



BAME Awarding Gap Case Study

**Co-Designing an 'Inclusive' Reading List for
'Politics: From Power to Participation'**

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Mazranni (students)**

What did you do/who's involved?

The aim of this project was to involve students in the design of a more inclusive reading list for Karen's first year, undergraduate module in politics. This was optional for undergraduate students of the Social Research Institute (UCL Institute of Education). This was a newly developed, introductory level module so particularly suitable for curricula development via staff-student collaboration. The project was informed by Karen's previous research on reading lists, which was funded by UCL's Liberating the Curriculum working group (and published [here](#)). The limited time and resource available meant that the project only focused on one week of the module.

Karen applied for ChangeMakers funding to carry out her project because she felt that having the ChangeMakers brand and stamp of approval offered institutional recognition for the importance of the project and provided an official channel for staff-student collaboration. An email was sent round to students asking if anyone was interested in working with Karen on a ChangeMakers project, and three student partners registered their interest. All three students were recruited for the project and included one undergraduate in their second year, and two in their first.

In designing the new module, Karen wanted to think about how student-staff collaboration could positively influence the design of a more inclusive and diverse reading list for the course, focusing on a particular week. She was keen to get students involved in the process because she felt there was a gap in the literature around student perceptions and understanding of the issue of inclusivity and diversity of the curriculum. As a result of the project, she hoped that students might engage more critically with their reading lists and curricula. In an effort to better understand students views of 'inclusive' curricula, the student partners ran a focus group with first- and second-year students from across the programme.

Project roles

Karen met with students and outlined her proposal/idea. Through the discussion, they decided to do a focus group. The students ran the focus group and then reported back to Karen with their findings. The team met periodically to focus on the week that they were co-designing, drawing on what had come out of the focus group and discussing different interpretations. Because of the time constraints, Karen did a thematic analysis of the focus group data to help with the design of the reading list. One key aspect that came out of the focus group was that the reading list should encompass many viewpoints with a global perspective. Student partners were asked to think about the week's topic (the role of the state) and go out and find some references that could go on the reading list, which were very diverse depending on their background and context.

Outcome

The project team decided that for the specified week they wouldn't set any key readings, and instead the students on the module were asked to pick their own reading. A list of suggestions was provided in case students didn't know where to start or wanted examples. In addition to selecting their own reading in line with their interests, there was a formative assessment that week, which enabled the students to share their learning and perspectives through discussions in the seminars.

The project was situated within the context of Liberating the Curriculum, and Karen was explicit about the purpose of the project and the rationale behind asking the students to choose their own reading. However, student feedback suggested that many of the students felt overwhelmed and would have preferred if Karen had selected the reading rather than having to make the choice themselves.

What evidence/rationale underpinned your choice?

The project recognised that student-staff partnerships have a critical role to play in responding to concerns around Euro-centric curricula, with great potential to advance agendas of inclusion and equality in higher education (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019)

What would you tell someone who is interested in doing something similar?

There are a number of issues to consider, including:

- Be clear about the aims and rationale for curricula reform. Developing inclusive curricula can target a range of different elements: module aims, objectives, learning outcomes, academic standards, syllabus, teaching methods, learning activities, assessment, and teaching materials. Clarity about which elements are being reformed, and why, is helpful for focusing the project and developing concrete outputs/ changes.
- Staff-student collaboration is invaluable but requires sufficient resources and recognition for student involvement. Find ways to reach out to students from diverse backgrounds, value their contributions and provide longer term recognition. Karen's project offered stipends for involvement and endeavoured to build longer-term recognition through collaboration in academic outputs (presentations and article).
- Choose an appropriate time to carry out the project. The timing of the project is important but difficult to get right. Karen's project was undertaken midway through term one, as the syllabus and reading list had to be completed by a certain time to be considered for term two. The team had

a small window to work within to complete the focus groups and then develop the reading list/ learning activities for the specified week. Karen and her partners found it hard, at times, to fit the project into their busy schedules (as the staff member was undertaking other teaching and research whilst the student partners were completing other modules).

- Balance student autonomy with sufficient staff input/ guidance. Given the time pressures on the project, the data collection and analysis of the focus group was carried out in a rapid fashion. This meant that the analysis needed further work to improve the rigour of the findings and the potential learning opportunities for the student partners were not maximised. Although Karen was quite happy for the students to lead the focus group, looking back she thinks they should have received more support, since none of them had ever run a focus group before. This connected with another concern of Karen's, which was the balance of offering support but not taking over the project, which she struggled with throughout the project. While trying to give the student partners the autonomy to influence the project, she felt that she perhaps didn't give them enough support to enable them to contribute and benefit from the project as much as she would have liked. To help address these more fundamental challenges around working in partnership with students, Karen felt that she would have benefited from tips and advice from staff experienced in partnership and a greater knowledge of the theory and literature around collaboration

What are your plans for the future?

Karen and one of the student partners presented at the UCL Education Conference 2019 and the BME Awarding Gap Conference in 2021, including the challenges they

encountered working in partnership. Karen and two of the student partners are currently co-writing an academic article based on the project.

For more information on this case study please contact Karen Schucan Bird
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