Involving Students in developing an Anti-Racist Curriculum

This resource was developed by and for Scottish tertiary institutions as a sector-led and co-produced resource

It was written by working group members of the Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC) project

You just look like you've got a tan.
Do you have hair under your hijab?
Do people eat insects in your country?
I just don't see colour.
I don't think of you as black.

Call it racism.

#CallItRacism

Introduction

Involving students as co-creators and partners should be a key tenet of developing a holistic and inclusive approach to an Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC). Historically, student activists have often led the way when challenging their curriculum and the need for anti-racist reform. Many Students' Associations have active student groups and representatives providing important critical voices to this discussion. Co-creation and partnership working is a fantastic opportunity to listen to their perspectives and creativity on this matter. Embed it into the curricula (re)design and involve and engage the student community, especially those with lived experience, from the beginning.

Of course, student co-creation and partnership is not a new concept and we share the literature and activity herein to support colleagues with this approach and help them consider how they can practically involve their students in their ARC development.
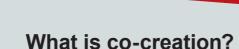
Further Reading

Knight, S. et al (2021) *Enriching BAME staff-student partnerships in higher education.* Journal of Educational Innovation Partnership and Change Vol 7, No 1

Liyanage, M. (2020) *Miseducation: decolonising curricula, culture and pedagogy in UK universities.* Mia Liyanage Higher Education Policy Institute, 51-56

National Union of Students (2020 - 2021) *NUS Decolonise Education Campaign including Decolonisers Library, Decolonisers Network* (website). Available from: https://www.nus.org.uk/campaign-hub/decolonise-education (last accessed 19th August 2021)

Walcott, R. & Sharpe, T. (2016 -2021) *Project Myopia: Diversifying university curricula through crowdsourcing material from students* (website). Available from: https://projectmyopia.com/ (last accessed 19th August 2021)

What is co-creation?

Co-creation is a process in which the end user is involved from beginning to end – in the design, development and delivery of the service. In tertiary education this means students are active participants in the learning and teaching process, from the development of the curriculum to the evaluation of teaching.

Why co-create?

- Co-creation is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

- Students gain a much greater understanding of the work "behind" the lecture which can lead to them engaging more in the classroom.

- Students know best about what it is to be a student and be on the "receiving end" of education, and can feed in perspectives unique to their experiences.

- Lecturers can develop curricula and materials that not only utilise their knowledge and expertise, but that are also shaped to the needs of the student, creating improved learning AND teaching experiences.

- It contributes to building a positive relationship between the lecturer and the student.

Models of co-creation

Bovill (2019) lists a range of models in existence such as students co-researching university-wide projects, students participating in course design review committees, students as consultants providing feedback on teaching observations and students co-designing courses and curricula, among many other examples[1].

Bovill (2018) also highlights the difference between co-creation *of* the curriculum (that happens before the course) and co-creation *in* the curriculum (that happens during the course)[2].

There are many ways to consider co-creation at various stages of the course or programme. However, the core principle of co-creation is to involve students as active participants in the design, development, delivery and assessment of their learning and teaching, and a key feature of the process is shared decision-making.

[1] Bovill, C. Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in higher education. Higher Education 79, 1023–1037 (2020).
[2] Bovill, C. & Woolmer, C. (2019) How conceptualisations of curriculum in higher education influence student-staff co-creation in and of the curriculum. Higher Education 78 (3) 407-422.

Where can I start?

Involve your students! Co-creation is the involvement of the student at all stages of the process, so your first step is to talk to students about what co-creation looks like to develop a shared model.

Consider the roles students can take in partnership work. The student partnership staircase developed by sparqs is a useful place to start. It outlines the four stages of student engagement:

- Information provider (completion of surveys)
- Actor (collector and analyst of feedback)
- Expert (recognised as experts in learning)
- Partner (authentic and constructive dialogue)

Going from "passive" involvement (i.e. providing a response on request to a survey designed by a tutor for their intended aim) to a recognition of students as authentic partners, it provides a good basis for discussion around what co-creation could look like in your course. The "expert" step particularly opens up scope for conversation about how students from certain backgrounds, who may traditionally not always be to the fore of decision-making, can play a powerful role in providing a testimony of the learning experience through their eyes.

Also useful, the Ladder of student participation in curriculum design[3,4], overlaps the sparqs model and outlines eight stages, from tutor control to student control, of the curriculum. It enables discussion of the desirability and possibility of active student participation in curriculum design.

Equality considerations

Ensuring inclusivity in co-creation is crucial, but too often the involvement of under-represented groups is not a consideration. Many existing approaches to co-creation often involve only a small number of already engaged students, course reps for example, or students identified by the lecturer and "shoulder-tapped" to become involved. There can often be barriers to student involvement such as not recognising themselves in existing processes so not coming forward, staff not understanding the importance of diversity to the process, or cultural differences. It is worth assessing how diverse a group is involved in co-creation. When developing learning and teaching, it should engage all of your students and having the views of ALL of your students will support this.

Understanding the diversity of students involved in co-creation is vital, but often not assessed. sparqs has developed a monitoring diversity of course reps project to support institutions to monitor and understand the diversity of their course reps.

Additional resources

Barrineau, Engstrom & Schnaas (2019) An Active Student Participation Companion. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet

Bovill, C. (2019) A co-creation of learning and teaching typology: what kind of co-creation are you planning or doing? International Journal for Students as Partners 3 (2) 91-98

Bovill, C. (2020) Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in higher education. Higher Education 79 (6) 1023-1037

Bovill, C., and Bulley, C.J. (2011) A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility. In: Rust, C. (ed.) Improving Student Learning (ISL) 18: Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations. Series: Improving Student Learning (18). Oxford Brookes University: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford, pp. 176-188. ISBN 9781873576809

Bovill, C. & Woolmer, C. (2019) How conceptualisations of curriculum in higher education influence student-staff co-creation in and of the curriculum. Higher Education 78 (3) 407-422.

Monitoring diversity of course reps, sparqs

Student Partnership Staircase, sparqs

Workshop Activity:

Develop a roadmap for a Students as Partners (SaP) approach to creating an Anti-Racist Curriculum (ARC)

This activity worksheet was co-created with student members of the ARC working group (Aishwarya Tiku and Alex Hedlund) for a 'Students as Partners in ARC' collaborative workshop between the ARC project and sparqs in March 2021.

Workshop participants shared feedback that this activity was helpful for planning an institutional approach to SaP in ARC, so we share it with you here in the hope that it may also be useful in your own context.

Instructions – 60 minute workshop activity

1. (5 mins) Set the scene for why a Students as Partners approach to creating an ARC is important at your own institution. Ideally this introduction should be shared between a Student Leader and an Executive Leader at your institution.

2. (10 mins) Divide colleagues into groups of 4-6, ideally with a balanced mix of students and staff in each group.

   a. Ask each group to nominate a Chair (a student participant) and a Notetaker (a staff participant)

   b. Ask colleagues to discuss possible issues/challenges that require consideration for developing a SaP approach to an ARC. They should add these to a post-it note (for a face-to-face workshop) or sticky note on a Google jamboard or Padlet (for an online workshop).

   We have included a few examples (right) that you may wish to consider, but please add as many additional issues as you wish.

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Staff buy-in to SaP and ARC

Engaging outside the institution e.g. community groups etc (link with institutional civic mission)

Continuity of student representation

Risk of over burdening students (and staff) with lived experience

Curricular framework/ redesign

Strategic planning – how does this currently link with school/faculty/ institutional KPIs

Ensuring institution-wide communication with student and staff around this ARC work

Implementing ideas – making lasting change (embed into quality assurance processes?)

3 Bovill, C., and Bulley, C.J. (2011) A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility. In: Rust, C. (ed.) Improving Student Learning (ISL) 18: Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations. Series: Improving Student Learning (18). Oxford Brookes University: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford, pp. 176-188. ISBN 9781873576809
4 Based on Sherry R. Arnstein (1969) A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35:4, 216-224, DOI: 10.1080/01944366908977225. This is a typology of citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States.

3. (5 mins) Ask colleagues to take a few minutes to review this example in preparation for the next activity.

CONSIDERATIONS	→	ACTIONS	→	OUTCOME
Do you have a student ARC strategy group?	→	Consider which groups of students you will engage e.g. reps, societies, students with and without lived experience etc.	→	
What will you do if inappropriate/racist comments are made during ARC meetings?	→	Establish protocols/ infrastructure to support students & colleagues before proceeding further	→	
What is the current landscape of ARC activity in your institution?	→	Conduct an audit of existing activity to highlight and draw out best practice as well as target pockets where focus needs to be directed	→	Embedding a SaP approach to creating an ARC across your organisation
Do you have the available resources and staff support for your institution to embark on its ARC journey?	→	Evaluate what more you need for staff to undertake this activity and create a resource bank/support network to enable them	→	
Have you set ARC as an institutional commitment and incorporated it into your strategy?	→	Commit to engaging with ARC at the institutional level so staff and students can recognise the priority this has	→	
How reliable and useful is your existing data in identifying, awarding and retention gaps?	→	Evaluate and improve the data you collect and how it is used in understanding awarding gaps and retention	→	
How will you engage staff at all levels to ensure a coherent and comprehensive approach to ARC?	→	Establish working groups with key staff at local and institutional levels	→	

4. (20 mins) Ask colleagues to develop their own roadmap by completing the template. Listing considerations and the action required to respond to them.

CONSIDERATIONS	→	ACTIONS	→	OUTCOME
Do you have a student ARC strategy group?	→		→	
	→		→	
	→		→	Embedding a SaP approach to creating an ARC across your organisation
	→		→	
	→		→	
	→		→	
	→		→	

5. (10 mins) In plenary, ask colleagues to compare roadmaps across all groups, discussing key issues identified.

6. (10 mins) In plenary, agree next steps and an action plan for developing your institutional ARC strategy further.

	Next Step	Responsibility	Timeline	Key Stakeholder(s)
	ACTION PLAN - STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN OUR ANTI-RACIST CURRICULUM			
e.g.	Establish an institutional Student ARC strategy group	Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching)	Within 1 month	Sabbatical Officers, Student Leaders, Black, Asian & minority ethnic Liberation Officer, Director of Student Experience, Others?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

" Lecturers can develop curricula and materials that not only utilise their knowledge and expertise, but that are also shaped to the needs of the student, creating improved learning AND teaching experiences."

Racism exists on our campuses and in our society. Call it what it is and reject it in all its forms.

We stand united against racism.

Offensive questions, stereotypes and 'jokes' have a lasting impact on individuals, affecting their mental health, career progression and overall welfare at college or university.

It's time to stop sweeping these microaggressions under the rug.
Call racism out for what it is and challenge unacceptable behaviour.

It's time to take a stand.

#CallItRacism

Call it racism | Challenge racist behaviour | Change racist structures