

## NEON Addressing Differential Outcomes for BME Learners Working Group

### Supporting the BAME HE Community during Covid-19 Pandemic

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“Supporting Black, Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) students during the COVID-19 crisis’ and the killing of George Floyd”

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#### Introduction – (re)discovering our purpose.

Thanks to all colleagues at NEON who have made today possible. There is a saying that one should strike when the iron is hot. Well, in present moment, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and also the Public Execution of George Floyd, the iron not hot but molten! Though for BAME people, staff and students, precarity is a norm, we live in times where we are all experiencing a sense of fear, uncertainty and perhaps, if not physical death, then certainly existential crisis demanding us to ask fundamental questions, such as:

- What is the meaning of society?
- What is the meaning and purpose of Education?
- What is a University?
- What does it mean to be/become anti-racist?

The Political Philosopher Hannah **Arendt** in her famous essay following the ruins of the second world war and the Nazi holocaust entitled “*The Crisis of Education*” (published in 1954). Pointed out that learning did not equal education. For her learning can be quite a personal experience, whereas as education takes us beyond ourselves. As she says, “**Education** is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it.”

#### Structural disadvantage

- In the present this moment of crisis, where we see massive state intervention, a resurgence of the values of collectivism and a collapse of commodity capitalism, we are left asking how relevant is the neoliberal

model of education, that we are all, willingly or otherwise, been compelled to deliver?

- If the figures of on dramatic disproportionate numbers of BAME deaths due to COVID-19 set the crisis in motion, the death of George Floyd has turbocharged the question of institutional and endemic racism and the onging legacies of white supremacy and imperialism.
- Like all other natural disasters what the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that when such matters arise, it is the most vulnerable, discriminated and disadvantaged sections of the population that suffer the most. Whether we are looking at the **Glenfield Tower** fire in 2017 or **Hurricane Katrina** in New Orleans in 2005, or taking a more historic example of the sinking of the Titanic sinking in 1912, we know that the privileged will always come out on top.
- The Titanic on her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York sunk in the north Atlantic Ocean with an estimated 2224 passengers and crew aboard more than 1500 died. The women the children were evacuated of the sinking ship first, not all women and children were given the same priority and opportunity to evacuate. Survival was based on social class and the death rate for all individuals decreased as socio-economics status and come in class increased, and the more top majority of children who died were in third class. But this is only part of the story along before the Titanic began its voyage, from the moment the individuals are born, it would seem the life expectancy was to some degree predetermined.
- When the COVID-19 crisis began to unfold, we were told that the virus does not discriminate, but what we have discovered the current recent government data is that “people of Chinese Indian, Pakistani other Asian, Caribbean and other black backgrounds facing much higher risk of death, or between 10 to 50% compared with white buttons.
- COVID-19 has shone light on an ongoing crisis of racism and racial violence, which has left us all with searching questions about our sense of being and belonging and doing.

## Implications for BAME students:

- Learn from health inequalities – social determinants of health/social epidemiology. ( Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, Daniel Dorling, Michael Marmot)
  - Shift the paradigm – balance downstream solutions with upstream solutions.
- Move away from cultural deficit modelling which has been based on the idea that we get them students to become like white students, to accumulate the simulate white middle-class cultural capital. This is part of the problem as the model assumes to flawed arguments. First at the dominant culture white culture is necessarily the best. And second, that the entire life of BAME and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2015)) is of no value.
  - Solution: Change the currency – get rid of white middleclass money!
- Whole issue of BMA BME attainment is complex, my experience and research suggest that we have more or less identified the key 6 aspects and if we can work on all of those no doubt significant progress

## Relationships and Sense of Belonging

- There is overwhelming evidence that students who experience a true sense of belonging are more engaged in their course of study and this leads to better outcomes. So, the question we need to ask is, how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting BAME students sense of belonging in institutions that were already felt to be hostile?
- In the short term, it's difficult to know precisely how the lock down will impact students. However, there is some evidence from Schools suggesting the damage to students sense of belonging from the lock-down could be much greater for disadvantaged pupils.
- In a ***Rapid evidence assessment Impact of school closures on the attainment gap*** Published last week by the ***Education Endowment Foundation*** it is suggested that

- **School closures are likely to reverse progress made to narrow the gap in the last decade - The median estimate indicates that the gap would widen by 36%.**
- For disadvantaged students, physically being at university will be critical to enable a sense of belonging to a community of learning.

## **2. Supporting effective remote learning will mitigate the extent to which the gap widens**

- Ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present—for example through clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback—is more important than how or when lessons or support are provided.

## **3. Sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up**

- Catch-up provision, including assessment of lost learning and targeted support, will be essential. However, it is unlikely that a single catch-up strategy will be sufficient to compensate for lost learning due to school closures.

(Source: Education Endowment Fund, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020. Available at: [https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA\\_-\\_Impact\\_of\\_school\\_closures\\_on\\_the\\_attainment\\_gap\\_summary.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/REA_-_Impact_of_school_closures_on_the_attainment_gap_summary.pdf))

### **Digital divide:**

We must NOT assume that BAME students will have the means to engage in online learning in an equitable way and we MUST assume responsibility for ensuring ALL students are enabled to do so.

This needs to be tackled in three distinct ways:

1. Pedagogical - Facilitate student engagement on online learning – boring uninspiring lectures/ passive learning, or using vle's as a dumping ground will not work. Advantaged students will find proxies to poor teaching; disadvantaged students are likely to disengage.
2. Equipment – Hardware, software, internet speed and private study space.

3. Structural factors – Housing and Overcrowding – ONS English housing survey 2014-17
  - i. Bangladeshi families 15 times
  - ii. Pakistani 8 times
  - iii. Black 6 times

**Guess what? all three factors roughly correlate with degree awarding gaps!**

**Solution: Need to think out of the box**

- What is the campus?
- Can we repurpose the physical campus
- Should we take the physical campus to the students?
- What about establishing a network of community hubs with 24 hour access – perhaps linking in with other universities and the local authorities. This is already a widespread in Australia.

**Pedagogy – what is education for?**

1. The current moment of crisis provides a historic opportunity to shift the old/ancient paradigm of HE, which is rooted in hierarchical white western centric view of human knowledge and ability, which, to varying degrees we have all internalised.
2. The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us all what are the most important things in life, and that is the quality of relationships and caring for each other. This is also key to addressing issues related to sense of belonging. Most critically, this means we need to focus on the meanings of education, not just the mechanisms for delivery.
3. The notion that faculty can simply move their courses online—or teach them simultaneously online and in person—is problematic. This is rooted in the assumption that educating involves merely delivering information to students, which can be done just as easily online as it can be in person.
4. But we know from that that pedagogies rooted in well-established understandings of education as a collective, immersive, and empowering experience, through which students learn how to deliberate,

collaborate, and interrogate established norms, cannot simply be transferred online.

5. These pedagogies are not optional frills but the product of decades of research and experience, as well as important commitments to equality and reconciliation that are not meant to be upheld only when convenient.
6. So, our new 'normal' post COVID-19 University must be built upon social and humanizing components of education, such as, questioning and altering one's sense of self and one's relationship to others, narrative, context, empathy, debate, and shared experiences. Moreover, active learning (as opposed to the passive reception of information) requires the trust, collectivity, and understanding of divergent experiences built through regular synchronous meetings in a shared physical space.
7. So, it is clear to me, particularly for disadvantaged students, physically being at university is critical to enable a sense of belonging to a community of learning. I think by shifting big lectures online and by developing flipped classrooms, we can really focus on building belonging and learning on small group tutorial group learning – indigenous pedagogy learning circles. Advantaged students are likely to access/develop all kinds of proxies – home schooling, friends networks/study groups etc – especially if they are on campus.
8. Online is a new norm but poor online teaching is likely to widen the gap for the same reasons, that being advantaged give you more options. Ensuring the elements of effective teaching are present—for example through clear explanations, scaffolding and feedback—is more important than how or when lessons or support are provided.

### **Need to develop what Bell Hooks terms a Pedagogy of liberation**

1. The current moment of crisis provides a historic opportunity to shift the old/ancient paradigm of HE, which is rooted in neoliberal, hierarchical white western centric view of human knowledge and ability, which, to varying degrees we have all internalised. We need to move towards a much more collaborative model – from the cartesian individualist

model: I think so therefore I am to a collective ontology very much rooted in “indigenous traditions of “we think so therefore we are”

2. The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us all what are the most important things in life, and that is the quality of relationships and caring for each other. This is also key to addressing issues related to sense of belonging. Most critically, this means we need to focus on the meanings of education, not just the mechanisms for delivery.
3. The idea that faculty can simply move their courses online is problematic. This is rooted in the assumption of education as transmission information to students, which can therefore be done just as easily online as it can be in person. True learning comes from collective, immersive, and embodied experiences where students learn how to deliberate, collaborate, and interrogate established norms.
4. Privileged students will be able to develop proxies for this kind of learning, though leveraging extra support, parental involvement, study groups etc. So, our new ‘normal’ post COVID-19 University must be built upon social and humanizing components of education
5. We must NOT assume that BAME students will have the means to engage in online learning in an equitable way and we MUST assume responsibility for ensuring ALL students are enabled to do so. However, whilst identifying disadvantages, we need to work even harder at avoiding **deficit explanations for BAME** attainment.
6. In this regard I think we can learn a lot from the work on health inequalities – learn from big body on knowledge in social determinants of health by balancing personalised learning strategies with upstream structural solutions. In a piece entitled, *Sharpening the global focus on ethnicity and race in the time of COVID-19*, Neeraj Bhala et al, Gwenetta Curry, Adrian R Martineau, Charles Agyemang, Raj Bhopal Lancet, Published: May 08, 2020 “The evidence in the UK and the USA in the time of COVID-19 has sharpened the focus on inequalities neglected for a long time. Therefore, hand in hand, political action is needed to tackle xenophobia and racism, with concerted efforts to resolve long-standing societal inequalities globally.”

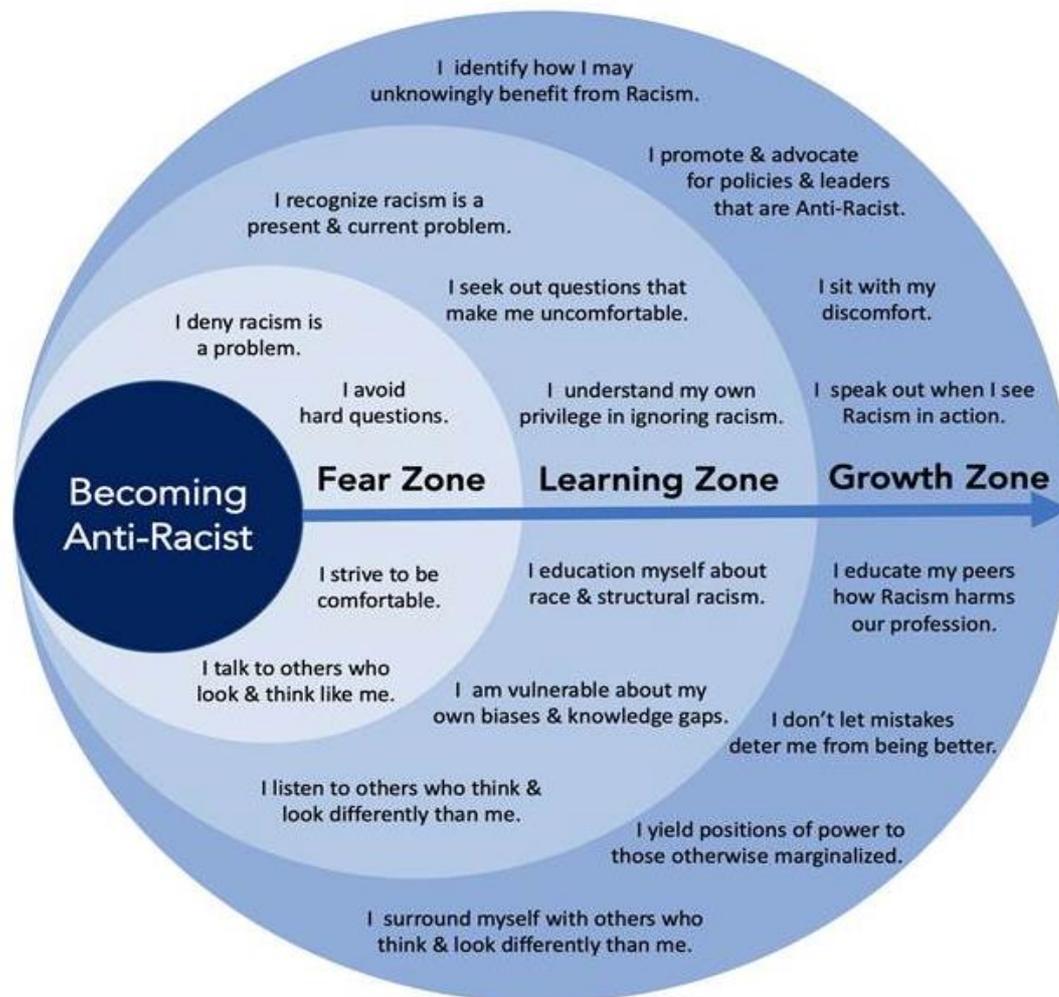
## Moving beyond degree classification

- Graduate recruiters are saying that degree classification is not a good predictor of employability, and given the destabilising effects of COVID-19 crisis degree outcomes, do we need to seize the opportunity move beyond current system of CLASSification, which itself is rooted in a hierarchical view of the human ability?
- In 2017 the accountancy giant, Grant Thornton, made a dramatic discovery. It had been screening its annual 10,000 applicants for graduates with firsts and 2:1s. For some reason – perhaps a CEO with a 2:2 – it dropped this barrier in favour of intensive interviews. It subsequently found more recruits with “poorer” degrees became high fliers than those with higher ones. Degree class was actually a negative indicator of future achievement. A subsequent Bridge Group survey found class of degree was not even cited for City jobs, as against “behaviour at interview”. (Nicholas Hellen and [Sian Griffiths](#) March 05 2017, The Sunday Times - <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-can-work-it-out-exam-failures-beat-graduates-at-top-firm-07509wv7n>)

## Personalization of learning and assessment

- Standardised testing, whether this is for admission or assessment, has proved to perpetuate inequities as they tend to advantage those groups who are familiar with the process or those students who are better able to prepare for them. Should we to move towards, personalized leaning and assessment?
- e.g “The University of California’s governing board voted unanimously to phase out the use of commercial standardised testing in its admissions processes, calling the move a critical step to promote equity. “Much of the opposition to such tests has centred on evidence that they favour wealthier students who are better able to prepare for them, thereby worsening income-based and racial divides in higher education.”

## Being/becoming an anti-racist



Source: **Andrew M. Ibrahim 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020**)

<https://twitter.com/AndrewMIbrahim/status/1269423199273525250/photo/1>

### Conclusion

The COVID-19 Crisis and the brutal murder of George Floyd have made us all feel somewhat uncertain about our present and future. For minoritized people (including staff and students) experiencing precarious lives is not new but we are where we are and if there ever was an opportune moment to act decisively, to be part of a generation that will be remembered not for our indifference to human suffering, but as liberators, it is now.

As educators, our primary tool for liberation is pedagogy and we cannot underestimate the power that this wields. This new pedagogy needs to be built on principles that completely reject conceptions of cultural deficit and racial pathology. This will require a paradigm shift in how we perceive all

students, no matter what social background they are from. That is as people who come to the university or college, not as empty vessels, but armed with skills, abilities, memories, capabilities, aspirations, and dreams. And our job is two-fold:

- to enable those individuals to both cash in if you like the critical possessions they bring with them.
- Design teaching and assessment strategies that enable students to grow and expand their own capital in ways that they can realise their true potential.

The COVID-19 crisis of the death of George Floyd has not changed this basic challenge, but for sure it has turbo charged the desire for change. It will not be easy, but I know this is possible, not only because of the overabundance of research that is out there, but because of my own experience, of my own journey and the testimonies many of my former students of all social backgrounds.

References:

Tara J. Yosso (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8:1, 69-91, DOI: [10.1080/1361332052000341006](https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006)