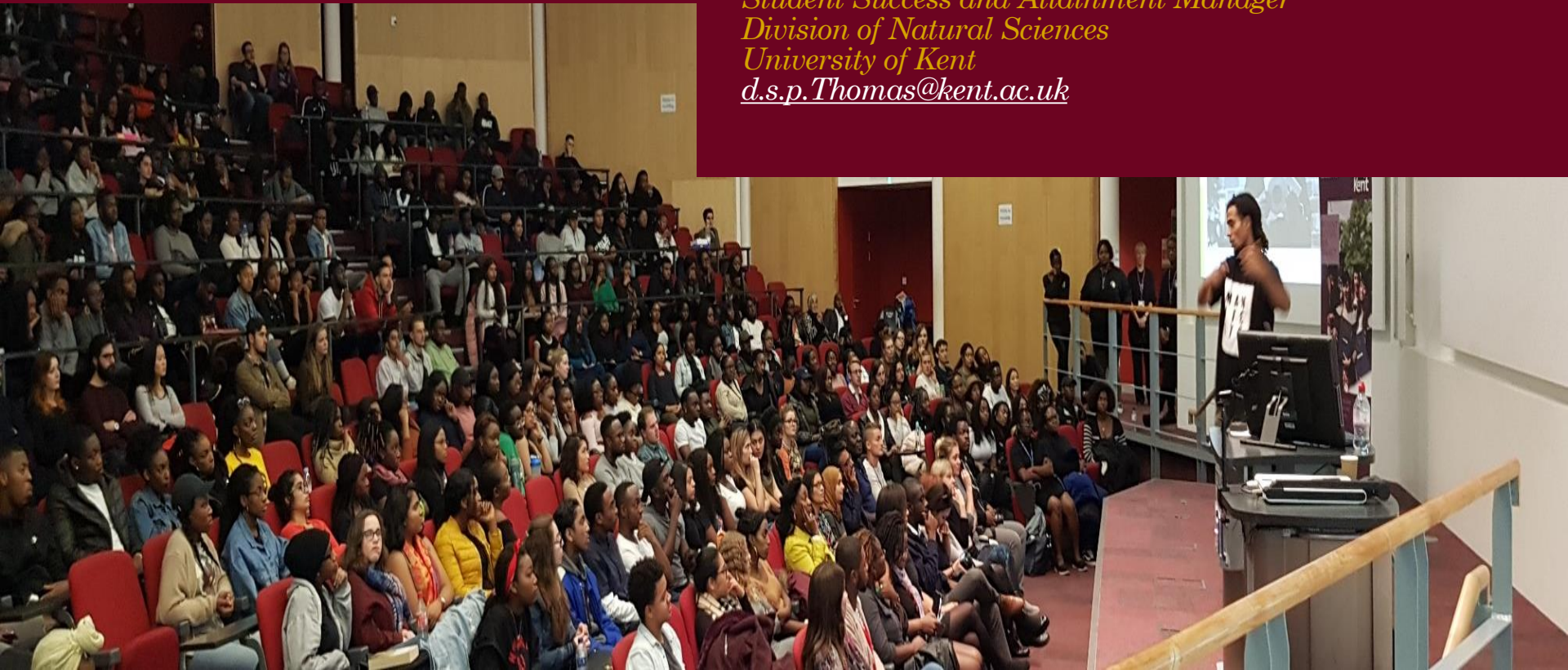


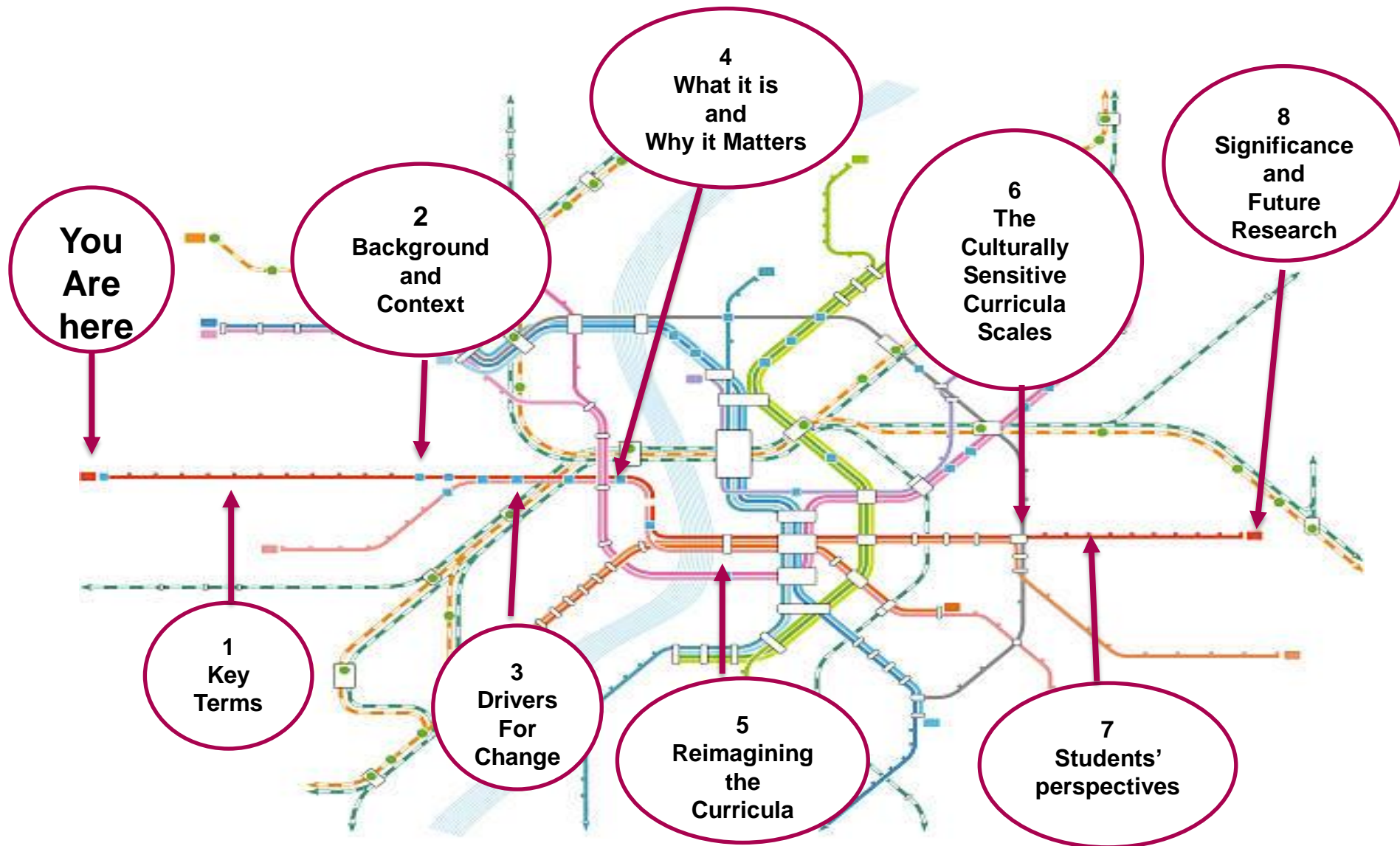
# The need for research and evaluation in student success / Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales as new tools for evaluating students' perceptions of the cultural sensitivity of the curriculum

*Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

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# Direction of Travel



*“The only time we look at non-White material is in relation to colonialism (slavery/anti-slavery) or extremism, and the material tends to be negative as opposed to positive”*

*“It was literally White male theorists all the time and it was just boring because you cannot relate to it... it was just not relatable”*

(Focus Group participants – Decolonise the University of Kent Manifesto)



# Question?

*What are the components of a Culturally Sensitive Curriculum and why does it matter in terms of student outcomes in higher education?*



# Key Terms

- **Curriculum** = that which is taught and how it is taught
- **Black** = African heritage (including Caribbean heritage)
- **BAME** – people who identify as belonging to a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. **Not a homogenous group**
- **Whiteness** = an ideology that empowers people racialized as White (New Urban Collective 2015)

# Background and Context

In the **2018/19 academic year**

- **98%** of UK domiciled students disclosed their ethnicity
- **24%** identified as belonging to a BAME background (a **73%** increase from 2003/04 numbers)
- **43%** of BAME students were **Asian**
- **30%** of BAME students identified as **Black** (23% Black African)
- The problem of non-continuation was most severe for **Bangladeshi** and **Black** students who have the lowest rate of non-continuation at about **82%** each, compared with **90%** of White students who continued or qualified

# Background and Context cont'd

In the academic year **2018/19**

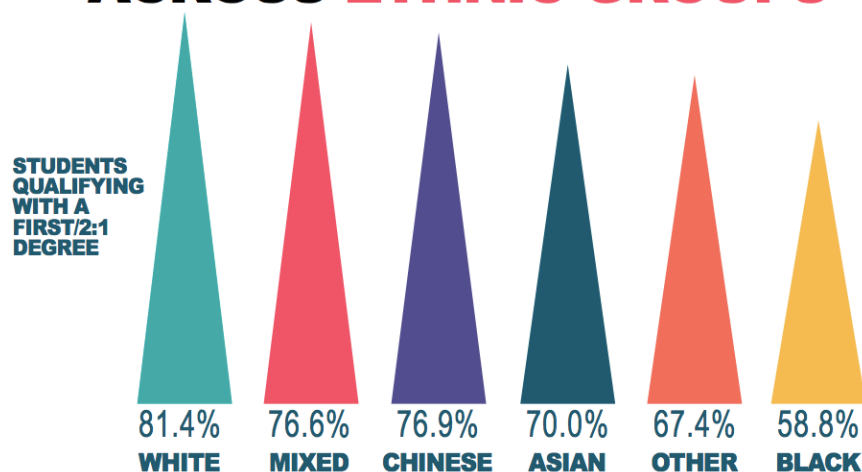
**81%** of **White** students earned a 'good degree' vs. **68%** of **BAME** students

**BAME 13% gap**

**Black Caribbean 19% gap**

**Black African 25% gap**

## STUDENT ATTAINMENT ACROSS ETHNIC GROUPS



5: UK domiciled first degree undergraduate qualifiers with a First/2:1 degree by ethnic group, 2018-19

**AdvanceHE**

Advance HE (2020) Equality in higher education statistical reports - weighted by full person equivalent

**#AdvanceHEstats**

## Background and Context cont'd

“...**controlling for other factors** which impact on attainment...**ethnicity is still statistically significant** in explaining attainment in HE (higher education)...” (Broecke and Nicholls 2007, pp. 16:19)



# Drivers for Change

- Legal
- Moral
- Sectoral
- Institutional



# What is Cultural Sensitivity and why does it matter in terms of student achievement?

- **Culture**

- Shared understandings, characteristics, practices or customs of a group of people

- **Cultural Sensitivity**

- Awareness of and understanding that cultural differences exist between people without assigning them a value (negative or positive, better or worse)
- Respect
- Value

# What is a culturally sensitive curricula? How does it differ from other related concepts?

A curricula in which the **attitudes, teaching methods and practice, teaching materials and theories** relate to students' cultural characteristics, experiences and context.

(Bryan-Gooden, Hester and Peoples 2019; Ladson-Billings 1995a; Holgate 2016; Ladson-Billings 1995b; Gay 2000; USC Race Equity Centre n.d.)

# A Culturally Sensitive Curricula: Why it matters

## A Culturally Sensitive Curricula:

- contains **positive references** (see Wei 2007)
- reinforce feelings of **self-efficacy and interest** and **sense of agency** (Lent, Brown and Hackett 1994)
- **respects all people**
- legitimises knowledge **from all communities and cultures**
- may reduce attainment disparities

(Gabriel 2017; Mountford-Zimdars *et al.* 2017; Mountford-Zimdars *et al.* 2015; Hockings 2010; Dandridge *et al.* 2008)

# Reimagining the curricula: A set of Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales

Validated a set of Scales Comprised of 19 items on 4 dimensions (n=262)

- **Diversity is present** (8 items,  $\alpha=.87$ )
- **Positive portrayals** (3 items,  $\alpha=.81$ )
- **Challenge power** (5 items,  $\alpha=.88$ )
- **Inclusive classroom interactions** (3 items,  $\alpha=.83$ )

(Thomas and Quinlan 2020)

# The Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scale

## Dimension 1 – Diversity is present

focuses on how  
people from  
diverse  
backgrounds are  
referenced within  
the curriculum.

### See yourself on the shelf: The role library collections can play towards decolonising curricula

An initiative at the University of Kent, led by the Student Success Network and Library Services with students as active participants, looked at how to diversify reading lists as a key step in bringing about curriculum change. The Diversity Mark project is based on a belief that reading lists are an important representation of the legitimised ideas, theories and perspectives that dominate within a discipline and subject area.

#### Diversity Mark Award

- Summarises diversity activities
- Displayed in student VLE
- Dated and recorded for future monitoring
- Demonstrates institutional wide progress in diversifying library collections and curriculum

#### Diversity Mark Framework

- Module convenors:** Module evaluation; reading list audit; plan of action; timeframe for implementation
- Students:** focus groups to discuss reading list audit; sources, research and recommend inclusion of more diverse materials
- Schools:** Commit to diversifying the curriculum; Diversity Mark incorporated in core module evaluations; Equality Impact Assessment of all modules



#### Reading list data

Visualising reading list content displaying author identity, currency and accessibility for users.



#### Diversity Mark Toolkit

Library support to help academics diversify their reading lists:

- Alternative suppliers of content
- Finding diverse authors and perspectives in our collections
- Identifying best practice
- Reading list retreats

“We need a diversity of perspectives, particularly from scholars of colour and from the global south, including access to reading lists from around the world.”

“It would be nice to see better representation to encourage more people to get into different fields.”

“We need a curriculum that reflects and addresses a range of experiences and promotes cultural democracy, as well as developing students.”



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### Democracy, Diversity and Decolonisation: Staff-student partnerships in a reading list review

18 Jan 2020 | Dave Thomas

Dave Thomas is Student Success Project Manager, PhD researcher and BAME Staff Network Co-Chair at the University of Kent. In this blog, he explains the importance of decolonising the curriculum to ensure diversity of opinion and democratic thought.

“What is generally understood as knowledge in the universities of our world represents a very small proportion of the global treasury of knowledge... Higher education institutions today exclude many of the diverse knowledge systems in the world, including those of indigenous peoples and excluded racial groups, and those excluded on the basis of gender, class or sexuality.”

**Hall and Tandon 2017**

Surprisingly, there is a paucity in research illuminating the unchallenged epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the reading lists of higher education (HE) study programs from a cultural, sociological or political perspective. This provided impetus for my conception and creation of what I call a “reading list review” at the University of Kent.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) consist of hyper-diverse student cohorts who are not properly represented on current reading lists. Western paradigms advance a notion that students are learning in post-racial HEIs, where reading lists are colour-blind, meritocratic, based on physical and online resources. Arguably, these paradigms have little appreciation for approaches to knowing and knowledge production from the global South. Such misconceptions are problematic. Professor Fred Moten challenges these paradigms in stating, “by selecting ‘colour-blind’ and ‘meritocratic’ bureaucratic approaches, universities can claim to be doing something, while actually doing nothing at all to change the status quo” (Moten 2018: 7). The reading list review is one of many strategies can be employed to challenge the status quo.

A reading list review is a process whereby staff and students engage in a collaborative, power-sharing relationship to explore the extent to which the contents, concepts and context of a program’s reading lists are representative of diverse knowledge systems, then actively make recommendations towards redress. The process includes a desk-based review of the reading lists, as well as focus groups with staff and students, in order to gain nuanced understandings of their perceptions.

Last year I ran a review in a similar manner to Hall and Tandon (2017) to represent an inclusive and equitable representation of traditionally excluded groups such as racialised groups, indigenous peoples, those generally excluded on the basis of gender, class or sexuality, as well as their White counterparts.

**Talis Insight Europe 2019: The University of Kent's project to improve diversity in the curricula**

16 Nov 2019

Stefanie Nails

Sharing better diversity in resources provided to students is a goal that many universities have been working towards in recent years. The award librarians and students from the University of Kent to present at Talis Insight Europe 2019 to share their collaborative project.

This session was presented by Emma Moss-Richards and Sarah Flett, Library Librarians, and Emma Agnew and Collins Ananda-Mutiah, Student Diversity Mark Officers at the University of Kent.

Everyone shared the following with us:

“My role was a Diversity Mark Project Officer for the University of Kent, upon taking on this role, the aim was to audit and read reading lists by finding the representation and perspectives of authors within these reading lists.”

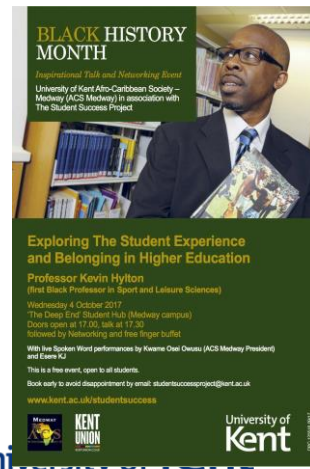
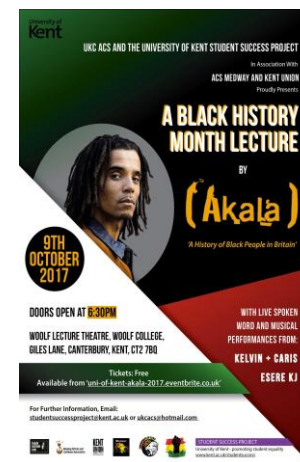
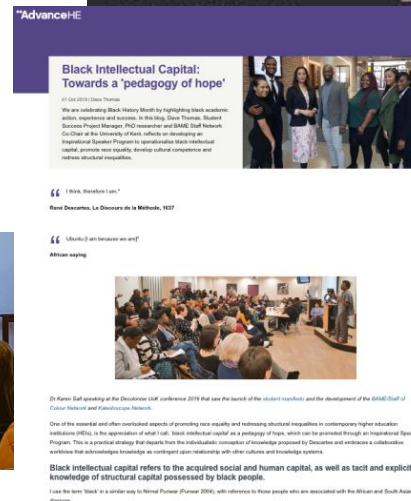


# Diversity is Present

## Sample items:

- People of diverse ethnicities are represented as researchers or professionals, not just as participants in research, clients, consumers, customers, etc.
- The curriculum references different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions and/or clothing.
- The curriculum respects that different cultures may have different understandings, skills and/or philosophies.

## Dimension 2 – Positive Portrayals



# Positive Portrayals

## Sample items

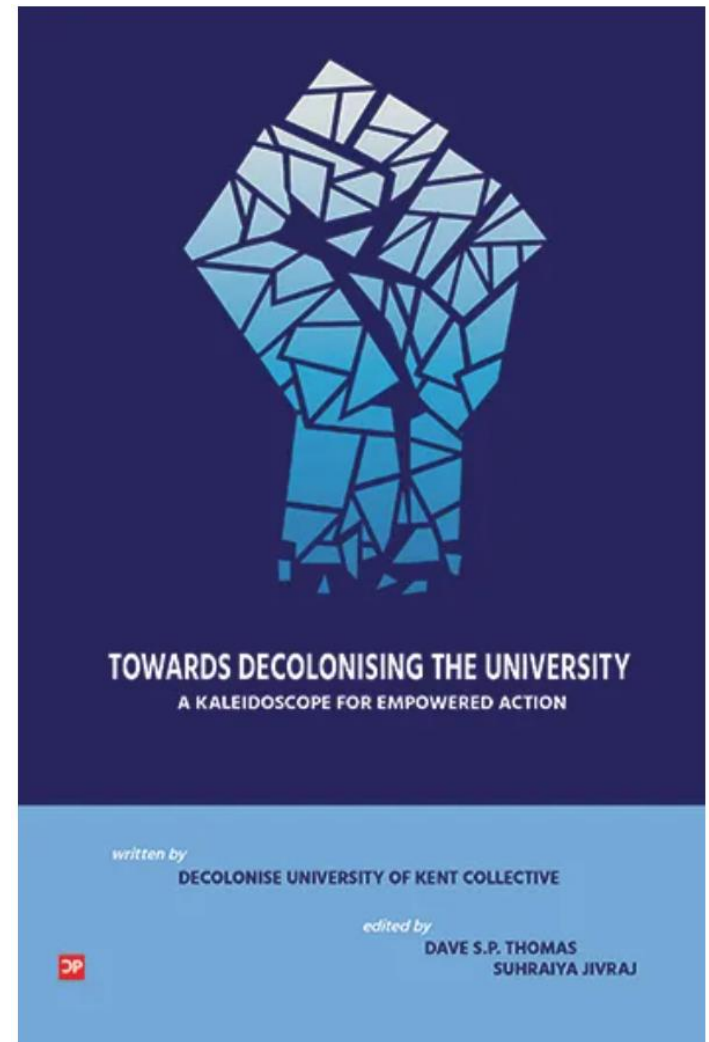
- When social problems (e.g. crime, violence) are presented, people of colour are usually considered the problem (R)
- When people of colour have problems, white people are usually presented as being able to solve those problems (R)

(R) Item reversed

# The Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scale

## Dimension 3 – Challenging Power

focus on the  
curriculum's ability to  
provoke critical thought  
and challenge  
dominant ideologies



<https://counterpress.org.uk/publications/towards-decolonising-the-university/>

# Challenge Power

## Sample items

- The curriculum raises critical questions about power and/or privilege that are usually taken for granted.
- The curriculum encourages students to connect learning to social, political or environmental concerns.
- The curriculum encourages students to take actions that fight inequity or promote equity

# The Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scale

## Dimension 4 – Inclusive Classroom Interactions

focuses on the development of a learning environment accepting of cultural differences and respectful of different perspectives





# Inclusive Classroom Interactions

## Sample items

- My instructors make an effort to pronounce everyone's name correctly.
- My instructors encourage students to respect other students' perspectives.

# Perceptions of the curricula

BAME students perceived their curriculum as less culturally sensitive on all four dimensions of the Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales than White students

# Why does culturally sensitive curricula matter?

All dimensions of the Culturally Sensitive Curricula Scales were correlated with:

- increased interaction with teaching staff
- higher interest

# Significance

- Key research tool for assessing and evaluating students' perceptions of the curricula

Findings led further support for:

- BAME students' qualitative reports of the “Whiteness” of the curriculum
- calls for educators to improve their cultural competence
- calls to decolonise the curriculum

# Next Steps

- investigate the relationship between a culturally sensitive curricula and achievement
- Evaluate curricular interventions

# Questions





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