



**To cite this podcast:**

Araneta, K., Fraser, J., & Maatwk, F. (Hosts). (2022, May 17). Kate M. Graham: Black History Year, white allyship and decolonial pedagogy in English Literature (Part 1) (No. 28). [Audio Podcast Episode]. In *Pedagogies for Social Justice*. University of Westminster.

<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj/tools/podcast/>

DOI <https://doi.org/10.34737/w12vq>

**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, for this two-part episode, I'll be in conversation with Westminster Lecturer in English Literature, Kate M Graham. In this interview, we discuss Kate's upbringing and how it shaped her understanding of race and sense of identity, we talk about her academic journey across her Bachelor's in English and her two Master's in Cultural & Critical Studies and Text & Performance Studies. We then move on to talk about decolonial and anti-racist projects within the University, specifically the Black History Year initiative at Westminster, before, finally, considering what it means to foster decolonial pedagogy in spaces in the University.

**Kyra:** Hi Kate, thank you so much for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It's so nice to finally have you here as a guest. How are you doing today?

**Kate:** Hi Kyra. I'm really good. It's an absolute pleasure to be here. I've been listening away and I'm excited to get a chance to chat to you.

**Kyra:** Amazing. So, I like to start things off with our guests just sharing a little bit about themselves, so, first things first, where did you grow up and where are you situated currently?

**Kate:** Yes. So, I grew up in Hounslow, over in West London, so I grew up, quite literally, underneath the Heathrow flightpath, which is a very particular kind of environment (laughing) to grow up in. But in terms of how I'm situated currently, so the kind of spaces that I occupy that like shape who I am, I'm a Lecturer at the University of Westminster in English Literature, currently a North Londoner now, which makes me feel a little bit guilty as a born West Londoner. I'm a queer woman with ADHD. I'm a writer. I'm a Brentford FC club fan. I'm a co-director of the Queer London Research Forum, and I sit on the steering committees for both Black History Year and Pedagogies for Social Justice, and I think those are the spaces that make me who I am.

**Kyra:** And just I guess re-visiting like your upbringing, how would you describe it in terms of how race was seen and felt in your household?

**Kate:** So, the first thing to say is that I'm a white woman, but I grew up in Hounslow, as I said, which was, and is, an incredibly diverse borough, and so the particular area where we



lived as a family, and the schools that I went to, were always really diverse spaces, and, as such, there was always a lot of discussion about what, in the late-'80s and early-'90s, was sort of termed "multiculturalism".

Obviously, that's a term that we've sort of interrogated now, but that's the term that we were using at the time. And, you know, I was really lucky because I grew up with parents who made sure that those conversations took place in our house. We never sort of just took for granted that existing in a diverse environment meant that you knew about diversity, meant that you understood. They were very, very careful to make sure that we were having reflective, thoughtful conversations about what it meant to be in a diverse space. So, race was something that we talked about in our household, and those kinds of conversations took really different sort of forms, like so we talked about our immediate lived experiences, so the ways in which...like how friends' households might look different to our own household. We talked about big news events, so like particular conversations I can remember about that, Palestine and Israel, and then the murder of Stephen Lawrence in the early '90s. You know, these were things that they sat us down to talk to us about. And then, also, we had loads of political mugs [laughing], so we had a lot of mugs with like anti-apartheid messages on them, and so there was a way in which, like in a very material sense, those conversations were like literally part of our everyday material existence.

And then, I guess, we also talked about race through music. So, my dad had this like wild, chaotic, amazing record collection which just covered everything – I mean, like contemporary classical music in there, like singing coal miners, folk music literally from around the world. I think, when we went through it, we had folk music from every continent. And blues, hugely, hugely into blues, and really into kind of contemporary R&B, so like he was a massive Frank Ocean fan – he'd wax lyrical about that Channel Orange album, really loved it. And so, there was always this sense of like listening, like a very oral way in which like the music of different locations was like in our house. But, again, it was something we reflected on, so like I had my '90s Indie music phase, but my dad was very clear to tell me that like, you know, Indie music is built on sort of rock n roll, and rock n roll is built on Black music. You know, those were the sort of conversations that we were having.

And then, also, theatre, like my dad took me to the theatre a lot, and he took me not just – well, he took me to like local theatre, and so, because we were in Hounslow, we went to a place called the Waterman's Art Centre in Brentford, and we saw productions by Tara Arts, so a theatre company that sort of centres and focuses on South-Asian voices, so we were seeing that kind of material and then talking about it and experiencing it.

So, race was very present as a conversation in our household.

**Kyra:** That just sounds so amazing and so refreshing, and your dad sounds so cool, by the way!



**Kate:** Thank you, yeah.

**Kyra:** But do you think like...were they always kind of interested in kind of addressing topics of race, and you feel like that's why it was kind of a thing to bring up to you – and I'm not sure if you had siblings as well – was there something that maybe triggered them to kind of want to bring up their children in a way that was like we want you to know about these certain things and know about this kind of music and be exposed to these certain cultures? Like what do you think was kind of behind that?

**Kate:** My parents were super, super-political, and they wanted us to grow up – so, I have a younger brother as well, and they wanted both of us to be able to grow up and be...be politically active and be politically reflective. You know, they were like crazy left-wingers [laughing]. When I talk about politics, I'm talking about a very particular kind of...kind of politics. I mean, even like '80s Labour were probably too centrist for my parents. And they wanted us to be able to talk about marginalisation, and whether that was a conversation about race or a conversation about sexuality or a conversation about gender, those were all things that we talked about and that we...we were sort of encouraged to think about. And then I think, because of the very specific location that we were in, right, like, you know, Hounslow is super-diverse, where we were was particularly diverse, and I think they didn't want to... they wanted to make sure that we were reflecting...reflecting on that. So, yeah, I mean, super-lucky because I know other people from Hounslow who grew up in exactly the same kind of environment that I did who didn't do that same kind of reflecting and critical thinking, and I think that was, really, a very powerful and important thing.

**Kyra:** Yeah, absolutely. So, in terms of, I guess, while you were growing up, what shows and kind of books did you watch and read? Did you see yourself in any of kind of like the representations you had access to?

**Kate:** Yeah, so, again, I think this is a super-interesting question because, obviously, as a Literature scholar and as a theatre person, like I just think representation is...is so important, and especially in terms of thinking about marginalised cultures, like representation is just so important. And I think, as a queer woman, I did not see myself in the kind of representations that I had access to. I think there was a sort of interesting point for me between...like coming out to myself and coming out to other people for the first time - and, obviously, I'm saying "for the first time" because coming out is never a thing you just do once, right? It's a thing you sort of do constantly. But there were a few years between that, and I think, in that period, actually, we did start to see stuff on TV. So, I think around 1995, there was this little...because that was a moment of change, I would suggest, and there were programmes like kind of 'A Village Affair' and 'Investigator', which were very white British programmes about what it meant to be a white British lesbian, and in a particular context as well, like the context of the village or the context of the army, which were completely removed from my sort of lived experience [laughing], and they were all very tragic and very intense, which is not really what you want to see when you're in that weird...in that weird in-between phase. But then, on Channel 4, there was something called Dyke TV, which was like this sort of curated selection of like films and...like films and



documentaries and like little short things, and a lot of those were American. So, I asked my dad to video these – I remember having a VHS with like Dyke TV written on it, and he taped it for me, and it was films like ‘Go Fish’ from 1994, and then, through the sort of director and actors in that film, I found Cheryl Dunye and her 1996 film, ‘The Watermelon Woman’, which is about Black queer history. And so, there was a really interesting moment at which...like the American stuff felt...you know, it was still kind of tragic and still about how do you survive [half-laughing], but it was much more celebratory and much more diverse, whereas the English stuff got very white, and I think that...that felt like a weird moment, as someone in diverse spaces trying to...trying to think about what it meant to be queer and how you...how you embody that and how you live that.

And then, I guess, I guess, later on, like...I should give a shout-out to Buffy [laughing] because, you know, all of the problems that we can now see in that, rightly, and should highlight, in that programme, it was so important in terms of like what it offered, em, like that kind of first representation of like lesbianism on telly, you know, was a sort of really...very powerful moment.

And I guess, in terms of like before, before that, when I was...when I was very little, my mum read me stories, like loads and loads of stories, and she was furious that all the protagonists in the stories that she was reading me were boys. So, she would change the gender of the protagonists as she went along, which I mean must have [laughing]...I would find that very hard to stick to, but...but she did it. And a brilliant moment, when I was an adult, when we were talking about how she’d done this, and she sort of said, like half-jokingly, she was like, “Oh, I think I made a little lesbian,” and I was like, “Mum, I don’t know if that’s how it works,” but, actually, I kind of hope that is my origin story because [laughing] it’s sort of amazing.

**Kyra:** Yeah. No, I love that, like kind of just like...your mum just made it so easy to kind of like just blur the lines between like what boys could do and what girls could do, and I think, yeah, like that probably did shape you, like in one way or another, which is great.

**Kate:** Yeah. 100%. And she was so like...so deeply committed to making sure that both me and my brother knew that...that there were no restrictions, and that gender was a thing that was made-up, and, you know, and I can see how powerful that’s been for my brother – like my brother is a proper little... proper little feminist. I say “little”, he’s like six-foot [laughing], but...but, you know, he’s a thoughtful, reflective dude.

**Kyra:** Amazing. So, you said that you were kind of more interested in kind of like the American kind of representations of queer people.

**Kate:** Yeah.

**Kyra:** How would you say that those kind of representations influenced things like your sense of style, and like your...like music and things like that, like your interests? Like how did that...was there an impact there?



**Kate:** Yeah, in some ways, yeah, because...but it was also really difficult to find that stuff. Because we sort of take for granted that we can just like go and find American stuff or like we can go watch K drama now, right? It wasn't quite that easy, and like we weren't a family who had...like we weren't early- adopters of the internet or anything like that. So, you know, you were sort of limited to what was on telly, what you could get in the library, which wasn't a huge amount of stuff [laughing]. So, I always felt myself trying to find those American things, but actually ending up sort of...like steeped in kind of English stuff, which, I guess, always felt like a little disappointing... That sounds a bit mean, doesn't it? But also, like all of this sort of starts happening at the point where I...I come out, and as soon as I came out, I went and got a job at Hounslow's premier local gay bar, so then I was very immersed, materially, in sort of lived London queer communities, and representation, for a while, became less important to me. There was sort of...you know, sort of four years or so where I was very much like... just living a queer life, rather than thinking about representation.

**Kyra:** And I guess, thinking about your like early school years and like the curriculum that you were under, when were you kind of introduced to issues of race, if you were, and, I guess, was it difficult because you'd come from a household where you were already having these really big political conversations about race and identity and things like that – was there like a kind of...juxtaposition there in how like colonialism and things like that were framed?

**Kate:** Yeah, for sure, for sure. I think that, you know, at school, like we were talking about race, but often what we were actually talking about was religion, and we...you know... I'm from an atheist family, very...you know, like we were not a religious family, and we talked about why we weren't a religious family, as you might expect, talked about why we weren't religious, and, you know, that was...those were things we thought about. So, it was...it was quite odd that that... So, conversations around, I guess, diversity and difference at school were often displaced into conversations about religion.

And...and, in some ways, that's amazing because like, you know, we were learning about such kind of rich cultural traditions, but often phrased in terms of belief rather than like embodied, lived experience. And this...this...those are frames that I'm now putting on that – those are not frames that were available to me at the time [laughing]. So, yeah, I think that is how I would describe the conversations that happened at school.

But coloniality, absolutely no, not...not part of...not part of the curriculum, not something that we discussed in school at all. Although, that said, in 1997, when I was doing A Level Drama, we had a director from Tara Arts like come in to school to work with us, and we devised a piece of theatre, like my A Level colleagues and some younger students as well, we devised this piece of theatre for the London International Festival of Theatre, which, in the '90s, was very student-focused. And 1997 was 15 years since partition, and the Festival had taken like partition as its theme, and so, while we were devising this work, this director from Tara Arts was talking to us about colonial violence, talking to us about what



happened, you know, in that moment, you know, the construction of the border between India and Pakistan, and talking to us in really like...very sort of distressing terms about...about that violence, and about the horror of that moment, and about British action in there. It was...that was a really important moment for me in terms of speaking about...speaking about these things, and also thinking about, again, the power of representation in learning because, you know, devising a piece of theatre is very different to like reading...reading a book or reading a bit of history or whatever. You know, we were actually sort of taking part in these conversations physically, which, for me, in that moment, felt really important. But I think it's really important that that was not part of the curriculum. It happened in school, but it was not a part of the curriculum. It was...it came from the Hounslow community. It came from that sort of...that...you know, that cultural location.

**Kyra:** And I guess sometimes you find that a lot of white students, they feel a bit...they feel as though it's not their place to talk about certain issues or have an opinion on topics, especially about race and kind of colonialism. Did you ever kind of feel that sense of...like you were restricted and kind of limited in what you could say and what you could voice, even though it would probably be in line with what all the other ethnic students would be thinking?

**Kate:** Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. I think there was...there was a really sort of...clear anxiety about what's mine to talk about, em, what place should I take in this conversation. And I think, now, we're much better about thinking about whose voices are centred and being alive to that, and I think, for me, that sense was there, but not in a way that I could articulate. So, it was just a kind of...nameless dread about like, oh, this is awful, how do we...how do we talk about it, how do we...how do we sort of deal with it and voice it? And I think...I would say that there's also...there was always a way in which....that inability to think about how we're centring voices and who we're listening to also sort of ends up in being a...it's not my problem or it's not my community – it's happening “over there”, whether “over there” is like in a different geographical location or in a different time, right, and there's an easy way to sort of put up a...put up a barrier. Or I think the other thing to think is that, just by being present, you're doing enough...do you know what I mean? Just like having been in that location... I've been in this diverse community, I've grown up in this diverse community, so my work is done [laughing], do you know what I mean, which is obviously not true because we need that reflection and we need that thinking and we need that constant learning, but I think...I think there's a danger there.

**Kyra:** Yeah, I totally agree. So, you did your A Levels. Could you maybe give us a breakdown of like your academic background after that?

**Kate:** Yeah, for sure. So, I think, actually, in some ways, the biggest moment in my sort of educational journey was, when I was 17 and I'd done my A Levels, so 18, and I didn't go to uni, and I was like I'm not going...and I was supposed to go and I said I didn't want to, and, em...and, you know, I would have been the first person from our family to go straight to uni from school, so it was a big deal and my parents really wanted that, wanted that for





me, and I was like...I don't want to. And so, that was a real...that was a very...like I would have made such a mess of it if I'd have gone then [laughing]. I was not...I was not ready. I needed to like go and be in the world, and then come back and think about what studying meant. And, so, you know, I went off and I worked, and I worked as a theatre technician, trained as a bar manager, worked as DJ [laughing], worked as a learning support assistant, travelled a little bit, and it was just like...I was chaos those four years, total chaos – I will happily admit that. But I had a very good time. And then...and then I went to uni, and then I didn't leave [laughing]....like literally still there, like very literally still there because when I went to do my Bachelor's, I did English Literature and I did it at Westminster, yeah... And I went to Westminster because I...when I decided I was going to go to uni, I went to some open-days and I went and looked around and I talked to some people, and I was just like... You know, I went to Royal Holloway and I just didn't feel comfortable, went to Roehampton – I'd very much decided I was going to stay in London, and like I just didn't feel comfortable. I came to Westminster and I felt comfortable and I was like...it's because it's a diverse space, and, for me, educational spaces, I don't feel comfortable in educational spaces that aren't diverse, and...and so I just...I got here...I got here and I was like, yeah, this...this...this feels...this feels good and this feel important, and so I came to Westminster.

And then...yeah, and then, the other big thing, I think, that happened to me on that educational journey was that, at the end of my first year, I got diagnosed with ADHD, and that was a sort of huge moment in explaining quite a lot of the chaos that had existed before...because, you know, I wasn't a straight A student, I wasn't like top of the class. It was always very much – and this narrative, I think, is very familiar for people with ADHD, that it was always very...lots of potential but can't quite action it, needs to stay focused, needs to stay present, and, you know, literally not a thing I can do, but cool.

And so that, you know, getting that diagnosis (a) opened up a lot of sort of support for me, but also made sense of things that had happened before. It was my mum, actually, who said, at the end of my first year, I was like getting this wild span of marks [laughing], like don't understand how I've got like a 50 and an 80, I was like, mm, that's quite broad, and she was like, "I think you've got ADHD – we should go and get you diagnosed," and I was like, "What?!" My mum was a speech and language therapist and worked with kids with learning difficulties, and she said that she had known that I had it but had not got me diagnosed because the options once you'd been diagnosed, at that period, weren't great, and she was like, "You were doing fine, you were managing – there was no need to get you...fenced off," as it...which is what happened at that point. And so, yeah, and that really changed everything for me in terms of how I was able to study and learn, and so, yeah, finished up my BA, went straight into an MA in Text & Performance Studies, which was taught between King's and RADA, and then, after that, straight into MA in Cultural & Critical Studies at Birkbeck, and then straight into my PhD, which was between Birkbeck and RADA. So, I mean, that's exhausting [laughing] as a drive- through, and no one needs to do two Mas, that's [hideous] [laughing], but, yeah, that was sort of my trajectory...my trajectory through...



**Kyra:** Amazing. And, sorry, just going back to kind of like your Bachelor's, what was it that made you want to study English Literature? Like you obviously had your experience of being a theatrical technician – why not go straight into Theatre Studies, like what was it about English that really pushed you towards it?

**Kate:** Yeah. Well, there are a couple of things. So, when I left school and didn't go to uni, I was supposed to go to Coventry University and do Theatre Studies, and I think, by the time I got to...by the time I got to 22 and actually going to uni, I didn't...I wasn't that interested in...sort of theatre per se. I'd thought maybe I wanted to write but I wasn't really sure. And, also, one of the reasons I went to uni when I did was I'd got injured and so I couldn't – I'd hurt my shoulder quite badly and I couldn't do a lot of the physical things that I'd been doing before, and so I kind of felt like, actually, I can't do the physical elements of...of a Theatre Studies degree. And, actually, you know, I'd got really into reading and was reading loads of random novels and thought, you know what, maybe...I can still do theatre within this, I think was my...was my thinking, but also explore these new things that I'm getting excited about.

**Kyra:** And just still thinking about your MA in Cultural & Critical Studies at Birkbeck, what were your kind of biggest takeaways from that experience and like how did it impact your thinking about race and coloniality and gender and sexuality and things like that?

**Kate:** Yeah. So, that's such an interesting experience, that degree. I kind of did it by accident. I went to do... when I left my BA, I applied to both Text & Performance Studies and Cultural & Critical Studies, and I wasn't sure which I wanted to do, chose Text & Performance Studies, turned up, way more acting training than I thought – we were literally doing like nine hours' acting training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, which was like a bit much for me. I was like interested in writing and directing, and suddenly, I'm like rolling around on the floor and I was like... So, I tried to swap off it and I tried to swap onto Cultural & Critical Studies, but it was too late by the time I made that decision. So, I just put in an application for Cultural & Critical Studies, including a funding application, carried on with Text & Performance Studies, and actually it challenged me in really important ways, stayed on that degree, and then, just before it finished, I got a letter to say that I'd got funding, so I was like, cool, going to go and do this next one. And it was...at the time, I think that my...my critical reflective language around race and coloniality was not...was not developed. It wasn't something that I'd done on my BA course. It was something that was important to me in terms of spaces I occupied, but in terms of my thinking, I really hadn't done that, that developing work, and I didn't develop it on that degree. There were some moments that were really important to me, which I'll talk about in a second, but that was not a degree that centred race, not a degree that centred coloniality, which you would expect, right? Like when I look back and think about this, it's quite shocking, but it was very much a kind of...it was that sort of... Marxist Cultural Studies that focuses on like Adorno, that draws on a critical history that runs from [Haygall] and that ignores sort of...civil rights movements in the '60s and '70s, focuses instead on like Guy Debord and other French philosophers, and sort of misses that out, which now seems to me like...a problem, a huge omission. There was...there was kind of like critical race





theory going on... around, but it was very much like sequestered, like it was over here...like the Black scholars were over here doing work on race, the gay people were over here doing work on queer stuff, and then everyone else was sort of in the middle thinking about like Adorno and Marx. And I think I...at this point, I was experiencing a kind of growing discomfort about the ways in which, the longer you stay in higher education, the whiter it gets, and I was feeling very uncomfortable in those spaces, and like partly... And I don't know that I was...I was articulating it in terms of race, but also I was articulating it in terms of class because I didn't, you know, as like a...you know, as someone from Hounslow, like I was not feeling comfortable in spaces full of like posh white people. But, again, I didn't quite know how to articulate that. I just knew that I was sort of not...not feeling totally at ease.

And then there was a moment when we were all...we were all gathered together to like share our dissertation projects, and I was doing a project on lesbian theorist, Monique Wittig, and lesbian pulp-fiction [writer] from the 1950s, and I give my little presentation and none of the other students have questions for me, but the gay member of staff has a question for me. And then a young Black woman stood up and gave an amazing presentation on Operation Trident and how it had shaped relationships between the British police and the Black community in the last 10 years, and the Black member of staff had a question for her, no one else did, none of the other students. And I remember thinking, alright, okay, we're ringfencing, right, like these are specialist – like the gay people are interested in this, the Black people are interested in this – and I remember being uncomfortable with that. But, again, not having the language particularly to...to articulate that.

But during that MA, I started teaching here at Westminster and so, even though I wasn't thinking about sort of race and coloniality in the studying that I was doing, I started thinking about it immediately in...just in terms of teaching, because I really think it's...working with Westminster students that has...that has, you know, prompted me and helped me to...to kind of do this work and do this thinking, which is...and I think that notion of that partnership with students, and learning with and through students, has been central to my development as an academic, just vital, just absolutely vital. You know, and...I remember...I remember just being like, oh, I feel much more comfortable at Westminster than I do anywhere else, and...and I think that, often, the environments, not always, but often the environments I've found myself in at Westminster have...have really challenged me and helped me to grow and to do this thinking, in ways that other institutions haven't...you know, just haven't, and...yeah... And I guess, you know, we talk a lot, don't we, about sort of hierarchies of institutions, and, you know, been at King's, been at Birkbeck, been at RADA, and, you know, "nominally", they're described as like better institutions – I'm using [air quotes] there because obviously that's absolute nonsense – but I've learnt things at Westminster that I wouldn't have learnt anywhere else. I've had conversations that I would not have had anywhere else, and it's because of the students, 100% because of the students, and I think that's really important.

**Kyra:** Thank you. And I guess we've got an idea of your experience and your opinion of the



University from your perspective as a student, but now, obviously you work in the institution – at what point do you think your opinion of the University changed then, I guess? What was that like for you, like on a personal level?

**Kate:** Yeah. So, this is such a good question and such...like...such an important reflection to do because I think universities and higher education and academia, however you want to sort of...whatever generalised term we want to use for the field, is changing so much, and I think changing so quickly, and I think it's really important to reflect on what happened at what point, and, you know, at what point did you start feeling increasingly anxious. So, I think, you know, as I've already suggested, as I went through that education, I increasingly felt a sense of sort of discomfort in the universities, which was around being in increasingly posh white spaces, and that was...and that's, you know, I felt that in my PhD a lot and, you know, I, yeah, felt that there a lot, and I felt an increasing awareness that, actually, in order to be taken seriously in particular academic settings, so particularly in conferences – and, historically, a lot of my work has been using...sort of bringing ideas around queerness into contact with renaissance drama and early-modern theatre, those sort of contexts. And those, when I was in those spaces, I felt like, if I need to be taken seriously, I need to like push-up my voice a little bit, and I was very conscious that like, if I gave a paper using my Hounslow voice, I would get a different kind of questions to if I gave a paper using like a slightly pushed-up version. I think I became increasingly aware of pushback from colleagues when I tried to talk about how white our curricula were and how we could go about changing that. I felt increasingly aware of sort of hostility, both in my research context and also at an institutional level, towards queerness. You know, I've experienced a huge amount of like... The thing I've heard more than anything is, "Why are you using that trendy theory to look at this moment in history or to look at this material?" like this idea that like queerness is like fashionable or trendy, rather than like a necessary tool of survival [half- laughing]. So, increasingly aware of that, and I think just sort of increasingly tired and angry about those things, and, you know, increasing awareness that like the structures that we work in are really hostile to someone with ADHD, and so my...the patterns of work, the ways in which I would work if I could, are not the ways in which the University wants me to work, and are not ways in which universities recognise me working, and this is, you know, this is true of like me as an academic and also me as a student. This was a real issue in my PhD, that they way they saw...the way in which the staff I was working with saw progression and development of ideas was not how ideas progressed and developed for me, and that was a real...that was a very, very difficult, you know, thing to think through and to work through.

And then I think, so increasingly, I've done a lot of work around EDI, and that has been wonderful, revelatory, life-changing stuff, but also really frustrating because I think I've become increasingly aware that institutions like to make noise, not make meaningful change. And I think, when I started doing – you know, I've been having these conversations for like 12 years now, but when we started actually really putting structures in place and trying to make change, there was this real sense of, "Well, yeah, but..." and, you know, I felt like... And I'd walked into this being like, "This is not okay – we're going to actually make change and put structures in place to help us make change. We're going to



do this!” And there’s just walls and walls and walls... And I think that what became increasingly important was finding pockets within institutions where we can make that change more, we can do that work. So, I think my opinion of the broad University, as a sort of horrifying, giant monolith [laughing], you know, has changed, and is...is not as glowing as perhaps it once was. But I still have a very...strong belief in those pockets of resistance within universities, and I think, you know, for me, it's places like Pedagogies for Social Justice, right, where we’re doing astonishing work, and where we’re doing it because of how we’re listening, how we’re centring voices, the pace we’re working at, what we understand change to be, how we value different kinds of knowledge, and, you know, those are transformational spaces, right? That’s where real meaningful change will happen. We’re not just making noise. We’re doing good work. And, yeah, Black History Year is also a space where we’re doing similar things, and I think that...the universities [laughing] [are difficult], aren’t they, because they create those little pockets, those little bits of possibility, and then...and then there’s...you know... And, you know, we work in an institution that likes to say, “We are inclusive! We are an inclusive space!” you know, but, as a queer woman with ADHD, I can tell you that it’s not. You know, I see my Black students negotiating racist microaggressions, which means it’s not inclusive. You can say that you’re working towards being inclusive, but like you’ve got to do the work to get there, and you haven’t done the work so... And, also, that’s destinational thinking. This is an ongoing process that shouldn’t be thought about in terms of end-product. I think that’s also really important.

So, yeah, I think there’s no one moment where I’m like...this has changed, but I think there’s a gradual...gradual sort of shift in how I’ve perceived what the University is and what’s possible within it.

**Kyra:** And I guess it’s even just like a constant process of like adapting to the University and the changes, like yeah... I’m so happy that you spoke about these pockets of resistance, and we’re definitely going to revisit that. But, lastly, I just wanted to ask, is there anything that you wish you knew as a student that you know now? So, maybe talking to Kate who’s doing their PhD, like what do you wish you knew?

**Kate:** I think...two big things: firstly, that you can change the institution that you’re in. I think that universities love hierarchies and they love to be like “We are the institution – here are our academic staff, and you are the student – you are the empty vessel that we are going to fill with knowledge!” and that’s a lie [laughing]. Like you can...you have power and you can make changes in the institution that you’re in. And I also...I think if I was going to talk to PhD Kate, and anybody in a similar position, I’d be, “You have embodied expertise that is of huge value. Just because you don’t, you know, in an ADHD way, just because you don’t think in the way everyone else wants you to think does not mean that you are not doing the thinking. It doesn’t mean you are not doing academic work. It doesn’t mean you are not making interventions. It doesn’t mean you’re not saying like smart stuff. You’re just saying it differently.” And I think that’s true for anyone from a marginalised position doing that kind of work.



**Kate:** Like the institution, whether that's like actual people within it or the institution as a sort of monolith, is going to tell you that you are not talking in the right way, and that's a lie, you are, so trust yourself, I think would be the thing I would say.

**Kyra:** Yeah. Thank you so much! Even that like spoke to me a bit – thank you!

**Kate:** I'm glad. And also, Kyra, you're such a good example of like someone who has...who has said, "I'm going to change the institution that I'm in," and you have, you know! And we both know other people through Pedagogies for Social Justice who've like walked in and changed it, and that's so powerful, you know, it's a wonderful thing. But it's finding those pockets, right?

**Kyra:** Exactly, yeah.

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