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Episode 9: Tamara Reid
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Fatima: So, hello, welcome to the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast. I'm Fatima Maatwk. I will be your host today, and I am very happy to welcome Tamara Reid with us today, who is the inclusive curriculum consultant programme lead at Kingston University. Tamara, welcome, and thank you so much for being our guest today.

Tamara: Yeah. Well, thank you for having me – I'm really excited to be here!

Fatima: And, just to start our episode today, I would like to ask you about your academic background and basically why Diversity & Inclusion?

Tamara: So, my academic background… What do we mean by academic background? Is that career or just also what I studied at university?

Fatima: Both really.

Tamara: Yeah, yeah, okay, yeah, that's fine. So, in terms of my academic career, I guess, my short one, I went to the University of Bath. I studied my undergraduate degree there in Sport & Exercise Science in 2014, and I graduated in 2018, and then I have been working in higher education for the last three years. So, I've worked at the University of Bath, I've worked at the University of Hertfordshire, and now Kingston University. So, that's kind of I guess my career through higher education at the moment.

But why I got into Diversity & Inclusion is a really good question. So, I think, for me, I grew up in suburban Florida, and there are not a lot of Black kids there in suburban Florida, but I was really luck to have…you know, attended like a really great school, which was really nice, not a lot of Black kids, which was absolutely fine, but my experience there was, you know, they initially tried to put me in kind of special-ed, special educational needs. I don't know what the equivalent of that is in the UK. Bless my Mum, she was like, you know, she was like, "No, you don't belong in special-ed!" and so they couldn't put me in special-ed so they kept me in mainstream schooling, and it was really funny because, the year after they kind of wanted to put me in special-ed, I ended up being on the honor-roll. So, I thought it was really, really interesting, and kind of one of the main reasons for that was me having a Black teacher who really believed in me and helped me really to do well. So, that was really kind of the first time I started kind of seeing these educational inequalities.

And then I moved to the UK, into lovely South London, which was a really different experience. In Florida, like schools are very well-funded, lots of money, you know, they have lots of resources, so it was really interesting making the swap from there to here and going to a more diverse school, which was nice, but kind of… One of the interesting issues was, you know, if you look at top-set for when I was in high school, like, you know, where are the Black kids? Where are they? They're not here. They're nowhere to be found. And, you know, even doing my GCSEs, you know, me, my brother and my friend were the only Black kids within the kind of top 40 of our year-group, out of 210 students, and the only thing that we had in common is that we hadn't done a lot of our schooling in this country, which I found really interesting, so, you know… And then, as I kept on going up in my educational career, there were less and less and less Black kids all the time and I was really lucky to get into Bath, but that was a really white space again. So, I think my whole educational experience has left me with that question of like: where are the Black kids like me? Why aren't they doing well.

And then, in 2018, when I was at uni, Amatey Doku, who was the NUS Vice-President, came to Bath and he led a session on the Black, Asian, and minority ethnic awarding gap, and it was the most mind-blowing thing. Like at the time, I was so mind-blown because I was like…this is my life, like he's just… You know when the penny just drops? Like it just really dropped and just really started to explain some of the things that I had seen in my educational experience and throughout my own personal educational experience, and because of that singular moment, that kind of…I guess changed the direction of what I wanted to do, from being a sports scientist to wanting to work in EDI, so here I am, three years later, doing exactly that!

Fatima: Thank you so much for sharing these amazing moments with us. I really like how you described that singular moment, the term, how you put it. Could you tell us a bit about that moment, how it felt?

Tamara: It just…it just felt so significant. I wrote this in my personal statement actually the other day because it was so pivotal. But it was just like, you know, all these things happen around you, and you're not necessarily putting it together. You know, I didn't have the framework, the understanding, to really get to grips with how, you know, racism had shaped my educational experience and the educational experiences of others, how poverty, the intersection of that poverty and trauma kind of all interplay to essentially contribute towards this awarding gap. So, it was just like…hearing him talk about it, you know, was like…it just felt really affirming because I think so much of the narrative that you get as a Black person, you know, is that…you're not that smart, you know, you're not…you know, you're really lucky, you know. I remember my high school teacher was like, "You may be the smartest here, but, you know, when you go to sixth form, when you go to college, you'll be at the bottom of the barrel." And just knowing so many people don't believe in Black kids and just always hearing those messages, so you kind of just think it's just you, and if you have made it, you're really lucky or, you know, it's tokenism. I remember, in my first year

reflection actually, because they made us do an assignment to write a reflection on how we felt the first year went, and in that reflection I had written, you know, how I'd started the year feeling like I had just gotten in as the token Black person, you know, because I missed one of my grades to get into Bath, you know, and I felt like they let me in just because I was Black, right, widening participation, which wasn't true, but, you know, those narratives were so strong in my head that's what it felt like at the time, instead of me being able to feel like, actually, you know, I did triple Science and I've got two As and a B, like I am quite intelligent, I have good GCSEs, like I deserve to be here. So, you know, it just kind of…that moment kind of realigned my thinking to be like, actually, you know, this is not about…necessarily about me or kind of the people who are like me – this is bigger than us, like this is…our whole lives, you know, the contexts of our whole lives are set around. So, it was just really pivotal in helping me put the bigger picture, start to begin to put the bigger picture together, and hence really why I went on a real path of like trying to find out more.

Fatima: So, I have a couple of questions about your journey really though school and university, and you mentioned a lot that you were, if not the only, one of the few Black students, kids at school. Can you tell us a bit more about how you dealt with this?

Tamara: Yeah, good question! How did I deal with it? Do you know what, I think the interesting thing is like, at the time, you kind of noticed but you…I…like you know it's a thing but like I didn't know why it was a thing. So, it just…it's really hard to say. It's not that it didn't matter, but I also didn't understand like why that was the case. I think, luckily for me, I think I have spent a lot of my life like dabbling in and out of quite white spaces, and I think, you know, when I went to uni, even though Bath was like painfully white and, you know, my Mum, my Mum, on the open-day, on the open-day, we went, we went together, and we were sat in the lecture theatre and she was like, she leaned over to me and she whispered, "Tamara, Tamara! Don't look but we're the only people of colour in the room!" you know, in the whole room of, you know, a full 200-seater lecture theatre. It was a bit nuts. [I hadn't even noticed] things like that, but I never really thought about how that might impact me, just because I thought it was just kind of normal at that point, right? Luckily, I just feel like…because…because of how I grew up, I can [code-switch], right? It's something that is quite normal for me to do and that I learned to do because that's what you have to do to survive. So, I think, where I've been luckier – I don't know about "luckier" but, you know, I've been able to navigate whiteness because I had the tools to do so. And I think [sighs], you know, my Mum, my Mum made it so that we had those tools.

So, kind of, I guess, the negative side of that is, for example, I can't speak Patois. I'm Jamaican and I guess I would say that's our home language. I can't speak it because my Mum really discouraged us from speaking that at home, or even [flying], to be honest, but that was her way of helping us to assimilate to…to whiteness, essentially. So, I think, just through how I grew up and the places that I grew up, you kind of learnt those tools to navigate these spaces. And I think you tend to be a bit blissfully unaware that you're doing so, until, for some reason, you're either a bit opened up to actually like, woah, this is… You

know, I didn't know I was doing these things until I found out these things were a thing, if that makes sense!

So, yeah, yeah, I think the moment for me that changed that was when I went on placement to Holland and really experienced racism for the first time, whilst I was on placement, quite bad racism, and I was like, okay, like I'm really like getting bullied here at work, being made to feel dumb, essentially, because like I'm this Black woman like and it doesn't… You know, I'm talking about like plantation jokes, like people calling me the N-word, like it wasn't…it wasn't fun, and it was just like…it kind of opened my eyes. It just opened my eyes a little bit, like, actually, like this is a thing, this is a thing that affects my life. And so, going into my final year, I was a bit more conscious about that, and I think not having the support in my final year was really hard for me, like I didn't…you know, I didn't have [sighs]…like all my Black friends had either graduated early or were the year behind me, so like they were all just gone. So, I didn't have any support structure or anyone to support me like at all, which was really difficult, so I had a really difficult final year because of that. I almost dropped out actually, during my final year of university, and it was really hard to articulate at the time why I felt the way I did, you know. Everyone was like, "Tamara, you are so high-performing, I don't understand like what the problem is," but, you know, essentially, I'd come off this year of people making me feel stupid because of their racist ideologies, and then, you know, coming back to a space where like there was no one to comfort me or support me or…yeah, allow me to be my authentic self, so, you know, it did have, you know, it does have real negative consequences as well. So, at times, I've navigated it, out of ignorance, and then, other times, like, you know, I actually haven't been…I've been…having…had to kind of be aware of who I am within the space and then be like, well, now, how do I navigate this space knowing what I am to people, if that makes sense.

Fatima: Now that you are on this side of the journey and reflected all of this, and you mentioned how you did things unconsciously and the time you realised the emotional labour you're doing really. Is there some sort of advice maybe you would give, let's say, Black students now starting their university journey?

Tamara: Mm…god, oh, such a tough one! Yeah. No, that's a really good question. What would my advice be? I think, to take a leaf out of my brother's book, is to really, you know, hold onto what it is you bring to the table, like whether that's accent, you know, whether that's your culture, like cling…cling onto those things because, you know… And I know other people feel this too, but, you know, to code-switch, to have to, you know, whether that's your language or whether that's your behaviour, because that's really your… I know, for my brother, as a Black man, you know, he's got to control his behaviour and mannerism to seem less threatening. So, I think, you know, my major piece of advice though, you know, is to be authentic, because code-switching, whilst sometimes it's necessary, not always, but you might need it, just at a base level, just so everyone understands what everyone's talking about, fair enough, we all…everyone has to do a little bit of that, but, you know, there are real consequences to not holding onto your authenticity, you know, losing sense of self, you

know, feeling like you're losing your culture. So, even if it's not every space you can bring that to, if there are spaces you can bring that to, so whether that's your ACS or just finding a group of friends, I think it's really important that you hold space to be authentically you and express your culture or your ethnic identity. So, I think that's what would be my advice.

Fatima: Thank you so much. Sorry, I put you on the spot a bit with that question.

Tamara: That's alright – it's a good question!

Fatima: So, now, talking a little bit about the work you're doing currently, so before moving to the specifics of the programme, if you think more broadly of the discipline and the kind of work of decolonisation, anti-racism, and EDI, how are these different to you? So, how is decolonisation different from diversity and inclusion or…?

Tamara: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Also, that's a good question as well. So, I guess, if we start with inclusion, as the kind of…I think the kind of broader lens that everyone understands, I guess inclusion, at its kind of most basic definition, is about taking into account everyone, and particularly that tends to be focused around, ooh, protected characteristics, so disability, race, gender, all of those things. So, it has a really broad focus on how we look at each of these, whether separately or together, and the way that differentiates from, let's say, for example, anti-racism, anti-racism takes race as its focal lens at all things. It can be intersectional if it wants to, but anti-racism is mainly about using race as the central lens through which we observe whatever it is we're doing, which is, again, very focused inclusion is broad, right? You can take any lens out of all the characteristics we think about, right, so whether you want to use a feminist lens, a social model of disability as a lens, that's inclusion.

Now, decoloniality, which I think gets confused with diversifying or Indigenising, a lot, is kind of really different in the sense – so, it doesn't have to have like race as a focus, but, essentially, a lot of people like think decolonising is the idea of just like adding in knowledges or knowledge, and that's kind of not what it is. I think…let me…there's a really good definition…that someone gave… I think it was at the Decolonising Partnership event, but I really loved the definition the person gave because they discussed like decoloniality as about returning lands, life and knowledge. And so, a great example that they used was this whole idea of you can't decolonise Psychology because, you know, Psychology is quite modern. It wasn't something kind of taken from Indigenous people or people across the world and then kind of adapted or whitewashed in some kind of capacity so we could decolonise it. Actually, it's actually just colonial and so there's nothing to decolonise – you would just have to get rid of it. So, a good example, I think, of something that can be decolonised is, if you think about something like yoga – I mean, it's not particularly educational-related, but if we think about something as yoga and the current movement we know it is, white people have really started this wave in the West of like this is what yoga is, it's a cool fitness trend, you know, and, you know, you get a bit flexible and that's all

exciting, and has really…and then have really stripped it of its spiritual element, right, you know? I'm forgetting where yoga actually comes from, but excuse my brain, but, you know, if we think about it like that, because, you know, for a while, I really thought white people in California invented yoga – I didn't have a clue like it had roots in India at all. So, in that sense, actually, that, yoga, in itself, as a practice, is something we can decolonise and bring back to its original roots. And I think, you know, people have a tendency to confuse things that may be colonial but there's no decolonising you can actually do because, you know, something hasn't necessarily been whitewashed.

And then I would say the other really critical element of decolonisation is really about, you know, it's bringing in these knowledges and then thinking about all these various knowledges very critically. So, I think, like I was saying to you when we last caught up, it's not about, okay, well, you know, we've found some…some case study, some reading materials, some ways of knowing from the Global South, we're going to chuck it in the curriculum and then essentially just say, actually, no, it's not all that good, which, you know, I found in my lectures, where, for example, you know, they would utilise Chinese Studies but only utilise studies from China to say how not to do scientific research and say how shit it was – excuse my language. Well, that was the language used actually to describe it. So, you know, at that point, it's like, okay, well, yes, you included it so you can kind of say you're drawing on stuff that's not from the West, but, actually, you don't see that as valid and you don't see that as something that's worthy, and so, therefore, that's not decolonial in itself. So, I hope that's quite clear, those separations…

Fatima: Absolutely, and I absolutely love the example of yoga because it's so clear, and I never thought about it and it kind of hit me and it's really simple to understand, so thank you for that. My next question is a little bit about the context you've worked within. So, I know that part of your work was in a business school context, and we know that colonisation, and then also decolonisation, takes different forms in different contexts. So, what spaces within business schools do you feel have been colonised?

Tamara: Ah, that's good, another one. So, business schools are really interesting because I always just think everyone's like "We can't be decolonial! Nothing was colonised!" and I'm like…like some of your subject solely exists because of colonialism – Economics is always a good one, right? Because, you know, we live in a capitalist society, right, and a lot of the times, we have used… When you think about the slave-trade, that's really…that's a good example, right? You know, we were really…really capitalistic in our approach of, okay, like we need to…we need to create this cotton, for example, we need people to pick our cotton so we can make money, [?]. So, we've now gone to not find cheap labour but free labour, and then what we then did was create race science off the back of that to justify this capitalistic exploitation, and that exploitation then went on to make, you know, America and the UK, you know, the superpowers of the world for a very long, long, long time, you know, and so, historically, from that context, it's like, okay, you can see where, you know, things like capitalism, you know, has its roots in helping…helping create racism, and

eugenics in particular, and how it's been propped up by eugenics, even up until today, because, you know, we're still exploiting, you know, Africans to do…you know, children as well, you know, to allow us to continue to produce very cheap things very cheaply, right, and somehow we've found a way to not feel bad about that. So, you know, just on a…even to the current day, it's like, actually, how are capitalist structures still relying on racism to allow us to get, you know, the things we want? Not that I'm calling for us to all become Marxists or communists, but you can absolutely see how the economic system we've chosen works quite well within kind of a racist structure. And I will not ramble on because I can go on, but I think Economics is such a great example, and I think, for a lot of business schools, it's really about thinking what is the historical context to my subject, and I think a lot of people forget that that lies there, behind whatever subject they're doing. I think everyone has this idea, in a lot of places, that, you know, we're post-race and colonialism was only…was way back, it was way back, and it's like, actually, no, because, you know, my parents, my grandparents, were living in countries that were absolutely colonised by the British, right into the 1960s. So, it's not that long ago whatsoever. It's just like are we willing to find out about it, are we prepared to understand how that context shapes what we know and what we've become now.

Fatima: And [thinking on these] thoughts, what would decolonising business schools involve to you?

Tamara: What would it involve [laughing]?! That's a big question which I'm still thinking about because I don't know if I have a complete answer to that, but I definitely think the first point of decolonising is really, like I said just now, coming to the place where you can recognise that your subject sits within a historical context, you know, and once you can be aware of that, then you can begin to explore the history surrounding your topic area, and then use that to inform, like I said, what it is that you know now. So, you know, if it's Marketing, how has Marketing in the past absolutely contributed to the dehumanisation of Black people? Well, we know it has. We used to have, you know, ads where…it was a soap where they had like a baby, a Black baby, and they would wash it with this kind of like bleaching soap and turn it white and call it pretty. We still have that kind of marketing across the world, today, right now. It's not uncommon.

So, you know, it's a thread through everything, but you just have to see it and then really think about, well, how can I bring some of these issues to the forefront within one teaching, but also from a way…in a way that's like critical and is really supportive of like, okay, so how can we move forward? When it comes to teaching our students, because I think that's really important, things of the past, you might not be able to decolonise, but I think our job as kind of educators is to think, actually, how can we support our students in having these decolonial thoughts so they don't reproduce what we've seen in the past, and I think it's for staff to have awareness, not just of the history, but all of these, you know, critical issues, whether that be racism [sighs], misogyny, you know, any kind of form of oppression, have

an understanding of those, and I think that's a good place to start. I know that's not a whole answer, but I feel like that's kind of the starting place.

Fatima: Absolutely. It's a perfect answer because I also think there is no whole answer as such.

And since you mentioned students and I know you work in partnership with students, so with student consultants, can you tell us a little bit about how working with student consultants in partnership can benefit decolonisation and anti-racism work?

Tamara: Yeah, 100%, my favourite thing, students as partners, it's great stuff! I wish more people saw it as valuable. But in terms of, you know, its contribution, I think, to decolonising in particular, anti-racism a little bit – I just think that's…if you're working with people of colour, that tends to be the lens they bring, you know, if I'm Black, like I can bring that lens, if I've done the work, I can bring my lived experience and the anti-racist lens just because of that. So, that's kind of one way, like especially with students of colour, they kind of bring that lens through their lived experience to the work that we do. So, that's been quite nice, but I think what I really love about partnership work is that kind of re-addressing of power within the [academy/academia]. You know, the university is kind of this place where the university, or your lecturers, like they hold the knowledge, they know everything there is to know about their subject, which they do, you know – they wouldn't be teaching if they didn't know something, which they do. Even when it comes to like learning and teaching, you know, we have this whole notion of they know everything and students don't, which is not true. So, I really value partnership space because I think, for me, it's really shown me that, actually, students do have the knowledge to, you know, really shed light on learning and teaching, all the topics that they learn about, and I think, you know, our work at Kingston is all about making space for their knowledges and their lived experience, and allowing to bring that to the table through…through any of the work they do, where they're doing like canvas reviews, or reviewing assessment briefs, or co-designing things with me. It's like, okay, I'm making space for your knowledge, right? I don't need it to be…like I don't need you to be an academic scholar, I just need you to come with your experience and what you know, and what you know is valid, right, it's good enough. I think, you know, because of how we traditionally see knowledge, it's not knowledge until it's theorised and written down in some kind of academic journal and paper, like it's not real until that happens. Whereas, for me, in my practice, I'm like, well, if this is what you know and this is what you feel, then this is real, and I think, for a lot of people of colour, a lot of the time, our knowledges and histories aren't always written down and theorised and, you know, particularly academic, mainly just because that hasn't been the way, and we also haven't had the opportunity to make it become so. So, that's been really important for me, and the only thing I really try to do is just empower them to feel like that's the case, and also, you know, because we do work in [academia], is just equip them with the kind of knowledge and language to translate what they know to kind of effectively communicate it with staff, because I think one of the big challenges, you know, from even the student-staff

partnerships I've worked with, is you may know stuff but not being able to have the language often means people are like, "Well, you don't know what you're talking about", which is not the case, I do know what I'm talking about – you just don't understand me because I'm not using big words like "pedagogy". Do I even still really know what that means? I don't know [laughing], but I can use it correctly, so that's the most important thing. So, yeah, I would say kind of that's…I think, you know, partnership is a great space for decolonial work in itself because of what it allows students to bring to the table and how it values students as producers of knowledge, which they don't often get to sit in that kind of seat throughout their degree really.

Fatima: So, you work together with student consultants and basically you review a lot of curricula to work on an inclusive curriculum. Are there any things you've noticed in the curricula that have colonial undertones or are even explicitly colonial?

Tamara: Mmm…

Fatima: As an example maybe…

Tamara: I think, so far, like I haven't, I actually haven't. So, the issue – like it's not because it's not there, it's because…because of the way staff tend to sterilise their subjects, which is really common in the kind of more Science-y subjects, you know, a lot of people tend to strip…unless it's the Humanities, a lot of, you know, curricula tends to kind of strip a lot of these subjects of its content. So, it's not that it's necessarily not colonial, it's just you don't have the opportunity to see how colonialism has kind of brought what we know to light, you know. So, for example, let's take Science because Science is always a good example, you know, for example, we know we just have… So, right, if we talk about cells that we test on, right, that we have in the lab, we just think we have cells, you know, that we can just test on in the lab, and that they've just come from some factory somewhere, right? That's it. That's it. That's the box that we….and you don't really think about it. But, I don't know if you've read the book or seen the book, 'The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks', and that's really all about how this lady called Henrietta Lacks, she had cancer, and what they found out was her cancer cells like just kept reproducing, like they didn't need anything, they just kept reproducing, and, without her knowledge, they kind of scraped a sample of her cells and then used it, and, you know, her cell line, which is called HeLa is one of the world's most used cell lines, you know, and it makes a lot of money, right? They use it to make insulin. And I think one of the interesting things in the book is…they move forward, you know, a couple, you know, 20-odd years, 50-odd years later, a little bit more than that, to, you know, her relatives in our current future, and it's like, you know, they're really suffering. They can't afford their own medicines, but it's, you know, their great-great-great-grandma's cells that have allowed us to make so many scientific advances.

It was gynaecology, right? What we know from that, you know, the Father of Gynaecology used to just dissect Black women, slaves, live, on the…on his operating table to find out

about women's insides worked, you know, and, you know, no…no anaesthetics, no painkillers, right, and because of that man's work, we now believe that, you know, Black people, Black women in particular, are, you know, less resistant to pain, and, you know, that's a common medical myth, or that Black people have thick skin, and that's only just coming out of textbooks and medical literature, but we know, in practice, that people hold those beliefs and we're seeing the outcomes of that in a lot of cases, to be honest, particularly around pregnancy in Black women. So, I think, a lot of the time, we just hear about we've done this thing, but actually, we've done this thing off the back of these absolutely nuts experiments that no one, you know, really talks to you about. And so, in that way, you just think this is fantastic work, but, at the same time, it's really, you know, a sterile version, like I was saying, of how our medical landscape, you know, sits within this colonial landscape. So, I think, in that way, a lot of people in the Sciences tend to kind of avoid talking about these things because they're like, "Well, that's history" – they just need to know about the medicines and what to do and blah-blah-blah, and it's like, well, actually, no, nothing sits without context, you know?

Fatima: Absolutely. I think there is no way to put it better, really, so you gave really an excellent example, and it is something we hear of today – it's not, you know…but it is systemically ignored, or sterilised – I love the expression.

Tamara: Yeah.

Fatima: So, another difficult question: what do you think lecturers could do, or need to do, in order to decolonise their curricula? Where could they start?

Tamara: Where could they start? I think, for me… To be honest, if I'm being really frank, like just like don't start at decolonisation, would be my first point of call actually. I think it's such a big thing to undertake, like if you haven't done what I would call some of the initial steps, right? So, for me, when I work with staff, my thing is like, alright, forget, you know, forget all this language that you're talking about, you know, sometimes even forget about inclusion – like what I want staff to do is really to think about their students, you know. I think…how can you centre students in whatever it is that you do, how are you taking time to listen to their voices, is something we really, really don't do. And once we've listened to their voices, how can we partner with them to then take forward all the things that we are learning? So, I think, for me, that's kind of step one, that people just haven't…aren't getting right. You know, I don't care if it's just reading open comments, I don't care if it's having some focus groups, I don't really care what it is, but really centre your students in your practice. And I think, once you can get that right, you will begin to get the inclusion element right. You'll be able to think about, you know, okay, like role-modelling, diversifying. So, you know who your students are. You can be like… You know, we have great dashboards at Kingston, right, and anything you want to know about your students – what religion they are, who's LGBT, you know, who's Black, all of that like…all of the data, you've got it, right? So, knowing all of

that then, how does your curriculum now reflect the people sitting in your classroom? What do the people in your classroom have to say about what they would like to see?

And then I think the next step to really decolonising is then to really immerse yourself, which I think…I guess one of the things which I will give to lecturers is, you know, finding the time to do the work needed to decolonise. Like, you know, if we're being real, staff are really overworked, and to do something like decolonise is a really big task. So, I think, from our institutions' point of view, to kind of take some of that off of staff is – so, really, [our] institutions, like how are we making space to do this supposed decolonial work that you want? And if you're not making space for that, then don't ask staff to do that, right, because now we're paying lip-service because…a lot of us know that, you know, whatever's being produced isn't decolonial. So, that's my caveat for that. But, in that sense, like I said, immersing yourself in the history of your subject, how it ties to all these kind of different themes, and [I kind of would like to centre] race in particular for decolonising, so, you know, how does race and racism interact with your subject? And I think it's from beginning…from being…interacting with those things that staff will be then able, with some assistance, right, because a lot of universities now have teams who deal with that, so it's now going to your team with this new knowledge that you have and sitting down with someone and thinking like, okay, like how do we unpack this, how do we do this who can help me with this, really.

I think that…that's my staged approach that I use with staff because it does take a long time. It's really hard to jump in at the deep-end at the side of "Let's decolonise". And a real talk – like a lot of staff don't know anything about anti-racism, or how racism and race work, I mean, race works in general. I still don't know that much. To staff, I know a lot. I don't actually feel like I know that much. So, to expect them to come at this with very little knowledge - like I don't know you expect a physicist, who will probably know nothing about race and racism, or any kind of other EDI issue, to now suddenly be able to perform what you want them to perform, it doesn't happen like that. It's taken me three years to be in the place to now be able to kind of see these connections and be like, okay, this is how we might begin to do that work. So, I just think it's important to give people the literacy around all these different issues so they can actually begin to do that work, instead of being like "Off you go!" I think a lot of universities have been like "Off you go!" and not really taken that scaffolding approach. I even do that with my students. So, I just think that's really important.

Fatima: Mm, absolutely. And you just mentioned students, so what do you think students need to navigate through the colonial nuances of their curricula?

Tamara: Yeah. Yeah, that's a good question. So…I would say like students need the education too, I think. You know, referring back to what I said earlier, I, you know, I didn't know I was harbouring a lot of anti-Black sentiment in my own life, like I did not understand or know what I was experiencing. I didn't know…like, honestly, until it got really explicit, like I didn't know how racism was operating to affect my life, and, you know, actually, a lot of

students are very blissfully unaware, which makes sense because it's the context they live it, but are really blissfully unaware to what is going on around them. And so, I think there's a process of, you know, helping them to understand what they are living in, so they can begin to do some of the internal work, because what I find sometimes is a lot of students of colour will absolutely go ahead and regurgitate the same things that, you know, Black people might say to you, and it absolutely – and I never judge them for it because it makes sense because I used to be like that.

Give you jokes, yeah, give you absolute jokes, you're going to think I'm so stupid, but, you know, for…until like…maybe two years ago, I really thought the British had no part in slavery, like I really…oh god, like I really thought they had nothing to do with slavery. I was like, yeah, William Wilberforce, you know, he abolished slavery, blah-blah-blah, all that stuff, and it was just – I felt stupid when I was like, "Tamara, you're Jamaican, like you're actually Jamaican, like you're a descendant of slaves from the Caribbean that was overseen by the British," right? Like it didn't even make sense. I felt really stupid. But going off in a context, you know, I grew up in the US and here. The US is a bit better because they really face front with their history – they have no…they have to do it, but, you know, in the UK, like we really whitewash what happened because we were able to kind of export our slavery. So, you know, we…I just didn't really understand what we were living in.

So, I think a lot of students actually will get by because they don't know what's going on, but in terms of the ones who've had their kind of awakenings, shall we say, I think that's a real struggle actually when you do get woken up to what is going on. I remember, oh, I got really depressed actually, from actually knowing all these things, and being able to unpack my life. But for those students, I think it's really about…I don't know, trying to hold some safe space for yourself [sighing], because I just think it's…I just think it's really hard because I don't think it's up to students to have to navigate this. I think we, as institutions, really need to make it so. They don't, but I think, if you do, it's knowing that, actually, you don't have to engage with what you're being taught, and that can look like at different things, maybe like actually not coming to your lecture if you feel it's inappropriate, to be – you know, actually, if you want to make a complaint, like make a complaint if you see that things are racist and colonial, and if you have other people to support you, I think student numbers are really important, you know. Having, you know, as a group, making a complaint, and not being able to kick up a fuss – I know, for students of colour, that's quite hard because we're quite over-policed in terms of our behaviour, but I just…I just think, with enough numbers, I think there's a lot, you know, when it comes to higher education, there's a lot of student power to get things done, and I know we've definitely seen that, you know, in the last year, how much power students have. So, I think we live in a time now, actually, because of the events of the last year, that you do have a lot of power to make change, and not really being afraid to step in it, obviously within reason and with you feeling safe. I'd say don't be afraid to call it out. And if there's someone else whose job it is to do this stuff, like go ahead, like, you know… When I worked at Bath, students would come to me to have a chat and be like, "This happened today, Tamara, like what can we do about it?" I'm like, "Don't worry, I've got you

– I can make a complaint for you, I can speak to someone for you so you don't have to do this." So, I think it's just knowing who those people are, not being afraid to make some change, and keeping yourself safe, you know? We're not going to…as a…as a…you know, the great African parable from our parents is "You can't come and kill yourself" and I really take that…I really take that to heart after my experiences within the [academy/academia], like there's only so much you can do, so pick your fight and don't come and kill yourself, essentially.

Fatima: Thank you so much. This was really good like advice for students also, I feel. So, I have one final question for you: what is something you would like to see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

Tamara: Yeah. That's a hard question. Even though you gave it to me earlier to think about, it's still a hard question. I think, you know, maybe as optimistic as I am, I would just really love to see this BAME awarding gap just close – I would love to see it closed. And I think, kind of as a more practical thing, because this is obviously we've all been wishing that it would close, but I would…I would just love for there to be some literacy, common literacy and language in the…you know, in the sector, about how we talk about and deal with these issues. I think there are just some easy – not "easy" wins, but there are just some real things that we're missing, you know, whether that's kind of like racial literacy. That is just not happening across universities at all. We're just getting [that] at Kingston. These languages are really, really important, whether that's in your own institution or across the sector, that, you know, every staff member has a shared language to communicate from, essentially, so they can actually begin to do things. So, we can talk to each other and do things, and I think it's just things like that, you know, centring, you know, voices, I don't know, if we're going to have to keep screaming this from the rooftops, not in an exploitative manner, but, you know, just paying attention to our students. I think those are some of the critical things and shifts at the most real basic levels that I personally would like to see.

Fatima: I will keep my fingers crossed that we are at least on the right way to this. Thank you so much, Tamara, for the really valuable and also personal insights you've shared with us today, and thank you for taking the time to be on our podcast.

Tamara: No worries, thank you for having me! This has been really fun!

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