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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Thank you for tuning in to the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast, brought to you by a student-staff partnership at the University of Westminster. This is a platform for students and educators to exchange knowledge and encourage discussion about the current challenges facing higher education. I'm your host, Kyra, and this is our second part of our two-part episode with Westminster Lecturer in English Literature, Kate M Graham.

Kyra: I wanted to dedicate some time to talking about Black History Year, that initiative at Westminster, and this is an initiative that recognises that, you know, having a month dedicated to Black history will never be enough, so it has been their aim to kind of host workshops, seminars, and other spaces that not only explore Black history but reflect on how it's kind of shaped the Black experience today. When did you become involved in Black History Year, and why is this a project, [an event, kind of series], important to you particularly?

Kate: So, I became involved...not at the very beginning but sort of just after it had taken shape as a year, and I became involved because, along with our friend Jennifer Fraser, I was organising the School of Humanities' new writing festival, and we thought here's a really great opportunity to do like a crossover event – we can join forces with the Black History Year team and we can arrange a panel discussion, and it ended up being a panel discussion about Black voices and the Black archive and thinking about how Black writers used the archives to sort of shape the creative work that they were doing. And then I've stayed because I was like...I don't want to do a one-off thing, I want to...I want to make a meaningful ongoing contribution to what is just like...such an important project. As you just said, refusing the confines of a month I just think is so important because...it's just another way of containing stories and voices of peoples, right, and it's wrong, and I think, to have a group of people who, you know, are wanting to get together and say we're going to change that, say no, is like great. That's good energy, isn't it, when you're like, "I'm not going to do what you're going to tell me to." And, you know, I want to – so, I think there's a massive political importance to what we're doing, and I want to be part of that, I want to contribute to that, and I want to be the kind of ally that shows up in an ongoing fashion, not just a like "Oh, I'm here because this is the moment in the year where our interests collide," like I want to make a...I want to make an ongoing contribution and to be present and to stand up. That just feels really important for me. Also, the Black History Year team are just like wonderful. It's a great pleasure.

Kyra: Amazing. And of course you also play a key role in our own steering group on the Pedagogies for Social Justice project. But in all your experience of being on steering



committees and leading your own projects, what are some of the major lessons that you've learnt about kind of like leadership and partnership, particularly in movements towards kind of like social justice?

Kate: Trying to pin down one answer to that one [laughing] is kind of...it's kind of tricky, isn't it? But I think that...I think that we need to think here about who we're centring, what voices are we...who are we listening to and what voices are we centring, and who are we working in partnership with, and how are we sort of contributing to those, and I think that...I think that making sure that the people who are in... I mean, (a) I think both of those spaces work so well because they have like leadership, but they're also very sort of non-hierarchical spaces. Like, I mean, you know, you do such an amazing job of like chairing...of chairing those meetings and leading those discussions, which you do because you're so prepared and so thoughtful in how you do it. And in Black History Year, you know, Debs is just such a wonderful kind of de facto leader. But, also, everyone in those spaces is there to contribute, everyone in those spaces is there to take part, and everyone in those spaces has each other's backs, and I think that that's just absolutely... Those are sort of communities of support, and I think communities of care as well. We reflect on this quite a lot, I think, in our Pedagogies for Social Justice meeting, that just the importance of like sitting and listening to each other, the power of that is like...it's so wonderful, so restorative. Like, you know, you can be having a kind of terrible day or week or whatever and you think, oh, I've got another two-hour meeting to go to – you get in that room and instantly you're just like, oh yeah, we're here to like...just care, and to think, to think slowly, and to build in an ongoing fashion. And it's the same in Black History Year, right, like we re-visit the same conversations, the same sort of "How are we going to develop this? What are we going to do?" but there's no "We've got to do it now, now, now!" You know, even though I think both groups feel University pressure to like produce now, now, now, we've both managed to resist it in different ways. And I think that's...so much of that comes from, you know, good leadership, but also flat leadership as well, if that makes sense...?

Kyra: Yeah. No, I completely agree, and I think, coming into this myself, like I've learnt how, as much as these spaces need to be like transformative and, you know, doing the work, but they also need to be spaces of healing, and I feel like that's so important for that, like just coming off your point, and, yeah, I'm happy that you feel that way, like being in those meetings and things like that.

Kate: Absolutely. Well, I think they're both spaces for storytelling as well, right? Like even whether that's a story of...you know, the kind of utopian story of the worlds that we're trying to build, or whether those are stories about like how our day has been, or whether those are stories about Black entrepreneurs, or, you know, whatever, whatever those stories are, that those are stories in which we facilitate storytelling, and that storytelling – for me, again, I'm a romantic, I love literature, but like, for me, storytelling brings knowledge, it offers compassion, it asks us to reflect, and I think... So, often, universities can be spaces...can demand...demand that they're spaces of production, and anything we can do to resist that – well, I think storytelling is a really good way to resist that, and I think



both these spaces just foster really lovely environments for that, so yeah...

Kyra: So, moving on, I think, when it comes to like social justice movements, people who align and kind of involve themselves in that kind of work might consider what they are doing to be a practice of like allyship and identify themselves as an ally. In a kind of general sense, what does being an ally mean to you?

Kate: So, I think being an ally, for me, means listening to and showing up for communities that are marginalised. It means acknowledging and interrogating the ways in which you are privileged and others aren't. I think being an ally can be such a kind of deeply powerful thing, and, you know, I really genuinely believe that taking allyship seriously and actually like showing up to work in coalition can create real social change. But I think, for me, being an ally is about action. It's about actually showing up and it's about taking part in making change. So, for me, I think being an ally is very much about – well, in order to be a good ally, it's about reflecting on how you can take part, how you can do that work, and also how you can constantly kind of develop and move forward as an ally because I think, you know, we might all be at different stages in like our journey of being an ally, right? Maybe you're at the listening and reading stage, but then make sure that that turns into that action stage, you know.

Maybe you're in the self-reflection stage – make that sure that turns into the reading stage. Or whatever that looks like for you... There's no – I'm not going to map a progression, right, but thinking about what you can do. So, for me, I think...I think I would say, around Black Lives Matter, so since 2013, there's obviously like social media has been such an important part of social justice and about fostering these conversations and having these conversations, and I always...when I reflect back, I can think about moments where I was like, okay, I better get better at social media – if I want to do this, I've got to get better at social media. Like I'm not good at social media, it makes me anxious, it does not make me happy – occasionally, I'll put a picture of my cat on Instagram, but like I am not... it's not an arena that I'm confident in, shall we say. And it took me a while to be like, okay, but then that's not how you be an ally. Figure out what it looks like for you, you know? And thinking you're doing this work in your teaching, so just think about how you could do it more, do it better, make broader changes, speak to more people about it. And so, I think it's really important to think that being an ally will look different for different people, but it's asking yourself what are you doing practically, like who are listening to, and how are you developing. It's not... I think, in some ways, I think some of what we...some of the pain and violence that Black communities, and that queer communities perhaps in particular, are experiencing at the moment is actually because we've had a very static model of allyship, in which allies haven't really felt like they need to like reflect on what it means to be an ally, what it means to be like a friend to the gays or whatever – like that that reflection hasn't taken place. There's been a sort of static...staticness, and I...I wonder, you know, I think being an ally is a mobile developing position that we need to reflect on.

Kyra: Yeah. Thank you. And I'm so happy you've made that point of like being an ally looks



different for everyone, like, you know, we need people on – I was having a conversation about this with somebody quite a while back, but like, you know, we need people on like the frontline, in the protests, we need people in the academy, we need people in government. You know, there's so many different ways that you can be an ally, and I'm happy that you picked up on that point, yeah.

Kate: So important. We can all take part. We should all take part.

Kyra: Yeah. So, how do the responsibilities of an ally differ from those of a white ally, would you say, particularly within like kind of anti-racist and decolonial work?

Kate: So, again, I think this is a really good question, and I think it's...it's a really difficult thing because I think that being a white ally – whatever your...any kind of allyship involves a kind of self-reflection and involves acknowledging the sort of privileges that you hold or that you have benefited from, and I think why allies have to interrogate a thing that we've been trained not to see, we've been trained not to speak about, and that, for a lot of people, is really difficult to talk about, and so there's a... So, white allies have to do that work and get over that defensiveness, and white allies have to sort of let go, I think, of positions of privilege and positions of silence, and I think that can be really, really difficult for people. And I think, for some white allies, there's a tension in acknowledging that you've benefited from structural racism, but also being like, you know, I didn't do structural racism but I'm benefiting from it, and as long as I don't talk about it, I'm perpetuating it. I think that move is...is difficult for people, and I think that...yeah, I think that self-reflection is hard, and I think being a white ally means doing that work. And it's...like it's really rewarding work. It's socially rewarding, intellectually rewarding, powerful, a powerful thing to do, and there are loads of resources to help you do it, you know, and you can do and make that change. But I think one of the things I often see in my role as EDI lead for the School of Humanities is I see that defensiveness, and I see that anxiety and I see that fear when people are asked to reflect on who they are as a white person, and who they are as a white person in the academy. And I think also like being a white ally in spaces like a university, a space of white privilege, means you have a voice and you need to use it. You can make change. You need to make it, you know, for me...

Kyra: And what would you say are some of the risks of doing kind of ally work? In your experience, have you seen there are ways in which like it can be more destructive than transformative?

Kate: Yeah. So, again, I think this is a really interesting question. I think it's...you have to be so careful when you're doing this work because...I think, firstly, I think you have to be like a trustworthy white ally. I'm taking that term from a woman called Melanie S Morrison, and it's just the idea that you've got to be reliable, you've got to show up when everyone isn't looking, you know, you've got to...you know, your Black colleagues have to know that you're going to do the work when they're not there. So, I think that that's really important because allyship can be performative – you know, allyship can be something you say you're doing when you're not. So, I think being trustworthy...you know, I think that



performativeness can be destructive, right, if you say you're doing it and you're not.

I also think it's really vital, as an ally, to think about what spaces you're occupying and how you're taking up space in there. You know, so if I'm the only white person in a Black History Year Steering Group Committee, how am I taking up space in that meeting? I think about that a lot, partly because some of the most awful homophobia and queerphobia I've witnessed has been in gay spaces from straight people who would describe themselves as allies, but who haven't done that work of reflecting on what it means to be...from the majority in that minority space, or what it means to be from the community that does the marginalising in the spaces of those marginalised people. So, I think it's vital that...you know, I think the risks of doing that work are that, if you don't reflect on yourself, if you don't reflect who you are in those spaces, you can centre yourself, and, you know, you can damage those spaces by doing that. You know, as an ally, I'm there to listen, to support, and to centre other voices. That's what I'm there to do. And I think, when that goes wrong, that can be really...you know, that can be dangerous.

Kyra: So, I guess the question is: what are some of the first steps towards kind of doing allied work in the University? Because I think some people, particularly like white lecturers and members of staff in the University, I think they're just kind of like, "Where do I start?"

Kate: Yeah.

Kyra: But what do you feel like is required of them first...?

Kate: Yeah. Good. So, I guess I feel pulled in two directions with a question like this [laughing] because there's a bit of me that wants to be like "Decolonise your curriculum! Think about the representation of thinkers and speakers. Think about how you're engaging with different models of knowledge. Learn to value embodied knowledge. Do some training. Learn about and implement inclusive assessment." And then I'm like...that's quite a list... And then I'm like, actually, just listen, just start...start by listening. Listen to those in your institution, or your circle, right – this works outside the University too. Listen to those who are from a kind of marginalised or non-majority position and adopt a position of care, right, adopt a position of care. I think, if we work from a position of compassion and care, that would just be...if more of us did that, that would be very powerful. And I think that, again, self- reflection...like who are you in...who are you, first? What kind of positions of power, positions of privilege, do you occupy, or have been put in, you know, because maybe you didn't put yourself there? How are you benefiting from that? How can you reflect on that position? And then I also think it's important for academic staff to reflect on the kind of...reflect on what meaningful change is, right, because I think that, often, you know, in my big long list of things, like decolonise your curriculum, value embodied knowledge, really, those can really easily turn into just like ticking boxes, you know, and that's not making meaningful change. That's not deconstructing or developing your pedagogical practice. And I think that...one of the very...one of the very, very fundamental reasons that people don't do this work is that they don't have time, right, that if we actually want to make meaningful change, and we should want to make meaningful



change, we need time and space to do that. It takes time to undo all of the things we've been taught. It takes time to unlearn structural racism and white supremacy and heteronormativity. And if you, as a lecturer, feel that you don't have time to do that work – like you probably don't because we are overwhelmed, right, very fundamentally overwhelmed – but tell people that you can't do it then. Tell people, "I want to make this change and I can't." Because I actually think that if people – again, one of the things I see a lot is people being like, "I can't do it! When am I supposed to do it? How am I supposed to do it?" So, tell your line manager that you can't, that you want to but you can't, because if you create enough noise about that, then maybe someone will have to act on it, you know. And if, you know, you say, "I want to be an ally but I don't have time or space," maybe you force the institution...hopefully you force the institution to create time and space. So, I think, you know, we can do that tick-box list of things to do, and there are so many resources out there, so many resources – I mean, like look at the Pedagogies for Social Justice website, you know, for a start, so like those resources are out there – but I think listening and adopting a position of care I think are...are like...a really strong base to start from.

Kyra: Yeah. Actually, previously, I was talking to Ipshita from International Relations, and she was kind of talking about how...we were talking about doing social justice work in the University from like an academic perspective and how she said that like sometimes, with social justice, there is that element of kind of like sacrifice, like sometimes doing allied work means like giving up your afternoon so that you can be present at a seminar and things like that. And I think...it just kind of rang bells for me, thinking about this quote – I can't remember who it's from, but kind of saying that there's always time for doing the right work, and, you know, it's kind of how you perceive it as well.

Kate: Yeah. That's such a good point, because you can always make time, and I think...and I think one of the things it's worth reflecting on is...well, one of the things it's worth asking yourself in that situation is what's the most important thing, what is going to make the most change, and, as academics, often the things that we're told are important aren't important, like, you know...I'm trying to politically pick a thing to say [laughing], but, you know, like writing module leader reports, you know, can take ages, you know, getting all the data for your module leader report, which no one is going to look at, right, but you take time to do that. Actually, don't, don't do that...like maybe...I'm going to radically advocate just don't do it – spend that time instead doing some training or doing some learning, doing some reading, doing some listening, like because, actually, that would have a much more positive impact on the academic community and on your students in particular, you know. So, I think, sometimes, the institution has hierarchies of what it values or what it tells you is important, and...those are wrong, you know. We can create space for the things that are important, and we can sacrifice the things that aren't important for the things that are. So, it's, again, reflecting on what will make change, reflecting on what has value...

Kyra: Yeah, exactly. This isn't to tell lecturers to miss their lectures...



[Laughter]

...but, you know, like, yeah, like it is a choice, and sometimes we need to say no, like there's power in saying no as well.

Kate: Yeah. I mean, I think that's also a really important thing to centre, that we can say no, that we can choose, you know, we can choose what we work on and... Big institutions like to make out like we can't, but we can, you know, we can do that. I think flexing that muscle a little bit, I think...I think wouldn't go astray.

Kyra: Yeah, exactly.

So, just going back to talking about English curricula, in what ways is English Lit a colonial kind of discipline? I'm sure there's multiple answers to this question, but kind of what sticks out most for you?

Kate: So, I think I would say that English Literature is...is a super-colonial subject, a super-colonial area, both in terms of like how it's constructed as a discipline and the very way in which we use English literature without really interrogating what we mean by "English". It's sort of centrally there...there in the name. I think one of the major things for me is just always this notion of the canon that inflects everything that we do as Literature scholars, and the idea also that we've got to teach the canon before we can try to undo the canon – like I don't think we do! I don't think we need to spend a year doing the canon. We could spend a week doing the canon, and then immediately go into all the exciting stuff that...that undoes it and that tries to challenge it, and, in doing that, we're thinking about, straightaway, whose voices are we centring. We don't have to centre the white men in order to de- centre them, right? The work has already been done. The centring work has been done. We don't need to reinforce it. But I think asking people to move away from that is...is a really sort of challenging thing to do because I think there's a sort of... I think the canon operates in such sort of... nefarious ways [half-laughing], where there's the sort of...there's the big canon that we all know, but then we challenge the canon by just sticking extra stuff in there. So, it used to be kind of dead white men, and now we've got a few white ladies in there too, but, yeah, not too many and they're also all dead. And, you know, we challenge it by expanding it. Like...maybe just ignore it... What happens if we do that, like something really radical I think? But then we also construct kind of smaller canons as a way of refusing the big canon, and, again, I just think let's...how do we do that work without even sort of constructing a centre and a margin? How do we refuse that model of knowledge, that model of value, that model of practice, which I think is a really important thing to do, but also a really challenging thing to do because the notion of like literary value is so tied up with the canon, with whiteness, and with masculinity, and also with heterosexuality, but I think we can see ways in which actually like white male homosexuality has made its way into the canon fairly easily [laughing], you know, if we think about the canon as an expanding thing.

And I think the other thing that can make English Literature a very...colonial subject is the



way that we position discourses or conversations that, you know, come from the margins, right, that often post- coloniality is a module, critical race theory is a module, sexuality is a module, queerness is a module – and they're not core modules, they're option modules, and they're not in those sort of big core classes that we're teaching. They're things that people do if they have a special interest in them. By doing that, again, we're just reinforcing the centre and the margin as a model, as a sort of spatial model of knowledge, which, you know, is dangerous. It's wrong. And students know these are wrong. I've had so many wonderful conversations, over the past couple of years in particular, with students, who say...who've really eloquently expressed how powerfully important it is that everyone is having conversations about race, not just people who are affected by racism, that everyone is having conversations about homophobia, not just queer people. They know this. They're right. We need to act on this. We also know this [laughing]. We just need to act on it, and we need to, you know – we could just flip it and we instantly make things better, I would say. So, I think, yeah, thinking about what qualifies as a “niche interest” or a “special interest” – again, I'm using sort of [air-quotes/square quotes] around those words because they're not niche or special – you know, let's make this core, let's make these conversations central to the backbone of people's education.

And in English Literature in Westminster, we've just brought in this new 3rd year module which we've called Reading the Present, which has been sort of 18 months or so in the making, and it has at its heart an interrogation of race and coloniality. That's where the modules starts, with this notion that English Literature is a colonial beast and we need to interrogate what that means and how it...how it inflects through and impacts on everything that comes afterwards. And so, we start from that point, and then we work through, and, you know, the module has a kind of historic – it's arranged in three blocks, but each block sort of works historically, so we're going like backwards and forwards in time in ways that I think are quite exciting because we're trying to think about the ways in which, you know, colonial pasts or homophobic pasts shape our present, trying to ask those questions to challenge those simple narratives of progression, and, you know, we're looking at loads of different forms, so we're looking at...you know, we've got prison writing, we look at short stories, we look at poetry, we look at Ex Machina, the film, we think about trial transcripts, you know, we think about all different sort of forms and the way in which literature is absolutely central to how the social fabric is woven and that literature has such a central place in how we understand who we are, and how we change who we are and challenge who we are, and how we challenge structures of power. And, you know, the module ends in a place where we think about what's the relationship between literature and justice, both in a really literal sense of what's the relationship between literature and the law, and how might the law be used as a tool to silence particular communities, which it absolutely has been, historically, but also like how might literature be a force for justice? How might literature give a sort of voice to marginalised people? And, so, we end with a novel, which is a stunning, wonderful piece of work by Shola von Reinhold called LOTE. It was published, what, 2020, and it was published by Jacaranda Press, who, in 2020, published 20 new books by Black writers, Black British writers. It was the first time that anyone had ever done anything like that. It's a really, really amazing series, and this novel is absolutely astonishing. This novel is about this character called Matilda who is looking for Black queer history and



she's trying to think about what it means to find, you know, figures from...Black queer figures from the past, and, you know, when she finds them, they are so powerful, and it's so sort of like amazing and transformative for her. But then there's also these amazing like little historical narratives running through it which are really asking us to think about the ways in which like queer Black voices, Black voices in general, queer Black voices in particular, have been sort of silenced and consumed by white models of knowledge. And so, there's a – I don't want to give too much away in case people read it, but there's this amazing way in which this Black queer poet from the modernist period is literally consumed by white art theory, and it's such a powerful exploration of embodied knowledge, racial justice, the power of like queer history, the power of Black history. I just think everyone should read it, a wonderful, wonderful piece of work, and such a wonderful way to interrogate what the bodies of knowledge that prop up English Literature are actually doing, you know, and how they're actually sort of consuming...consuming the marginalised, in ways that are, you know, really distressing, and yet the novel itself is like a powerful celebration. So, yeah, a wonderful piece – read it!

Kyra: So, this module that you were talking about, it's for 3rd year students, right, English Lit students?

Kate: Yeah, 3rd year English Literature students, and it's a core module.

Kyra: Okay, nice...

Kate: That was, when we were designing it, that was absolutely...we were very insistent that it was core. But other students on other Humanities degrees can also take it if they're interested, so, yeah, it's not a sort of closed thing, it's open. And, yeah, it's been really exciting to teach it for the first time, and, honestly, some of the student work that has been produced as part of that module is some of the most amazing I've ever seen. So, I think it's also - and this is what we wanted to do, was, you know, to give students whose lives have been shaped by colonial legacies a chance to reflect on and speak to that, and some of what they did in response to that was wonderful...so...more powerful.

Kyra: We might need to sit in on one of these classes!

Kate: Oh yeah, yeah, you're totally, totally welcome to. They do presentations – sit in on the presentations because that's such a moment of, you know, like, wow, you guys are mind-blowing! And also students who've been through the pandemic and online learning...hope you're okay [laughing], and then like, "Yeah, you are, look at you!"

Kyra: Amazing. So, I wanted to ask, as a lecturer, do you find it challenging to kind of introduce decolonial readings of knowledge in your course? Like maybe not thinking about this core module now that you're teaching but in other kind of areas, is it a challenge for you sometimes?

Kate: The challenge is in having the time to do it properly. Because like, in some ways, it's



kind of easy, right? Like the material is there, it's just finding it and putting it on your course and committing to it. It's exciting to do. Like, this year, I put on, again, another very contemporary novel, like 2018, by Michael Donkor, 'Hold'. It's about sort of...it's sort of got two narratives, one set in Ghana and one set in London, and it's sort of juxtaposing sexuality, desire, and female friendship in those locations, a really wonderful text. We had a brilliant conversation about sort of Ghanaian history and LGBTQ rights, and the histories of coloniality and the ways in which they've shaped sort of contemporary Ghana. So, it can be...so, one of the best classes I've taught this year, so super, super exciting, but making sure that you make the time to like do that properly and that, you know, that you're making time to centre the right voices in those conversations can be a challenge. But again, as Ipshta says, it's about making the time for the things that are important and making those sacrifices. And, you know, again, like...there's a pleasure in doing that work, selfishly. Like, you know, you're learning all this amazing stuff, facilitating great conversations, students are coming alive when you teach them, you know, and that's just really important. So, I think there's a level on which now that it's not challenging. We can all do it, right? But I think there is a sort of...I think there's a challenge in making sure that you don't take for granted what it means to introduce decolonial readings, right? Because it's not just...it's not just me saying, "Oh, Michael Donkor is a Black British man with Ghanaian heritage, so I'll just throw him on the course – job done!" It's about thinking how can I, as a white woman, then facilitate a conversation about Ghanaian history, right? How do I do that? How do I think about who I am in the classroom in that moment? How do I think about what voices I'm bringing in to have that conversation? You know, how do I think about how I'm letting students who might have Ghanaian heritage speak in that space? How am I creating spaces for all of those different voices? And I think that, often, we take for granted that that's...we take for granted that, if you're going to do it properly, that takes time, that takes thought, that takes reflection, you know, and we live in a moment where we're all time-poor so... But, again, we make space, we make space...

Kyra: Yeah, exactly. So, I guess my question is then, just coming off what you've said now, like how can lecturers within English Lit begin to decolonise their pedagogy but really like create that kind of space where those discussions can be had? So, what are kind of the practical things or is there anything that you do particularly?

Kate: Yeah. So, I think, really, it's just asking yourself what voices are you centring. For me, that's just such a kind of useful question. And thinking about the level at which those different voices exist. So, you know, when we think about English Literature or any...you know, comparative literature, you know, literally, who is the text written by, but like who's in it, what's in it, what conversations are happening within it, what bodies of knowledge are we bringing into conversation with, you know, how we...how are we bringing different discourses in, how are we positioning the discourses that we bring in, you know, how are we making sure we're not universalising because, often, you know, I think that's a real...a real kind of danger. But then...so, I think there's that kind of practical thing in terms of like your curriculum, but then, for me, there's also something really important and very powerful, right, about like...what...what embodied knowledge do you have, what embodied knowledge do you lack, and what embodied knowledge is in the room, because I think often what we do is we privilege kind of intellectual knowledge, right, and, so often,



that kind of knowledge is tied up with like enlightenment, histories of rationality, which are just built on racism. So, how can we create space for students to bring...safe space for students to bring their own embodied knowledge into the room, into the space? And often I think that means reflecting on who we are in the classroom and acknowledging that we are not...a kind of abstract brain, that we come in with a class history and a racial history and a gender identity and all those kinds of things, and I think that...I think that we often, as lecturers, can fall back into the position of just being like, well, I am abstract, I am just...knowledge [laughing] or I am just facilitating knowledge, and you're not because you're standing in front of a room full of people. Just the very act of standing in front of a room full of people who are sitting down instantly brings a power hierarchy into play. If I, as a white woman, stand in front of a room full of students who are sitting down and looking up at me, and, you know, who are BAME, that's another power that's inflecting on that. If I was a white man standing in front of a room full of female students, there's another sort of power thing there. And I think it's really important that we think about that, and I think, for me, that's really vital.

And I think some...like...like back in my early teaching career, I can think of moments where I thought I needed to stand at the front of the room and be authoritative, and so I'd push my posh voice on and, you know, I said things and facts, and, actually, it didn't work [laughing]! Like, honestly, going into the room and thinking about who I am and reflecting on who I am, not in a kind of weird, centring myself way, but, you know, reflecting on who I am in that space, and acknowledging that I don't know things, the power of saying, "I don't know – what do you think?" or "Where is that question coming from?" or "Do you want to say a little bit more about that?" like letting someone else's like knowledge into the space and drive the conversation I think is a wonderful, wonderful thing. You know, not pretending I'm something I'm not, and not...and acknowledging that...again, like...trying to find ways of not just leaning into the empty vessel model of teaching, right? Students know more than me about loads of things, so my job is not to like tell them stuff – my job is to facilitate a conversation about things that we've all read. And there will be moments where, because of my experience, I have a different kind of knowledge, but my job is to introduce people to that knowledge, not to be expert on that knowledge. And so I think that that...so, I guess those three things then: thinking about what voices are you centring in terms of your curricula, thinking about how embodied knowledge is allowed to be present and is valued in your classroom spaces, and thinking about who you are when you stand at the front and what you're there to do, what your role is. I think those three things can really help decolonising both your pedagogical practice and your curricula, because I think, too often, we forget that those things go hand-in-hand, right?

Kyra: Yeah, absolutely. And like, for me personally, like even still as a student, like I think I learn so much from the lecturers that are just like transparent and just kind of treat us kind of like as equals, and like, you know, this is like an equal discussion that we're having here, rather than just the typical, like you say, like, you know, standing at the front and then just saying all these things. Like I think it makes such a difference to the learning experience, and like you really get the most out of...university that way, I think.



Kate: Yeah, because you're involved in a conversation, and that's what...that's where good learning lies, right, in having conversations, and conversations should be like multi-vocal, not just one person dominating [laughing].

Kyra: Thank you. And I guess lastly, just for this segment, what advice would you give to students in or entering university that also kind of want to demand social justice within that space?

Kate: Yeah. So, I mean, I think, firstly, like thank you for coming in and making that demand...because I think we...we need...we need you to do that. It's a hard thing to do, so thank you for doing it. And then I would say like...[...] support are vital for doing this work – you know, I think this is probably implicit in the things we've said about Pedagogies for Social Justice and Black History Year, but finding...finding (a) work that's already happening that you can get involved in is really valuable, and then those spaces as community support, learning spaces, I think are also really, really, you know, valuable things because we work better when we work together, right, and when we're listening to each other. So, I think things like, you know, things like Black History Year, things like Pedagogies for Social Justice, student societies – you know, one of the things that we have at Westminster is we've got our EDI champions, so from each School, students who are paid to do work around EDI, you know, finding those opportunities, finding those structures, and getting involved with them, I think is a really good way to make that demand for social justice. And then I would say that there's lots of channels available for students to sort of voice their opinions and to make those demands. Those might be things like your course reps on whatever course you're doing, those might be things like talking to the Student Union, and like use those channels that are there but also ask for evidence that someone has responded to them because I think, too often, those channels – we build channels that encourage people to say stuff, but then don't...but then they're just like echo-chambers, right? If the student is coming to me and saying this is a problem, I think I have an obligation to say this is what we've done about it, but, too often, that reciprocity isn't...it's not a conversation. So, ask for sort of...proof of...evidence of change or evidence of action.

And then I would also suggest to those students go rogue, right? Fine, there are these things that already exist, but you can also go rogue, like get the email addresses of people in power and email them. Email the VC – like his email address is on the internet. I'm using "he" because the Westminster VC is a man – I don't mean to gender all VCs. But like refuse that hierarchical model that tells you that you can't speak to these people because they're too high up, like whatever that might mean. They are there to create an environment in which you can learn – that's their job. And if you feel they haven't done that, tell them, reach out to them, because they have to listen, that's what their job is, and I think, too often, they're sort of cloistered away. So, reach out to them. Don't listen to that hierarchy. Just go and [...].

Kyra: You heard it here first – go rogue [laughing]!



Kate: Can I add one thing to that as well?

Kyra: Yeah, of course.

Kate: I think what I would also say to students who are doing that valuable, vital work of like demanding social justice within the space of a university, or within any space, right, anyone who is doing that work of demanding social justice, I think the other piece of advice I'd give them is...that work can sometimes be really exhausting, it can sometimes be really hard. You know, giant institutions are slow and not the most responsive beasts in the world. So, make sure you're taking care of yourself, and if you need to take time out, that's okay. I think sometimes it can feel like we've got to get up and do social justice and then go to bed, get up and do social justice, and sometimes we need to just get up and like play with a puppy or go for a walk or eat an ice-cream, whatever, because sometimes like actually going to an art exhibition is also doing social justice. So, find ways to take care of yourself within doing that work.

Kyra: Yeah. No, absolutely, and I think...like doing self-care allows you to do the best work that you can do as well, and I think not many people...they realise that too late or they just don't know, and I think, yeah, I'm happy that you raised that point. So, unfortunately, we're coming to an end to this interview. I could probably go on...

Kate: And I'm having a really lovely time [laughing]!

Kyra: But as a question I like to end on, what is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

Kate: Yeah. So, I think I've kind of got two things that I would say here. The first is I want to see institutions create meaningful space for people to do the work of decolonising, and I think that means time and space to reflect. I think that's vital. I think institutions have a responsibility to do that. And I think that, if they don't do that, they're just continuing this situation in which you can make a lot of noise but you aren't making any change, and I think that, you know, we both know, and we've reflected on this already, that to do that work takes space, it takes care, it takes slowing down, it takes conversation, it takes storytelling – those things take time. So, make that investment because, if you make that investment, you can change the game – like the power of what you can do by creating that space I think is so important.

And then my other one, and this is the thing I like to say in meetings that no one ever knows how to respond to, but I think we have to challenge hierarchies in really meaningful ways, because universities are so hierarchical, like in terms of how we construct the space for the seminar to how we're literally arranged as an organisation, just so, so, so hierarchical. You know, we only need to... And the majority of institutions are also very white at the top, and, you know, that's just...then we're just reproducing structural racism, just reproducing white supremacy, and we have to challenge that. You know, they're also often straight people in positions of power as well – you know, we have to challenge that.



And I think that, as long as we're in hierarchical spaces, we're not in inclusive spaces. As long as we're in spaces that rely on an imbalance of power to function, we are not doing inclusive work or creating inclusive spaces. So, I think, in the next 10 years, we have to address that. I think if we could do that, that would be a really radical and powerful thing, and, again, the kind of work we could do, you know, in terms of coloniality, in terms of diversity, in terms of, I don't know, just like what learning mean or how we think about learning, I think would be astonishing. And I think we get glimpses of it when we do like partnership work, get little glimpses of it, you know, I keep saying it but I think it's wonderful, in Pedagogies for Social Justice, we get glimpses of just how powerful and radical that transformation could be. And I think that we need to...that needs to go bigger, right? So, challenging hierarchies...

Kyra: Thank you so, so, so much for being here today, sharing your thoughts, and just being open to this – like I feel like I just know you so much deeper now....feel like we're best pals [laughing]!

Kate: Good, I'm glad! For sure! For sure! It was an absolute pleasure to have this chat with you and thank you for these amazing questions. Actually, I feel like I...doing that work is a powerful thing for me, you know, because, again, spaces of reflection, spaces of conversation, they're transformative, so thank you for creating that space.

Kyra: Thank you so much. Well, I will see you soon and, yeah, thank you again!

Kate: Take care, Kyra, and take care everyone who is listening!

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