Researching Together: Disrupting Colonial Thinking in Higher Education and Beyond

Investigando Juntas: Desafiando el Pensamiento Colonial en Educación Superior y Más Allá

Sue Tangney [1], Julie A. Mooney [2] y Ana Luisa López-Vélez [*, 3]

[1] *Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales*
[2] *Midst Educational Consulting Inc., Canada*
[3] *Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU), Spain*

KEYWORDS:	ABSTRACT:
Decolonisation Indigenisation White privilege Curriculum Autoethnography	Universities, whilst being seen as centres of knowledge creation, are also products of colonialism. This article focuses on an autoethnographic study undertaken by three White university teachers using reflective prompts to problematise our White positionality. We wished to better understand ourselves and our identities, the benefits we have gained from colonialism, and appropriate approaches we can take to facilitate decolonising curricula. We found that this self-interrogation and collaborative meaning making, while sometimes painful, provided an enriching and transformative opportunity for personal and professional development, and a starting point to listening to, working with, and enabling Indigenous peoples to undertake decolonising work. We then use this experience to suggest ways in which other teachers might engage in similar processes of critical self-reflection and self-development, towards disrupting colonial thinking in higher education and beyond.

DESCRIPTORES:	RESUMEN:
Decolonización Indegenización Privilegio blanco Curriculum Autoetnografía	Las universidades, aunque se consideran centros de creación de conocimiento, también son producto del colonialismo. Este artículo se centra en un estudio autoetnográfico llevado a cabo por tres profesoras universitarias blancas que utilizamos pautas reflexivas para problematizar nuestra posición. Nuestro objetivo es comprendernos mejor a nosotras mismas y nuestras identidades, los beneficios que hemos obtenido del colonialismo y los enfoques apropiados que podemos adoptar para facilitar la descolonización de los planes de estudio. Consideramos que este autointerrogatorio y esta búsqueda colaborativa de significados, aunque a veces doloroso, constituyen una oportunidad enriquecedora y transformadora para el desarrollo personal y profesional, y un punto de partida para escuchar a los pueblos indígenas, trabajar con ellos y permitirles emprender una labor descolonizadora. Seguidamente, utilizamos esta experiencia para sugerir formas en las que otros y otras profesoras pueden participar en procesos similares de autorreflexión crítica y autodesarrollo, con el fin de desbaratar el pensamiento colonial en la educación superior y más allá.

1. Introduction

Decolonising the curriculum has been described as "concerned with deconstructing pedagogical frames which promote singular worldviews" (Ryan & Tilbury, 2014, p. 20), and to enable a "critique of Eurocentricism from subalternized and silenced knowledges" (Grosfoguel, 2011, n.p). Ryan and Tilbury's (2014) stated purpose is to expand students' inter-cultural understanding, and to develop new ways of thinking and working with others in a global context. These are also concerns of ours, the authors, but as White teachers, of European ancestry, working in universities across three countries (Canada, the Basque Country, Spain, and Wales), in order to support this process, we focus this paper on problematising our positionality.

We were acutely aware of the challenges we faced as White women in 'addressing' this topic. We recognised that we have benefited from colonialism and are limited in our understanding of what it means to be colonised. We also recognised that, because of our positions of privilege, the lens we bring to the work of decolonising the curriculum may be limited and, as non-Indigenous people, we do not have the knowledge needed to Indigenise the curriculum. However, we felt we had a role to play in listening, working with, and enabling Indigenous peoples to undertake this work, and that self-development was needed on our part to prepare ourselves for this role.

We used collaborative autoethnography to understand ourselves and our identities better in order to problematise knowledge claims about experiences, relationships and cultures, and to deconstruct our positions in a Western education system created by colonising powers. In this approach, we are the only research participants (henceforth called participant-researchers (PR). This study aimed to (1) develop self-awareness within and among the PRs as university educators and curriculum developers; (2) explore a method for developing teachers' self-awareness in curriculum development.

Working with a set of reflective prompts based on questions raised in relevant literature (e.g. Chung, 2019; Said, 1978), each PR engaged in two cycles of critical reflective writing on our positionality with respect to our identities, and to our teaching and curricular practices. These were then shared and discussed. We wanted to increase our understanding and mindfulness of the "scholarly processes, practices and traditions that privilege dominant forms of knowledge making and knowing in teaching and learning" (Behari-Leak, 2020, p. 4) and reflect on this within the colonial institutions in which we teach.

We then critiqued the process of using the chosen reflective prompts as to their effectiveness as a tool for deepening our understanding of coloniality. We close this paper with suggestions for tertiary educators who wish to use a similar approach individually or with their teaching teams.

2. Literature review

2.1. Origins of Eurocentrism, racism, and White fragility

The drive to decolonise Eurocentric structures including universities and curricula is not new. Bhambra et al. (2018, p. 19) state "For decades, teachers and students have been chipping away at the coloniality of the university, in an attempt to make it more critical, rigorous and democratic".

What Bhambra, her colleagues, and other critics keep stating is that universities are key sites in our society for knowledge production, and yet, they have traditionally also been gatekeepers determining whose histories and knowledges are valued. Indigenous knowledges have not been acknowledged or included (Bhambra et al., 2018) despite universities' "ethical obligation as epistemic agents" (Behari-Leak, 2020, p. 6). Mirza (2018) asserts that universities in the United Kingdom, despite their positioning, are less engaged than other institutions in combatting racism, and Tuck & Wang (2012), writing from the United States, consider much of settler colonial decolonising work to be further enhancing the power of the colonists themselves.

DiAngelo (2018) makes a distinction between prejudice, discrimination, and racism, where prejudice is defined as the judgment made about someone based on the group to which they are seen to belong. Prejudice gives rise to generalisations about the whole group. Discrimination is action based on this prejudice, such as exclusion, derogatory comments, or violence. Racism is collective prejudice underlain by systems such as the law or institutional structures that perpetuate and enable discrimination to continue.

It is worth examining the origins of the "other", and how this notion developed. Said's (1978) highlighted the way ideas of Otherness are constructed through new encounters with peoples and cultures. The Other is created through (largely) Western eyes using Western language, structures and norms. This Western concept thus creates a cultural hegemony in which "neither the term Orient, nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other" (Said, 1978, p. xii).

What results is a Eurocentric view of the world, which has permeated science, literature, the arts, and political discourse, and is wrongly presented as a "universalistic neutral, objective point of view" (Grosfoguel, 2011, n.p.) rather than *a* worldview among many. It has become a "residual structural and cultural presence … [that has remained] long after the colonisers have left" (Behari-Leak, 2020, p. 18), and to which there is resistance to change. None of us can change our hitherto cultural, social, class, and gendered backgrounds; our perspectives and our knowledge are always situated (Grosfoguel, 2011). However, we can, through mindful and critical practice, "unlearn, relearn, and reframe assumptions and practices" (Behari-Leak, 2020, p. 5). The situated nature of knowledge, however, is not generally evident or explicitly pointed out to learners. Many disciplines present their canon of knowledge as a given; the 'speaker' is not obvious, and not examined or critiqued. Western concepts of knowledge are presented as universal Truths, creating and perpetuating a power differential between Western and other knowledges.

As DiAngelo (2018) underlines, with respect to race, in the West, we have been socialised to view White people as the central voice, the insider, and the norm. Indigenous peoples experience this most acutely, whilst those of us who are White are not taught to see ourselves in terms of race and we are often ignorant of how racism benefits us. Race for the White population does matter, but it is about others and *their* race. While we perhaps consider ourselves to be anti-racist, we may be perpetuating racism through the lack of questioning of our curricula, institutional norms, and political systems, and the defensiveness that surrounds this denial has been coined "white fragility" by DiAngelo (2018, p. 2).

The permeation of Western ideas extends far beyond knowledge itself to include frames of critique which are also shaped by Western epistemology. Critiquing and challenging the legacy of colonialism is therefore difficult, as attempts to challenge are informed by situated, and thus limited, perspectives. This ironically, includes ourselves

as White scholars writing about and critiquing coloniality, and this needs to be acknowledged. Indigenous scholars trying to extricate themselves from Eurocentricism may find it difficult to escape and undertake research from their own perspective (Matthews, 2018; Grosfoguel, 2011), and Indigenous researchers may lack credibility even within their own communities. These examples highlight the success of the colonial project to undermine Indigenous ways of knowing (Grosfoguel, 2011).

As awareness about racism grows among those of us with White privilege, allyship is necessary to "disrupt patterns and leverage power and privilege" (Arday, 2020, n.p.). Part of that process is recognition of White privilege and that in doing nothing, we are complicit in the colonial hierarchies (Arday, 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars assert that decolonising movements are being subverted to retain the power of the White population. Tuck & Yang (2012, p. 9) critique the absorption of decolonisation narratives into the social justice agenda so that "the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tried to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self".

The notion of reconciliation, which is a popular narrative around decolonisation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) is criticised for being just another way of making the problem go away (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Post-colonial discourses can also be seen as a convenient way of continuing to validate or re-authorising colonial versions of interpretation.

2.2. Decolonising pathways to enhancing curricula

Because of the rise in visibility of decolonisation in the pedagogic literature it is also useful to consider alternative pathways that are gathering traction. Diversification of staff and students can have an impact, though does not guarantee an alternative epistemic perspective as the power of the Western voice is pervasive, and can be internalised by the oppressed as well as the oppressors (Martínez, 2022; Peters, 2018). Other decolonising pedagogies include:

- Storytelling (Peltier, 2016; Van Camp, 2021);

- Circle pedagogy (Camilleri & Bezzina, 2022; Peltier, 2016);

- Learning in community (with local Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members) (Gaudet, 2019; Martínez, 2022; Peltier, 2017);

- Land-based wholistic learning (Chambers, 2006; Dei, 2014; Gaudet, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2020; Peltier, 2017);

- Posing questions that problematise colonial histories (Laing, 2020; Rivas-Flores et al., 2020);

- Narrative enquiry as political action (Rivas-Flores et al., 2020);

- Co-creation opportunities (Laing, 2020);

- Collective sense-making (Rivas-Flores et al., 2020);

- Reflective practice (Kreber, 2004; Mezirow, 1991);

- Encouraging students to be a stranger to themselves and their culture (Paraskeva, 2020); among other approaches, which can all provide an opportunity for student perspectives to come forward and for students and teachers to learn the perspectives of various equity-seeking groups.

2.2.1. Engaging allies and encouraging their journey of critical self-reflection

Allyship is a vital part of decolonising the academy. Universities are power structures that privilege White Western ontologies. Disrupting this dynamic cannot be left solely to those who are disenfranchised. As a predominantly White academy, we need to examine ourselves, to become better educated about race politics, and to begin to understand the perspective of disenfranchised others (DiAngelo, 2018). We need to engage with Indigenous scholars and communities, to listen and learn from the ongoing harm they are experiencing, and to work in partnership with them (Ward et al., 2021).

2.2.2. More critique of the situatedness of knowledge

Universities, despite being seen as central to knowledge creation, are themselves products of colonisation. In engaging with their respective disciplines, students are encouraged to consider the domination of the colonial powers in shaping Western thought and to contest the resultant 'Truth' underpinning their disciplinary canon. Centring scholarly literature from equity-deserving and rights-holding groups, as well as community-based sources of knowledge while examining the situatedness of knowledge, can provide a pathway towards decolonising knowledge and the structures that shape it (Laing, 2020).

3. Method

The participant-researchers (PR) conducted a collaborative autoethnographic inquiry based on personal narratives. The purpose was to engage in critical self-reflection on our own underlying theories about our identities, decolonialisation, curricular and educational practices (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Rivas-Flores et al., 2020), and collaboratively share these reflections with one another to co-create meaning and develop collective insights.

Autoethnography is characterised by participant-researchers appearing together in texts of multiple voices focused on the characteristics and the process of a human encounter (Cortes et al., 2020). It emphasises those topics relevant to the voices: intersubjectivity, interpretative authority, and the representation of the participants. It also explores the use of the first person in the writing and includes the participant-researcher's perspective (Rivas-Flores et al., 2020). Thus, the methodology addresses personal and autobiographical narratives in different collaborative and individual formats within a social and cultural context.

We used a collaborative autobiographical approach of self-study research (Blair, 2017; Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001; LaBoskey, 2004; Lassonde et al., 2009) by writing narrative responses to two prompts. In the first prompt, "*How do you describe yourself, your identities and positionality (with reference to the Eurocentric nature of higher education?*", we carried out a retrospective autoethnography (Tilley-Lubbs, 2009) about our identities and our underlying assumptions about higher education and decolonisation. The self-reflective writing in response to the second prompt, "*Drawing on Chung (2019), how might you co-create learning and evolve the authority of the learner? What is your experience of co-creating curricula which allows agency, and how might this be useful in decolonising your curriculum?*" helped us to explore our personal understandings of decolonising curricular and teaching practices.

The prompts were drawn from Chung (2019) and Said (1978) which started our questioning process. As the research progressed, we expanded our reading beyond the

European canon including a range of Indigenous writers broadening the focus of our discussions.

Following the personal self-reflective writing, discussion took place among all three PRs; this involved two steps. First, each PR gave written feedback on the narratives of the others. Having read the feedback from our colleagues, we then met to discuss our respective narratives to enhance the self-study and critical reflection (Miller-Young et al., 2015) (see figure 1). Meetings were held online and were recorded.

The study was approved by a university Ethics Committee (Ethics number 2019D00041) and was subject to the usual informed and signed consent procedures.

Figure 1

Cycle of collaborative autoethnographic enquiry followed
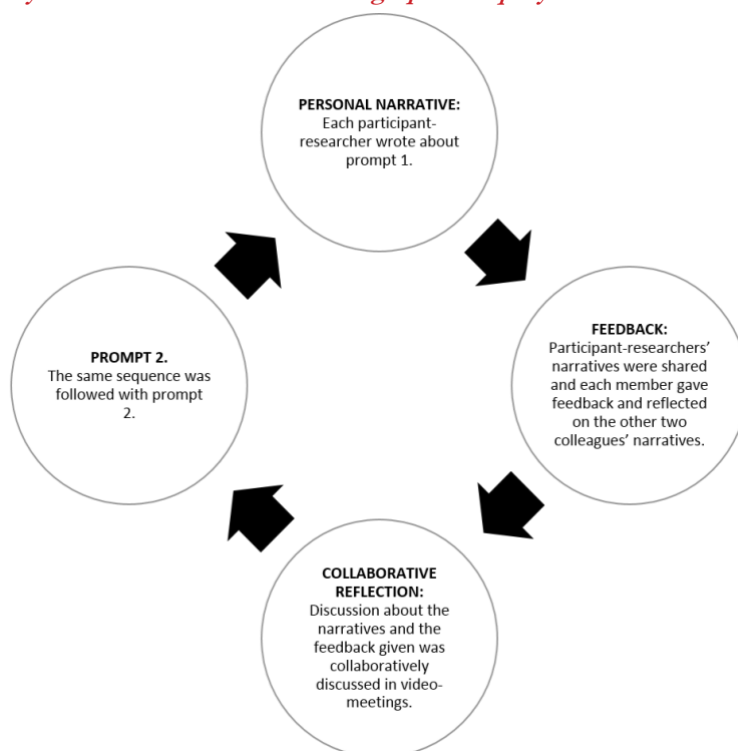
The data set used for analysis consisted of:

- PRs' written narratives based on each prompt (6).

- PRs' written feedback of the other colleagues' narratives (12).

- Video recordings of the online group conversation meetings about all PRs' narratives (6).

Data analysis of the narratives, feedback, and recordings was carried out using the NVivo 11 programme for qualitative analysis. Emergent topics appeared, were shared and contrasted, and the coding system (Table 1) established. Finally, the coding system was used to categorise the data.

Table 1
Coding system

Category	Code	Agreed conceptions issued from data
1. The self	1.1. Identity	Multiple identities or positionality as complex and layered; unconscious bias; relationship to language - colonial languages.
	1.2. Consciousness	Privilege and the relationship to the other - identifying with the other, identifying as privileged; gendered experience/ experience with disability, as ways into seeing privilege; experience of exclusion; our own position.
	1.3. Place	National or territorial context; socio-economic, cultural influences; historical background; place within the university; where we fit in that landscape; diversity of academic staff; resistance to change.
2. Decolonising curriculum	2.1. Pedagogy	Reciprocal learning/ co-learning/ peer learning/ relational curriculum/ living curriculum/ dynamic curriculum/ curriculum of care; transformation, a particular kind of pedagogy is needed for a decolonising curriculum.
	2.2. Agency	Negotiating with learners about their learning; giving voice to students and the community to enable way forward; dialogue and mutual understanding; student agency, authority of the learner, students challenging the system; community of learners.
	2.3. Will of academia	Commitment to the community, and social justice.
	2.4. Measuring and evaluating	Impact, policies and obstacles; Eurocentric bias; affinity bias; valid knowledge; regulatory framework; power, impact and real implementation of decolonising policies.

Following the coding process, each PR agreed to the excerpts selected from their respective narratives for the Findings and Discussion section of this paper. This step ensured consent from each of the PRs and served as a member-checking process.

4. Findings and discussion

Our findings and discussion are limited to a selection of the codes identified in Table 1, namely: Identity; Consciousness; Place; Pedagogy; and Measuring and Evaluating.

We decided to present the findings in a hybrid format, centring our narrative data while using a thematic analysis to make sense of the data. We acknowledge that our analysis methods and our analysis itself have been influenced by our current situatedness within a colonial system. Throughout the thematic analysis, a pattern emerged revealing tensions and harmonies. They are highlighted as we pose questions about the data.

4.1. Theme: Identity

The first reflective prompt asked us to consider our sense of our own identity. While all three PRs identify as women in the academy, we noted significant differences in our sense of identity and our perspectives as a result of our past and present geographical locations. Our physical, political, and social places in the world have shaped our identities profoundly.

PR3's excerpt takes us back to her childhood and youth, growing up in a region in Spain where separatists have struggled for generations to assert their independence. In this context, PR3 searched for her "place in the world".

> *The anger I expressed emerges from my feelings of frustration as I have witnessed exclusion, terrorism and violence in my country during my whole life. My personal experiences of exclusion have influenced my philosophy about the values that should be fostered in order to educate committed democratic civilians. (…) It was then when I started to feel the sensation of belonging nowhere, followed by the need to find my place in the world. This feeling (…) grew more explicit over the years, particularly since I became an immigrant in Chile and then in England. (PR3)*

PR2's excerpt situates her in North America, where the history of settler-colonialism has influenced her identity and the languages she learned (English, French, and Spanish). Writing about her linguistic identity, arising from colonial powers, leads into her acknowledgment of the layers of privilege she experiences in local and global contexts. We posit that these privileges may contribute to her sense of belonging in the academy.

> *All three of my languages are colonial languages, brought [to the] Americas by European colonialism. These languages, especially my mother tongue – English – position me as privileged. […] This linguistic privilege, combined with my white-skinned privilege, my university education, and my middle-class background, give me significant social and economic advantages in Canada and internationally. (PR2)*

PR1's excerpt places her as growing up in a settler colony of New Zealand but now living in the UK. It shows how engagement with communities of practice influences our identity, and the ongoing and evolving nature of identity.

> *If I was asked this outside the context of this project I would very likely describe myself firstly as a woman, then maybe as a New Zealander, then maybe my occupation would be the next on the list in defining myself. (…) If pressed then other identities might emerge, e.g. a feminist, an atheist, a reader, a cyclist … (…). Underlying these identities (…) I would describe myself (or what I wish to be) as an advocate for equality and diversity within my personal and professional relationships (…) I recognise that how I have tackled this over time has shifted as my consciousness has shifted. (PR1)*

4.2. Theme: Consciousness

There were examples of increasing consciousness of privilege in the reflective writing and meetings, and evidence of strategies to raise the consciousness of others. PR1's narrative notes other dimensions of privilege, and highlights the possibilities of using these as a vehicle for discussing decolonisation. It also presents the challenge of remaining mindful of our thinking, and continually examining our own socialisation (DiAngelo, 2018), and provides a vehicle for discussing the assimilation into coloniality (Behari-Leak, 2020, p. 6).

> *My 'awakening' to the Other (and I do see it as an emergence in my adult life and an ongoing project) has been evident to myself mostly through gender politics, because in this situation I can see myself as the Other, and this has become even more evident as an older woman as I am conscious of the increasing invisibility of older people in British society, and maybe particularly women. However even here because of my gendered upbringing and the constant bombardment of patriarchal perspectives, I still fall into traps of aligning myself with the patriarchy, and I have to stay vigilant. (PR1)*

Identity and Consciousness converge in PR3's narrative writing as she explores what it takes to deconstruct dominant pedagogical frames (Ryan and Tilbury, 2014) through dialogue with students. She reflects on constraints we all experience when working to understand another person, and coming up against limitations to understanding or knowing the Other because we are always viewing another way of being and knowing

through the lens of our own situated worldviews and perspectives (Grosfoguel, 2011; Kuokkanen, 2007).

> *I think mutual understanding is a key milestone when you are trying to open up and establish a dialogue with other people and particularly with our students, because, finally, each one of us has their own underlying way of thinking about life, our own culture, our own identity and our own way of being brought up. So, when I'm trying to understand the other, (…), I ask them "what do you mean about that?" But I always have in mind that I'm not going to be able to understand fully what the other person is trying to tell me. (…) It was particularly difficult for me to understand those people who lived in the rural part of Chile, who are Mapuche, because their way of life was very different from the way I lived. I felt I was able to grasp the way they think about life by living with them, interacting with them, taking time to have a "mate" and eat some home-made bread with them. That was how I could understand better the way they were living and thought about life.* (PR3)

4.3. Theme: Place

Identity continues to be intertwined under the theme of place. Each PR writes from a different perspective of place, but all three root their identity in place. PR3's reflections explore her geographic, national, and regional location as they inform the multiple identities that give her a sense of her own diversity and that of the world around her.

> *I consider myself as European, as well as I see me as a Basque, Spanish and Ibero-American citizen. (…) These are my roots, my pillars, but I feel them all together, because my sense of belonging has to do with the personal life, and that of my family. I feel diversity is the way I see myself and the world that surrounds me.* (PR3)

PR2's writing connects a sense of belonging to place, specifically academia as place, and highlights again how engagement with communities of practice inform our identity.

> *I suppose to some extent I have taken for granted that I belong in the university system, and I have been able to navigate the Western knowledge traditions and customs of this institution with ease.* (PR2)

PR2's sense of belonging and ease in the university raise important questions of identity and place as we consider the work of decolonising curricula. How can those with the power of privilege leverage it towards both decolonising curricula and corresponding institutional changes?

In PR1's writing, place plays a prominent role as she articulates the ways in which identity and place are inextricably connected. Her identity as a New Zealander is made more complex because she has lived in the United Kingdom for more than two decades.

> *In fact, describing myself as a New Zealander wouldn't occur to me if I lived in New Zealand; it is only because I live in the UK and clearly have an Antipodean accent. […] It is clear to me that I have had the benefit of white privilege without being really aware for much of my life of the extent to which this pervades our society and its institutions. The challenge that I face is that I am not only a New Zealander, but I am a Pakeha New Zealander, and so a descendant of British colonisers. I have probably gone through several shifts in position regarding race throughout my life.* (PR1)

The themes of identity, consciousness, and place have highlighted the complex nature of identity that we as teachers bring to the classroom, but also raise awareness of the multiple identities that our students bring. The responses to the reflective prompts also highlight a consciousness of White privilege (DiAngelo, 2018; hooks, 2003; McIntosh,

1989; Saad, 2020), a willingness to challenge colonial curricula, and a desire to work in partnership with people excluded.

Allyship is vital to decolonising the academy. We need to be comfortable with the discomfort of the challenge this might invite (DiAngelo, 2018) and have the "courage to be altered" (Chung, 2019, p. 17). We need to move beyond optical allyship (Saad, 2020) into actions that reflect actual allyship: taking on the struggle as if our own lives depended on it, showing up even when we feel uncertain or afraid, standing up and staying standing, so that those with whom we ally ourselves know we are with them (Calvez, 2020), transferring the benefits of our privilege to those who are excluded, recognising the conversation is not about us nor is it about our, albeit real, feeling of pain[1]. We can help with the disruption of old narratives through engaging as authentic allies and accomplices (Ward et al., 2021).

4.4. Theme: Pedagogy

Engaging with appropriate pedagogies that enable transformational change was evident from the reflective pieces, in particular in response to the second prompt. The data showed that we all had some opportunities to negotiate aspects of the student learning experience, but its degree varied across courses and institutions. This was one of the main topics discussed in our reflective meetings. PR3 offered regular opportunities for students to revise the learning approach, but also felt frustrated that she still had overall lead.

> *Through the assembly, values and norms are reviewed, negotiated and modified in order to adjust to the group, and the organization, methodology and the communication in our lecture is arranged and agreed among us. (…) Considering the design of the lectures, I must admit that I still feel that students have a limited participation in the curriculum, because I am the one who gives the structure to the curriculum and also who selects and decides the documents and articles they are going to read during the term. I'm trying to find a way of involving them more on the design of the subject, but I am still reflecting on how to do it.* (PR3)

PR1's experience teaching university teachers demonstrated flexibility in approach with teachers given autonomy to develop project work depending on their own professional needs. However, it was to some extent restrained by already defined learning outcomes.

> *[M]y underlying philosophy regarding teaching practice is that there are underlying principles, but that staff can find what works for them, their teaching preferences, their students and where they have come from, and their teaching environment.* (PR1)

PR2's experience demonstrated the flexibility available to her in her course, where students are able to develop and negotiate their own learning goals, activities, and assessments with their teacher, and to continue curriculum-making by making necessary adjustments as the course unfolds. She also, however, highlighted the reluctance of some students to take this lead, preferring to see the teacher as the expert.

> *Once we [students and teacher] got into the conversation about our course plan (written/formal curriculum), I could see, among the students, differing levels of investment in the co-creation process. Some were clearly more comfortable with a course designed entirely by the teacher […] I reminded them of the importance of participation in class, in order to benefit from the humanistic, relational, and socio-constructivist learning philosophy and practice. We planned the assignments and methods of assessment. Their choices were similar to what I would usually*

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[1] https://guidetoallyship.com

> *plan for a Humanities course. The difference was they were the ones who proposed these assessments. They had ownership for the measurement and evaluation of their learning experiences, [which] included both self-assessment and peer-assessment components, [positioning] them in a more active and central role in the curriculum.* (PR2)

Engaging students in curricula flattens the hierarchy between teachers and learners. Enabling students to determine learning goals acknowledges the value of prior knowledge that each participant brings to the learning experience. PR2's students talked about the vibrant community that had been created in their course:

> *each day [students] read their creative writing pieces aloud to the class and received "critical friend" feedback; realizing that they could be helpful to one another as listeners and critical friends.* (PR2)

Experiences where students are exposed to others' identities and can examine their own were evident.

> *I start the course by sharing with them different narratives of young people who were born in Spain or the Basque Country but their families were migrants. They read the experiences they faced as a child and particularly at school, and reflect and talk about them with their classmates.* (PR3)

PR1 highlighted opportunities academic staff offer to students to examine their own identity in a workshop she runs for teachers about internationalising the curriculum:

> *We consider ideas such as […] if students have an opportunity to critically reflect on their own values (and thus gain a better and more tolerant attitude toward values of others).* (PR1)

Derived from the analysis of the reflective writing and the videos, there was evidence of decolonising curricular moments that enabled learning by students and teachers. These activities have the potential to be transformative for both parties, but require staff to let go their need to demonstrate their expertise, and to incorporate students' own lives in the process. PR3's engagement with the local community highlights this opportunity:

> *(…) But during our course we try to go a step further, not only letting them be mere spectators but also offering them an experience of real contact with students of migrant families, or from other cultural backgrounds, for example Roma people. Based on the service-learning approach, each team has to get to know a neighbourhood of our city. They search for information about it, the population who live there, their cultures, language, the places they go to in the neighbourhood, the services they count on, and the organizations, NGOs, associations located there. (…) By learning from these experiences, each team starts designing the proposal, getting in contact with members of associations, organizations, or schools of the neighbourhood to organize the activity with them. Finally, the students carry out the activities where they show the sensitivity they have developed towards other unheard voices, start listening to them and knowing each other, and establish more equal relationship with the children and their families.* (PR3)

PR1's reflective writing highlighted transformational opportunities embedded in teaching. In her internationalisation workshop she and university teachers consider:

> *whether students get an opportunity to explore other cultural perspectives in their disciplines through international articles and comparative studies, international speakers, engagement with students from different cultures in our collaborative partner institutions abroad.* (PR1)

Purposefully challenging the ethnocentric nature of the curriculum was evident in the data. In PR1's workshop she discussed with teachers:

> *how ethnocentric the curriculum might be. This is by far the most challenging to unpack, but generally there are some in the group who have already considered this [and their contributions] trigger ideas from others.* (PR1)

Challenges to decolonising curricula were highlighted the unsustainability of decolonising efforts when they happen in an isolated and under-supported area of the institution.

4.5. Theme: Measuring and evaluating: impact, policies, and obstacles

We classified data segments that related to assessing the impact of the PRs' decolonising curricula efforts, as well as policies and obstacles that hindered these efforts. In this section, we decided not to identify the specific PR to ensure the anonymity of the institutions discussed.

The Western university is foundationally colonial, making decolonising curricula a counter-action to the epistemological and ontological pillars that uphold the academy. Our reflective writings and meetings explored this tension. How can we shift curricular and teaching practices when we are constrained by structures that recognise and reinforce a narrow, Western colonial view of teaching and learning?

> *In many cases, we maintain a theoretical discourse, rooted in a patriarchal occidental capitalism, which overlooks the majority of philosophical perspectives and knowledge.*

> *(…) We transmit this [universal and unique] discourse through our lectures. Lectures which are mainly one-directional, where dialogue and mutual reflection is not promoted among our students, and where the lecturer's authority and power are based on the evaluation system we imposed on our students by examining and giving marks, if they show they have internalised this [universal and unique] discourse. Lack of collaboration and collaborative reflection among colleagues is also generalised. Bureaucracy, external evaluation and competition are controlling academic development.*

Even academics with White privilege can experience isolation from the institution, especially when they are in precarious, non-tenured positions. Thus, we ask: if decolonising work remains on the margins, performed only by those in precarious roles, will change at institutional and systemic levels be possible? Or will decolonising curricula continue to occur only in isolated acts, by individuals?

> *This experience of collaboratively planning a course [with students] was a dream come true for me. It was so realistic and human to adjust the curriculum as we lived into relationship with one another and as the group came to know itself in a cohesive whole. This experience reaffirmed my wholehearted belief in the [co-curriculum making] philosophy. (…) The institution provided the infrastructure of classrooms, furniture, lights, and heating in which [the class] could meet, but the [decolonising curriculum was poorly funded and institutionally marginalised].*

Despite centring learners' prior knowledge and building new knowledge with them from there, our findings show Western bias in the pedagogical research as well as barriers to decolonising academic programmes that are governed by professional colleges such as Engineering, Medicine, Nursing, Teaching, etc., as these externally imposed standards are often grounded in colonising worldviews.

> *The biggest shortcoming however is the nature of the pedagogic literature itself which is Western focused (…).*

> *Many programmes of study are governed by professional standards, and these themselves may be culturally bound (…). But if you can raise awareness of this, and encourage [colleagues] to help students to see the cultural boundness of disciplines, it expands their horizons, and can lead to ontological shifts in the way they see the world.*

While obstacles to decolonising curricula revealed in the findings of this study demonstrate tension within the academy, the data uncovered harmonies or moments with potential for advancing decolonising efforts. As more and more students take the

initiative to challenge status quo policies and practices, they may help to lead needed changes, as long as faculty and staff are willing, and have the courage to change themselves/ourselves.

> *(…) engaging and empowering students provides a great opportunity to explore decolonisation, but the university faculty and management have to be open to ideas, and be prepared to be challenged. [These conversations] need to be explored in smallish groups with mutual respect and patience.*

There is great need for engaging community members from within and beyond academia who have been excluded from curriculum making.

- *involving people, particularly those in vulnerable situations;*
- *establishing equal power in relationships;*
- *promoting dialogue and reflection, individual and collective reflection;*
- *fostering change;*
- *producing valid knowledge collaboratively;*
- *exercising a "self-reflective attitude" as researchers and lecturers.*

> *This requires more thorough and committed work, joining the university with the community through mutual understanding and collaboration, dealing with the demands of our society by working together and sharing our knowledge in order to achieve change and transformations towards global justice, equity, and sustainability.*

The findings indicate that we, as teachers, researchers, and women, feel that our identities have been profoundly influenced by our physical, political, and social places. Acknowledging our positions of White privilege, we exercised consciousness by processes of self-reflection and collaborative reflection, where our positionalities were questioned by one another.

The reflective process and collaborative nature of this research study helped us to uncover the complex nature of identity and open us to greater awareness of the multiple layers of our own identities, as well as the complex identities of our students.

Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) describe three stages in Indigenisation:

> *Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation indigenization, and decolonial indigenization … [where] on one end of this continuum, the academy maintains most of its existing structures while assisting Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in succeeding under this normalized order, and on the other end, the university is fundamentally transformed by deep engagement with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous intellectuals, and Indigenous knowledge systems for all who attend.* (p. 218)

Considering our pedagogical practices and explorations in decolonising curricula, we have each travelled different paths towards decolonising curricula: engaging with pedagogies that promote transformational change; involving students in the process of negotiation and decision making about learning goals, activities, assessments, and curriculum adjustments; engaging students in examining their own identities; and engaging students with local communities. We have each encountered obstacles to sustaining and centring decolonising practices within institutional approaches to curriculum, educational practices, and research, and this resistance is not uncommon across the sector (Raffoul et al., 2022). We are at the beginning of this process. Tensions arise when confronting the Eurocentric epistemological and ontological pillars of the academy alongside our own academic career development that is itself often grounded in colonising worldviews. Academic institutions as a whole must begin to listen to and support the driving force of students and staff who are challenging

status quo policies and practices at the university, and to engage with community members, particularly those, thus far, excluded from curriculum making.

However, despite the challenges we face, we believe we have a role to play and a responsibility, as allies in the process of decolonising the curriculum. Much of our role is centred on raising our own critical consciousness, continuing to develop understanding of our privilege, and levering our power where we can to instigate change in our respective universities. Most importantly, we need to exercise humility in our engagement with Indigenous staff and students, and start with "listening and sharing in the emotional labour involved in the work" (Ward 2021, p. 15).

5. Conclusion

This study sought to develop our understanding of White privilege and to question our cultural positioning through a collaborative autoethnographic approach with a focus on our role in and efforts towards decolonising curricula. A subsequent aim was to examine whether using the reflective prompts were effective in uncovering our biases, and to provide an opportunity to understand and develop effective, decolonising pedagogic processes for ourselves as teachers. A further aim was to examine whether our approach would be useful for other teachers in higher education.

When we started this collaborative autoethnographic process, we were unsure how the study would unfold. We, as participant-researchers, have realised however, that the collaborative process of working, communicating, and listening to each other throughout the study has provided an enriching and transformative opportunity for personal and professional development. The interrogation of "our personal stories, lenses and narratives of self" (Kempf, 2020, p. 119) has provided a challenging and rewarding process to advance our respective understandings. The process has been sometimes challenging, even painful at times, but we have realised that we need to 'get over ourselves' and be braver in making mistakes. We must treat the uncomfortable feelings and insights that arise as important opportunities to make visible the pervasiveness of the colonial project and opportunities for unlearning our colonial ways of thinking and being. Through this study, we have become increasingly aware of the normalisation of colonial perspectives, and our responsibility to disrupt them. This disruption enables and emboldens us to further explore and practise decolonising pedagogies with students, staff members, and community members.

In our collaborative post-analysis reflection, we were aware however, that a limitation of the study and to our current awareness of colonialism may be the gaps in our narrative which were consciously or unconsciously omitted when we reflected on our experiences. The stories we left out might reveal a reluctance to examine ways in which we contribute to the ongoing colonial project, maintaining the status quo, and continuing to participate in an academic hierarchical system. This work therefore needs to be active and ongoing. We will not reach a point where we can say, "Now the curriculum has been decolonised." Rather, we must commit to living out a decolonising curriculum as an ongoing practice.

 We would encourage colleagues within academic institutions to participate in reflective practices followed by discussion (using prompts, texts or other similar points of discussion), particularly in small groups where trust can be developed, difficult conversations can take place, and personal transformation can be facilitated. We would be pleased if the collaborative process used in this study served as a framework for such collegial explorations.

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Brief CV of the authors

Sue Tangney

Dr Sue Tangney is a New Zealander living in the United Kingdom, and of British and Irish descent. She was until recently a Principal Lecturer and academic developer at Cardiff Metropolitan University in Wales, and is a Principal Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. She continues to research and write in a freelance capacity. Email: suetangney@hotmail.com

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6297-1134

Julie A. Mooney

Julie A. Mooney is a settler-Canadian of Irish and Scottish ancestry, living and working in Moh'kinsstis (the Blackfoot word for the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers), on Treaty 7 territory and the Homeland of the Métis Nation of Alberta. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies from the University of Alberta, with a specialization in Adult, Community, and Higher Education. A member of the 3M National Teaching Fellowship, and owner/senior consultant at In the Midst Educational Consulting, Dr. Mooney has been serving in academic and educational development roles in Canadian higher education institutions for nearly two decades. Email: juliemooney@inthemidst.ca

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2197-7780

Ana Luisa López-Vélez

Dr. Ana Luisa López-Vélez is a Principal Lecturer at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) and an academic researcher as part of the IKHEZI (educational research) research team (IT1703-22). She prepares future teachers to reflect on the way they view and respond to diversity in their teaching and learning practices, considering inclusion, (dis)ability and interculturality. She has a PhD in Education (2007) from the University of Manchester. At the international level, she has been a consultant for the UNESCO Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean in the area of inclusive education and educational innovation. Email: analuisa.lopez@ehu.eus

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6993-4395