Decolonizing Knowledge, Curriculum, Pedagogy: A Classroom Experiment at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies

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Faculty member Dr. Pushpa Iyer and four graduate students from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies' Spring 2022 course on 'Decolonizing Knowledge' are the authors of this article.

The course had 14 participants, including the five of us. Through this course, we embarked on an exciting experiment of decolonizing the classroom - curriculum and pedagogy - along with exploring the topic of decolonizing knowledge. The process required us to decolonize our minds, which meant we had to challenge every assumption about teaching and learning. This article details our experiences and provides recommendations for those seeking to use decolonized approaches to designing classrooms.

Explaining Decolonizing

Decolonization has many different definitions and contextual meanings and is understood in various ways. Eric Ritskes, Managing Editor at Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, says decolonization is "'*writing back' against the ongoing colonialism and colonial mentalities that permeates education, media, government policies, and common sense.*" For Yang and Tuck, centering indigenous thoughts and lands is central to the process of decolonization; they caution against using decolonization as a metaphor. In essence, their argument is supported by many who say decolonization is not synonymous with diversity, equity, inclusion, or even social justice. Instead, decolonization is a process where you expand what or who is in the center – people, institutions, places, languages – by bringing those in the periphery to the center. Most importantly, decolonization is not a goal or an endpoint but a process.

When it comes to decolonizing knowledge, we cannot engage in the process without decolonizing our minds. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o refers to colonizers' language as the primary tool by which our minds internalize colonized ideas. Given that westernized education encourages teaching and learning in the language of the colonizers, one can understand that those of us in the business of knowledge exchange are all operating from a colonized mindset.

Therefore, decolonization is not the opposite of colonization. It is also not about being anti-colonial or post-colonial but about a process of decentering and recentering knowledge and people. Decentering involves readjusting who or what is in the center and the periphery. This process does not involve replacing the center with the periphery but expanding the center by bringing more of the periphery into the center. Further, in this process, the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion are central, which means the expanded center does not look homogeneous, nor does it insist that those joining the center from the periphery must assimilate.

Methodology

Putting this article together was a great educational experience. We were eager to retain our voices while presenting a shared learning experience, so you will note that we all present our thoughts separately in each section. If there are repetitions, we left them there for emphasis, and although we mostly agreed, there were moments of disagreement. We discussed our disagreements which we saw as inevitable given the nature of the experiment in which we all had an equal stake. While combining our varied thoughts and writing styles to

produce this finished piece was challenging, we felt it was an important conclusion to our semester-long efforts to respect diversity and be inclusive. We have been working on this article since March 2022. We have had many discussions and have met at least once a week over these months. Our preparatory work included gathering information from our fellow participants. We, therefore, designed two surveys, one after the midterm and one towards the end of the semester. The surveys asked participants to self-reflect on strengths, challenges, opportunities, what worked and did not work for them in decolonizing the classroom, key lessons learned, and what suggestions they had should we re-do the experiment. The authors also responded to the surveys to capture our feelings and impressions at different times. All of us also contributed weekly to a shared journal. The journal was meant to capture our immediate thoughts and feelings after every class meeting. All of this became the data to inform our writing. Everyone was invited to co-author this piece. Those who did not join expressed time constraints or a lack of interest. They chose the option to write on a topic they were passionate about as the final paper for this course.

Our writing process suffered a minor setback; one of the authors, Y, dropped out of the project because they disagreed with Pushpa's final grade suggestion. Instead of negotiating their grade, which was the agreed-up-on process, this student disrespected our writing process (with frustrations primarily directed at Pushpa) and decided to write an individual final paper. It was another learning moment in our experiment. The incident momentarily disturbed our flow, but we quickly bounced back.

Some of us took responsibility for editing, but we strongly feel that editing itself is a colonized process. So, we have done our best to retain our styles of expression in this piece leaving out the urge to standardize the English language or force everyone to have a similar writing style.

Our Reasoning for Decolonizing the Classroom

Pushpa: I felt I could not lead a course on decolonizing knowledge (which requires us to question how we gather knowledge and disseminate it) by running a classroom where I dictate what should be read and how knowledge must be processed. I felt uncomfortable running a show similar to the one I have been running for 15 years in the [westernized education system](). Coming up with a syllabus, designing assignments, and stating policies upfront was traditionally my responsibility, but I wondered what it would look like if I shared responsibility with the students. Would the students feel responsible for how the course topics would be selected and structured? Would they feel a sense of ownership for our joint learning? Would the process make them more empowered? Would they learn more? Would it change how they evaluated the course at the end of the semester? Finally, would they stop seeing me as the person who dictated what constitutes knowledge, how we work with knowledge, and who has access to knowledge?

I remember thinking about all this in the lead-up to the start of the semester. I was excited about exploring various sub-themes of decolonizing knowledge based on student interests and passions. On the first day of class, I conveyed my reasoning that decolonizing the classroom was our attempt to decolonize our minds and knowledge. It was the applied aspect of decolonizing knowledge, the course topic. That week's journal entries show that everyone was on board, but there was a lot of nervous excitement for our experiment. Many said this was their first time jointly designing the syllabus without having a professor set expectations and standards. Ruth captured the excitement in her journal, saying, "*I'm excited for this course after today, I especially love the collaborative exploration feeling I'm getting from the way we'll be determining our syllabus and topics as a class.*" Niya, on the other hand captured the nervousness many felt by saying, "*I am SO used to formalized almost rigid style of classes where expectations are set by the professor, not the student, and I hope that I don't become laissez-faire towards the class, because I am not used to this style of learning.*"

Much later, one participant, X (we, the authors, have decided to give this participant the privilege of anonymity), in response to the first survey, thought the whole experiment of decolonizing the classroom was wrong because it had nothing to do with decolonizing knowledge. For them, the course was structured wrong because, as they put it, "*Students pay tuition that ultimately pays the professor for their expertise and for facilitating classroom discussion, and providing expertise, feedback, and guidance on student work.*" They implied that I

was shying away from my responsibilities by not playing the role of the teacher who delivered knowledge and guided students. Not only did I find the statement offensive and rude, but also unproductive, given that we had spent an entire class discussing our reasoning for the structure and process of this course.

I find students who make targeted attacks on faculty without being able to discuss their concerns a problematic feature of [westernized education](). So, on the one hand, I am the expert who guides, and on the other hand, I am only the provider with my students as my clients. My only job is to keep them happy and say only what they want to hear. The corporatized education model turns the students into customers who make personal attacks when they are dissatisfied with the service they receive. If this participant had chosen to discuss how they did not understand the link between decolonizing the classroom and the course subject, it could have led to a fascinating discussion. Instead, it ended up being a missed opportunity for true learning.

I believe our experiment was appropriate for the course topic we were exploring. I understand that some students did not sign up for this experiment, felt uncomfortable voicing their concerns or disagreement on the first day, or did not anticipate the amount of responsibility on their shoulders in a decolonized structure. This, despite the very open and collaborative environment created on day one, which many of the participants were grateful for, as noted in their journal entries. This course is not a required course for any degree program, so there was definitely a choice for people to withdraw if they disagreed with the class structure.

Alicia: When I first signed up for the class, I thought it would be centered around decolonizing our minds and questioning the knowledge that has dominated higher education institutions from a western-centric lens. On the first day, we learned that we would focus on varied aspects of decolonization, most notably in a decentralized classroom structure designed by all of us as equals. It felt important to have this experience in graduate school because we had all come here to learn different ways of thinking and develop critical analysis skills. While I had had other classes that helped me reframe my thinking, none of the other courses challenged my ways of learning. I was very excited to take this class, as I was coming into it with expectations from an [Anti-Racism]() training course and meetings that Pushpa had led. I liked how those spaces challenged my way of thinking; I was excited for this class to do the same. In my undergraduate degree in Scotland, I learned about the school of [post-colonial]() thought, which refers to the reality of all of us existing in a world where every facet is necessarily a product of colonialism and urges us to be more critical of the way we navigate the world. From this education, I was curious if decolonization referred to a reversal of the colonial process if it meant breaking down the colonial era's barriers, or something in between. I came into this class with many questions. Specifically, I had been curious about the idea of how we can reverse or shift the long, dark shadow that colonialism has cast over our world. I brought this query into the class, excited to explore these ideas further. Finally, going off Pushpa's point, I was shocked and disappointed to read X's responses in the survey because I came into this class very confident that we were all building this experiment together and that we all had equal respect for one another. It was difficult to hear that someone had been silently judging Pushpa so harshly when I thought we were all on the same page.

Chanel: As a candidate for the International Policy and Development program, I came into this course to study the role of colonization in global development and what the processes of decolonizing development would entail. I went into this class with no background knowledge of decolonization. I had, however, learned and been part of discussions on the history of colonialism. These factors have contributed to my understanding of slavery as an essential aspect of colonialism. I also understood colonialism as a group of colonizers, usually European white men, coming into a foreign area and enforcing their ideologies on its people. I, therefore, signed up for this class to learn about decolonization. I was surprised to see that we would practice decolonization in the classroom, from creating our ground rules to determining what the syllabus entails. Throughout my higher education experiences, I have followed a specific structure provided by the instructor, and this class presented a different route. Coming into this course, I was a little anxious to see how I would adjust to having a decolonized classroom. I was also excited to see what a classroom environment looked like where the students were on the same level as my professor.

At the end of the course, I felt that I had progressed in my decolonization journey. I was able to grow my facilitation skills. Additionally, I was able to add a new perspective on what decolonization can look like through a national and international lens. However, as Pushpa and Alicia have mentioned, one of my colleagues felt differently. For the first time in a class, I had an opportunity to discuss our sentiments midway through the semester from a survey. I was a little frustrated and confused that the individual, X, only felt comfortable sharing through that outlet and not during class, a location I thought of as a safe space. The comment regarding the classroom structure connected to Pushpa's salary revealed how colonialism and capitalism collide in academia. I also realized how difficult it is to decolonize someone's mindset from the effect of colonialism in education/academia.

Christina: When I signed up for this class, I expected to learn more about ways to decolonize my thinking and was curious to experience the process of decolonizing the classroom. Like Chanel, I came into this course not knowing much about decolonization and wanted to learn more about the decolonization process and apply it to my passion for bringing social change. When I entered the class on the first day, I thought decolonization was the opposite of colonization. Brittanica.com says decolonization is "*a process when colonies become independent of colonizing countries*." However, I quickly learned that decolonization meant "*decenter and recenter knowledge and our minds*." Once I heard how the class would be structured, I thought this would be a good experiment to see how decolonization happens in practice. After the course, I will say it was a thought-provoking experiment that encouraged me to think deeper about myself and my thoughts on the journey of decolonizing my mind. Our peer, Justin, also said the same in response to the first survey, *"This has been a challenging experience for me. The course has encouraged me to peel back more and more of the overlapping layers of colonization in my own life and in my past and current experiences. I've learned a lot and would certainly do it again."*

On another note, I saw the impact of the biased and inflammatory comments presented by X in the survey on Pushpa as I worked closely with her on this article. Their response also suggested that X was not there to learn from other students but from the professor. All this troubled me and made me realize how difficult it is for us to decolonize our minds.

Ellen: When I looked into this class before the semester started, I genuinely had no expectations and believed it would be a typical course in a westernized classroom. I had taken courses that included alternative teaching methods or relied on consistent student leadership, so I wondered if this class would take on similar elements, framing it as a decolonized approach. Like my fellow writers, I was unfamiliar with what decolonization meant or even all the forms of colonialism present in our lives. My initial thoughts on what we would cover in the class were like those expressed by my colleagues. They tended towards the idea of decolonizing how knowledge is collected, analyzed, used, and dispersed in the field of development and aid, as that would follow the theme of my past coursework. I was hoping to build tools to take forward with me into my professional life but did not reflect much on what decolonizing the classroom meant.

I also understood that I had a significant journey ahead of me and knew that some of the participants already had experiences with decolonization. I was grateful for a space to be vulnerable and learn. When it came time to fill out the survey, I had already had the opportunity to lead a class alongside another participant, Ruth. I enjoyed the experience because I could take control of my own learning while developing a deep understanding of a subject with a respected peer. What struck me from the survey is what everyone else has expressed; X felt very differently about the class and expressed their discontent in a way that was dehumanizing to Pushpa, framing her not as a person but simply a professor providing the service of educating. Like Chanel, I was sad that X had chosen not to speak up in class or on Slack. I felt their choice to share in a space free from peer responses or discussion undermined our work to construct a safe space and Pushpa's effort to offer a space of flipped power dynamics where we could take charge of our learning process. I was also struck that they thought "*course management and facilitation should be led by the professor that is paid to do that work and trained in it*" because I wondered if they held less value for participant-led sessions. Although they did note in the weekly journal that they "*learned a lot from the information Ruth and Ellen shared and I thought they were both excellent discussion facilitators,*" this made me feel as though what was said in class might be ingenuine

and that more invalidating ideas would arise in later surveys or in the End of Semester Evaluation. While I am not affected; by the End of Semester Evaluation, I knew that Pushpa had, in many ways, gone out on a limb for us to have this experience, and I hoped her effort would not be in vain.

Our Decolonization Journey…

We think we did initiate a process of decolonization. We had the ball rolling by emphasizing how we generated knowledge in the classroom to be equally important as how knowledge was to be shared, assimilated, and managed. We also believe the center of the classroom was expanded by the language shift from students to participants. The center had the potential to be further expanded because many would be involved in deciding what constitutes knowledge.

The Beginning

We created three documents that would outline our goals and basic expectations of each other for the duration of this experiment. These documents were a [course contract](), [ground rules](), and a [grading policy](), created on the first day of class through a class-wide discussion. The course contract detailed the responsibilities of all participants. The ground rules were jointly developed by all participants and focused on rules of engagement, on how we all wanted to treat each other and be treated. Lastly, we prepared a grading policy outlining the assignments and the potential weights they would each have for our final grade in this class. We were all conscious that at the end of the day, we were still embarking on this adventure within a traditional Graduate School Institution that does require a final grade report for each of us. Therefore, we decided that we would determine not only our own grade breakdown but also our own final grade. Together we agreed on due dates for each assignment. Pushpa would review all assignments, and if she disagreed with the final self-assigned grade, she would let the concerned person know; the participant could then negotiate their final grade with Pushpa. If the negotiation process were started, Pushpa would almost certainly agree to the grade decided by the participant.

Alicia: I enjoyed this process of creating the classroom together, and I remember feeling very empowered to participate in the first day of class discussions. On that first day, I felt as though everyone was putting a lot of effort into participating and committed to this experiment together. None of us, including Pushpa, had ever engaged in decolonizing a classroom. All our ideas were just creative brainstorming, and overall, I was proud of all of us for coming up with the ground rules and course contract.

I also found the process empowering. For example, on evaluation/ grading, I had said in my journal, *"I think it's really interesting the idea of being able to choose how, when and why we are evaluated, being able to recognize our strengths and weaknesses and use that to our advantage is a very strong practice that especially women need to be better at because we tend to be unrealistic about our strengths and weaknesses and feel that we are much worse off than we actually are."*

Throughout the semester, I know I failed to revisit some of our initial policy documents and suspect that others did too. I would have benefitted from periodically rereading these documents, especially the course contract and ground rules. In addition, I feel that our inter-class dynamics might have been more respectful if we all read them more often.

Chanel: At the start of class, everyone seemed open and willing to work together on creating documents instead of the traditional syllabus. I found this to be exciting because this allowed everyone to be a part of the decision-making instead of having to follow decisions made by a professor.

The part of the ground rules I most appreciated was that if anyone were feeling any discomfort, they would be able to meet with Pushpa to address them. Pushpa agreed to be available for anyone with questions or concerns in and outside class. I know this may not have been decolonized because the responsibility to address

discomfort falls on one person, Pushpa. However, I thought that this was an excellent way to slowly adjust to the idea of decolonization since not everyone may be used to expressing their problems or concerns with the whole class. We didn't want to rush the process but instead take it one step at a time.

Unfortunately, though, no one reached out to Pushpa. Maybe time was a concern – it seemed as if no one wanted to make time to discuss matters outside of class time. One of the participants, Lisa, brought up this point in the surveys. She mentioned that this class should have met twice a week. One of the classes could've been dedicated to following our initial curriculum of having everyone facilitate a discussion on the topic they chose and related to decolonizing knowledge. In contrast, the other meeting time would be an opportunity to discuss our process of decolonization as a class. I found this suggestion useful as we navigated some of the challenges from not having thoroughly thought through our policies.

As a class, we decided to give ourselves a grade that Pushpa would review. We would negotiate with her if there were significant discrepancies between her and our own evaluation. We didn't want to support the idea that one person gets to decide your performance, but neither could we move away from the colonized system. This was different for me because I've only really had the opportunity to dispute my grades but never the opportunity to negotiate my grades. I felt that this was a great start to decolonizing the classroom and supporting our egalitarian structure. As the semester progressed, our communication as a class declined, most likely because we didn't have an authority figure forcing us to do so. At the start of the course, I wrote in our reflection journal after every class; however, my writing lessened towards the end of the semester.

Christina: I agree that when we all found out how the course would be structured, there was a lot of excitement among the participants. That week, Niya wrote in her journal that her overall mood was "*intrigued and optimistic.*" Lisa wrote, *"was very excited to start this course and this "decolonized" pedagogy is really new to me. After our first course, I began to think about the changes in class affected by the "decolonized" methodologies and whether these methodologies could be used in some other conference, town-hall, activities, or conversation. What difference would these methodologies make to other events?"*

This was a new experience for all of us, and we would be learning on this journey together. Creating a group syllabus, course contract, and grading policy made our decolonizing journey real. It took time for everything to sink in, and I realized that nothing about this class would be "normal." This course involved significant amounts of class participation, no authority figure, joint decision-making on everything, and lots of communication with each other throughout the semester. As expressed by Lisa in the survey, I feel that establishing monthly check-ins as a group before each class to go over the challenges and concerns about the course would have been beneficial for the whole group and I believe might have sparked more discussion on what was working and what was not working in our experiment.

Ellen: The start of this class was exciting because it was a new approach to a class structure. Like my colleagues, I was happy to see that we would work together to design the syllabus and grading structure. I had had a similar experience with my first-year Arabic courses, where I felt higher levels of accountability and dedication. I find that language courses are easier to manipulate and alter than core policy-type courses, so I was eager to see where we would end up. Like my fellow writers, I was excited that we would all be a part of the creation process and was glad to see everyone equally as interested on that first day. I noted that everyone quickly spoke up and agreed with the policies. Although I did not contribute as much as others to set up policies, I was quick to agree. I brought up past relevant experiences to support my interest in the experiment.

Later, when Lisa mentioned needing more discussion time in her survey, this struck a chord with me. I fell easily into old habits and did not always adhere to ground rules. This was most notable because I continually used generalizing, we-statements instead of I-statements, offering more accountability and space for differing opinions and experiences. Like Alicia, I know I could have benefitted from re-reading the agreed-upon contracts periodically. When the survey conversation took place, I was made aware that not everyone in the group felt that the discomfort we were experiencing was beneficial. I wondered if maybe I needed to reflect more deeply on my own quick acceptance of the set policies and embrace more critical thinking with my own journey.

Pushpa: I knew that setting up a course with everyone having input would be difficult. It is always so much easier to make the decisions and have the power to force everyone on board (even if only symbolically) just by being the faculty person leading the course and providing final grades. This was going to be different. I thought there was much excitement on the first day of class, which made my job easier. I honestly did not feel that I took the lead or made a rule at any moment. We had a genuinely egalitarian atmosphere that day as we set up the course contract, ground rules, and grading policy.

Given that we all actively participated in the classroom design, I did not experience discomfort. I did not feel that my power as a course instructor was being diminished. In fact, at the end of that first class, I wrote in my journal, *"I had not one moment where I feared losing control of the course. My ego was non-existent."* I thought that all participants would have more ownership in how the class would be run, which brought relief because there were fewer chances of me being judged for any decisions I made. This was reiterated in the journal entries of a couple of other participants who said, "*This approach is going to require a lot of trust in all of us. Not only do we need to be vulnerable, but I think with this structure, Dr. Iyer will be vulnerable too. Very different from a usual class*" (Camaro); "*It takes a lot from a professor to step back and allow their students to take the lead on classroom logistics. Prof. Pushpa is taking the initiative to create a non-western classroom.*" (Chanel).

All this said, half the class did not sign the contract documents until I reminded them during the second week of class. I was really frustrated. Homework is never completed by everyone, but I thought it would be different if participants had set up their own tasks. We also spent time during the second week revisiting our agreements (primarily for the benefit of two new participants); we also finalized the dates when each participant would lead the class. At this time, our audit student, Z (who was allowed to audit after a joint decision), said they would need to give more attention to other classes where they would be graded. This did not sit well with me. I wrote in my journal that week: "*Z's comments are completely contrary to how I take responsibility for anything I commit to, so I understand why it bothered me. But, if we are running this course as a community, I need to keep my misgivings aside and trust the community members. However, if everyone is not pulling equal weight, I will be upset. Again, as a community, shouldn't we pull the weight for the person who can't or won't? Isn't that what a true community does? I am challenged, and I will stay in that uncomfortable space for now.*"

I agree with everyone who said that if we had a second class every week to discuss decolonizing the classroom (we initially said that we devote at least 5 minutes every class to highlight challenges though it never really happened), it might have sparked more thoughts and ideas. That said, I believe Ellen, Lisa, and anyone else who felt similarly could have initiated a conversation about challenges in decolonizing the classroom on Slack - our communication forum. Unfortunately, as is typical in graduate school, no one wants to discuss class matters once the class period ends. Which meant there was radio silence for the rest of the week until we met for class the following week.

In retrospect, one of the things I did not do well (and I take full ownership of this) in setting up this experiment of decolonizing pedagogy and curriculum was stressing the point that decolonization meant shared responsibility. If decolonization was breaking down the colonial structures and not having one person take the lead, make decisions, and more, then it meant we all had to put in the effort to lead jointly. It meant more communication, time, and energy we all needed to bring into our shared space. Graduate students have a very tight personal schedule juggling internships, jobs, classes, personal lives, and more. They often are not as able or willing to give time to additional tasks such as jointly running a course, so over the semester, people stopped engaging in joint decision-making or even just communicating.

Our Decolonization Journey…

Our process was taking shape. Pushpa was not the only one in the center as it would have been in a westernized classroom. There was more structure to the decolonization process. Individual and group responsibilities were clear. However, there were clues that not everyone was taking their responsibilities seriously. Which leads us to the question: what does it mean to be at the center? What happens if everyone is at the center?

Pedagogy and Curriculum

Chanel: Our approach to teaching involved the participation and input of everyone in the class. Pushpa had to continuously stress that she was not playing the role of professor. At first, it was difficult to adjust to not having this one person as the central reference. However, as the semester ended, I became more comfortable with having a community to exchange ideas with rather than just one person.

During the creation of the syllabus, we decided that everyone would choose a day to lead a discussion about an area of decolonization. I was able first to expand my perception of what decolonization can look like in different settings, and it gave me the chance to research topics on decolonization. This was an excellent opportunity to show off our egalitarian structure. Participation was another topic that became increasingly sparse during our course. During the first half of the semester, I did not fully recognize the importance of participation, which is reflected in my response to the first survey. I wrote, "*I do not think it is an important part of decolonization, there are people who are naturally introverts and have a hard time participating in class and insisting someone to do something that they are not comfortable with it's almost like forcing them in a way. For me, I think presenting everyone with an environment in which they feel comfortable participating is an important part of decolonization, however, if they choose not to then that is their choice.*"

I think this may have been because my main focus was on my own participation and less on the participation of my colleagues. As the semester progressed, my understanding of participation changed. I found that having the entire class participate gave more room for discussion during class time. Additionally, I could connect with my colleagues based on some of the viewpoints and experiences they shared. For example, during one of our classes, there was a discussion on Whiteness and its disapproval of expressing emotions. I learned that Niya, Hannah, and I all restrained our emotions in specific settings, such as work and school. Realizing that a few of us had similar experiences brought me comfort.

Halfway through the semester, I did my facilitation on decolonizing education, during which a great conversation ensued. Alicia and Pushpa discussed the emphasis on academic sources being the critical resources in the evidence presented during discussion facilitation. In my experience, this was Alicia's point that in academia, our professors had often insisted on citing academic sources in my assignments. However, this course gave us more liberty to explore different sources. Pushpa disagreed by saying it was always a mix of traditional academic and non-academic sources of knowledge that she and many other professors used in courses. After the conversation, I understood that facilitators should not be limited to scholarly sources as ways of evidence for their topic. I felt that, at least for me, a certain degree of clarity and confidence emerged from this conversation. I also know that we regularly discussed how Indigenous culture and knowledge could be important in decolonizing knowledge. However, I wish we had the conversation sooner because I would have confidently added more alternative sources, such as data from interviewing my peers on their perspectives on colonial education. I specifically remember Alicia soliciting our views before her session on decolonizing beauty standards. She then used the emerging themes to guide her facilitation. I thought it was a very innovative approach.

As the semester progressed, more of the same people were participating in our class discussions, and there was never really any discussion on Slack. I found it interesting how the level of participation altered. Overall, I found the pedagogy we used was successful, considering this was everyone's first time in a decolonized classroom.

Christina: As far as the pedagogy for a decolonized classroom, the decision to facilitate conversation in turns instead of having a traditional lecture class by Pushpa motivated us to take ownership of our learning. Some of the topics we covered included decolonizing mental health, decolonizing education, decolonizing the environment, decolonizing beauty standards, decolonizing knowledge management, dehumanization, and decolonizing the mind. The opportunity to do more in-depth research about these topics since we were all leading the discussions was empowering. This pedagogy encouraged sharing by giving space for individual passions to be pursued. I agree with Chanel; participation was difficult to enforce in the class because some participants

would neither speak up in class nor on Slack. In our first survey, we asked participants if we should insist on participation and received some interesting responses. Lisa said, "*If we are "insisting" a learning method that does not work well for some participants, how far are we in going into a colonized way of thinking?*" H said, "*I personally feel (based off the wording "insisting") that participation is important, but there should never be direct pressure put on someone individually by directly "calling them out" and asking them to speak if they have not. That would go against decolonization, in my own opinion.*" Ruth had a more nuanced response, "*since we raised the question of participation via Zoom hand raising early on, I've been going back and forth about whether or not equal participation across every platform is a useful practice for decolonization. On the one hand, I think decolonizing our classroom is an excellent opportunity to acknowledge that people engage with learning in different ways, and that expecting people to conform to particular ways of doing that can be unnecessarily restrictive. At the same time, power imbalances like how much (literal, metaphorical) space people of color and feminine presenting people should take up is so ingrained I can see the value in a practice that reinforces the importance and value of participation from everyone as a way to challenge that.*" In short, we had varied ideas of participation, and depending on where we stood on the issue, we all experienced levels of discomfort.

Ellen: Similar to my thoughts at the beginning of the course, I found the process of building a collective curriculum engaging. I had played a role in curriculum design in language courses and was eager to bring some of those experiences to this course. I have always been troubled with some people hoarding knowledge and being known as experts, so I knew almost immediately that I wanted to conduct research and share what I gathered with everyone in the classroom. The option of working with a colleague was also important to me because it provided a space to bounce ideas off another interested individual and hear a new perspective. So, I decided that I would co-facilitate. As the class progressed, our curriculum made me often reflect because everyone showed a passion for what they shared with the group, leaving me looking for more information on that topic. Our creative curriculum introduced many topics but did not leave space or time for much depth. An example of this was when we discussed the role of colonization in acceptable beauty standards or the practice of religion; we had great discussions sharing how we had experienced the two topics in our own lives but had less time to talk about how to decolonize our minds on these issues. We found time to continue the conversation on religion and beauty standards, but the topics outside class time often saw fewer participants.

Regarding participation, I found myself reflecting on this aspect of the classroom at length during the experiment. As both Chanel and Christina mentioned, there was a push to have everyone, especially quieter or less confident participants, contribute via Slack; however, those participants never took advantage of this opportunity. This was particularly interesting because I have always considered myself a very quiet person, and I wanted to rise to the challenge of regularly participating in our discussions. This led me to reflect on past classroom experiments and how my silence could be perceived as a lack of interest or buy-in. This observation also extended to our weekly journals. I kept up with them for a while, but in the last few weeks of the process, I noticed that many of us were contributing less. In the final entry, only four people participated, and in the penultimate, only six. Ultimately, I decided to continue pushing myself to use my voice rather than focus on the journals to express myself.

Turning to the pedagogy of the course, like Chanel, I quickly became very conscious that Pushpa was not playing the role of a professor and worked to change my perception of the power structures within our classroom. About a month and a half into the process, I started to understand, as I believe many of us did, that while we may have flipped the classroom, we had not done away with the colonized power structure but simply adjusted who held power for each session. Within this, I also wonder if we could have brainstormed other ways to facilitate that would have allowed those generally less confident in the typical discussion leader space to find and use their voice with more courage. I'm unsure what this would have looked like, but we weren't focused on how to facilitate; we all seem to fall easily into research and discussion-based structure.

Pushpa: I have lost count of how many times I have said, "a flipped classroom is not a decolonized classroom." Yet, I am fully aware that it is precisely what first comes to mind when we plan to overturn a colonized classroom structure. In retrospect, I had no creative or innovative ideas of how to go about sharing respon-

sibility for what is taught and how it is taught in a decolonized classroom, barring passing on some of the responsibility to the other participants. I felt the students were innovative in deciding on the course contract, which included aspects such as grading, which probably mattered the most to them. However, they did not engage much with others on what we should read, what topics we should cover or how we should lead. Some did reach out to me to plan their topic, readings, and facilitation process, but most did not contact me. When I received my doctorate, it came with the assumption that I was now ready to teach; it took me years to figure out how to develop a good syllabus, how to organize classroom time, and how to become comfortable with the unexpected twists and turns in a classroom – driving home the point that teaching and facilitation is an art. I believe if the participants had spent more time reflecting on the process rather than on what readings to provide and what slides to present, there might have been more learning about gathering, disseminating, and managing knowledge as a leader.

The minute I suggested students take the lead in turns, everyone seemed to jump on it, and we went immediately to the logistics on who was leading which day. I was one of the few who added a wish list of the topics I would like to see covered in class. Many did not inform us in advance what subject they would cover. When facilitation imitated the colonized ways of how a class is usually led – readings assigned in advance, one person getting others to think about a particular question/ issue, and everyone participating per their level of comfort even if that meant no participation, I recognized that now we had a flipped classroom and that was it. There was nothing decolonized about our approach. In fact, I was receiving readings on the Thursday or Friday before our Monday class. Compare this to faculty, who usually must provide the syllabus and readings before the start of the semester! No one except me seemed to have an issue receiving readings late in the week. I believe there is a sense of camaraderie that makes the participants (as students) support each other and their busy schedules, but I cannot imagine in a colonized structure a faculty member getting away with providing readings two or three days before a scheduled class.

I brought up the matter in class, suggesting that we were running a flipped classroom and, therefore, had not decolonized the classroom. I received a lot of pushback on that day because the participants, as is always the misunderstanding, felt that since they (students) were leading the class, we had decolonized. I remember Alicia being the only person at a certain point to continue to engage. I challenged her and others if they had done anything differently because they also came into the space with their colonized minds. I argued that challenging authority (my authority as a professor), which I think they were doing, was a step toward expanding the center, but it was not decolonizing. I learned later that this debate between Alicia and me, which I thought was an excellent intellectual exercise between a professor and students that is often only possible in a decolonized environment, made X uncomfortable because it took away time from Chanel, who was facilitating that day. This debate came up on that day because Chanel was presenting on education. X's journal entry expressed their discomfort but resulted in radio silence from the others who never mentioned the discussion in their journal entries. I am still flabbergasted. I must say that I genuinely felt engaged in that classroom and appreciated Alicia for taking the time to openly share her thoughts and think we both self-reflected on the discussion many times over while writing this article.

I facilitated the first two classes to cover the concept of decolonization, the history of colonization that led to Whiteness as a system, and culture in education. I brought in mixed methods of self-reflection (journaling), small group conversations, case studies, and large group conversations. I was surprised that a few critiqued my use of self-reflection, saying that they would have instead spent the time discussing the articles they were assigned. My argument was that having an academic conversation on published peer-reviewed articles (which I had to assign to provide conceptual frameworks) did nothing to question our own approach to knowledge management. I later figured that critiquing me (the person) was itself considered decolonization because I was still seen as the person with power. No one else was ever critiqued for their readings or their facilitation. In fact, every subsequent journal entry hyped up each participant as the greatest facilitator.

Further, with regards to the curriculum, I believe that we can decolonize when we bring not only non-academic sources into the learning space but also prioritize non-westernized sources of knowledge. Some of the readings did that, but since none of us were raised at home or in schools to learn from these non-western sources, we could only interpret these readings as far as our colonized minds would take us. Also, the facilitation styles

were that of discussion and not necessarily seeking out information from participants to lead a discussion around shared knowledge. Alicia was the only one who solicited articles and topics from others to facilitate a conversation on decolonizing beauty standards. However, we also ran the risk of going to the other extreme by providing no academic readings. Replacing the readings at the center with sources of knowledge from the periphery only replaces what knowledge is in the center. It is not decolonization. There is also a lot of responsibility for taking the lead in knowledge gathering and knowledge sharing. It requires trying to gather knowledge from various sources, challenge your thinking and interpretation of knowledge, and solicit knowledge from others. While I think everyone put in a lot of work to share knowledge, the fact remains that we only selected the knowledge that our colonized minds considered important. I, therefore, believe that more life experiences, exposure to varieties of knowledge, less positionality in our beliefs and assumptions, and open expressions of differing ideas and opinions from others in the room are needed when leading a decolonized classroom. However, colonization, especially our education system, has resulted in us being a primarily homogenous group regarding what knowledge we consider important and how we interpret knowledge.

Alicia: As others have mentioned, including Pushpa, our class structure of having each person facilitate a class was not too different from other classes I have taken at MIIS. It was indeed a flipped classroom. I know the idea behind this student-facilitated class schedule was to hear a diversity of perspectives; however, I am still wondering how we might have decolonized the classic classroom structure and what other options might be available. I was initially very intrigued by the idea that each student would find resources for the topic of their choosing because I thought students who were not PhDs would provide more unique sources than a professor who knows the most well-received academic papers in the field. For example, when studying law in Edinburgh, I kept thinking I found unique contradictions in legal principles that people had not found yet, only to find out that there was a correct legal principle or applicable case law, and the one I had found was incorrect. I could never find the correct principle on my own without instruction from the law professor. I remember thinking how disappointing it was that these secret paragraphs or cases I found so incorrect. So, I was hoping that students choosing their own resources would be like me finding not well-known parts of the law, only in this world of decolonization, there would be no wrong answer, no wrong resource.

When Pushpa and I debated whether students choosing these resources themselves was that different from a PhD-educated professor's resources. At first, I thought it was very different because students do not have the most accurate and up-to-date information meaning they would bring in less academically revered arguments, which at the very least contributes to a diversity of thoughts. However, as Pushpa pointed out, we are only some six years of formal education behind her; we have still gone through many years of colonized education systems and probably valued the same sources as 'respectable' or academically viable, meaning that the sources we tend to choose as students are not that different from the ones Pushpa would choose unless we all tried to look for knowledge from sources in the periphery.

Our Decolonization Journey…

With pedagogy, we made a lot of progress toward decolonizing. However, colonized thinking still put Pushpa at the center and unknowingly put the others in the periphery. Colonized minds produce binary thinking, leading to the professor being pitted against students, which continued. With regards to the curriculum, it was much harder for us to challenge our colonized thinking. While there was more diversity in the sources of knowledge, our interpretation of knowledge tended to come from more homogeneous thinking. There was not much diversity amongst us in thoughts and beliefs. Pushpa tried to bring in the "other" viewpoint, but it often did not provoke thinking in some because they saw her comments as challenging the participants. Avoiding personal discomfort prevented us from truly decolonizing.

Joint Decision-Making and Policies

Our first reflection paper was due two months after the start of the semester. Half the class missed the deadline because no one had reminded them of the due date. That is when we realized we had no late submission policy. Unfortunately, not all individuals participated in the conversation, and there was still some confusion

about late submissions in the class. Similarly, there was no discussion on final papers – length, topic focus, submission date, and more. Another decision we struggled to make jointly.

Christina: I felt that a collaborative decision-making process was difficult when deciding on the late submission policy and finalizing the details of the final projects. I disagree with the late submitters who said they did not participate in the decision-making process because they wanted to give those who submitted in time the chance to speak up first. Since this was a decolonized classroom, as participants in the class, we all had the opportunity, the obligation, and the power to make a joint decision on developing a late policy for the course. By the end of the semester, it seemed as though only a few participants in the class, particularly the ones working on the main article, were the ones suggesting policies, with the others just going along in agreement. I felt that since the beginning of the class, we had a hard time communicating with each other. It was hard for the participants to understand that there was no one central figure in the class and that we were all running the course. We are used to a colonized classroom where a professor tells us what we need to read when we need to turn in our assignments, and how we should follow the class. In this class, we all needed to work together to create a space where we made rules and policies as a whole and not just by one person.

Ellen: Policies were an interesting topic for this class because, in the excitement of the first day, we all agreed quickly to the grading, facilitation, ground rules, and course contract. However, we struggled to implement and agree on new policies later in the semester. My first interpretation was that the initial policies did not include many "what if" scenarios and the ease of the discussion led us to a place of general complacency. I agree with Christina that later in the semester, we all seemed to be searching for a central figure to take control of and struggled to run the discussion on our own. For example, with the late policy, the regulation had not been discussed at the start of the course and had to be created only once a need arose. While developing this policy on Slack, I noticed that those of us who did not need to turn anything in late had less interest in the conversation. I knew I was an important member of the course, but I couldn't find the urgency to include myself in the conversation because I had no individual stake in the issue. As a result of such complacency from me and others, the policy was *never* developed. From my side, perhaps I was so used to colonized academia that without a set policy from the start or a leader to dictate regulations, I struggled to create policy.

Pushpa: It was frustrating and, at times, even amusing for me to see how the collaborative decision-making process was being handled. Everyone was waiting for someone else to suggest a policy. No one wanted to take leadership or even joint leadership. Making disparate comments on Slack or radio silence were two approaches I noticed. It was a good lesson for everyone on the challenges of having a fully egalitarian society. Also interesting to me was the number of times participants expressed that if a policy did not affect them, they really did not mind whatever decision was made. For example, participants said that if individual assignments were submitted late, they did not care if there was a grade penalty, but if joint assignments were submitted late, there needed to be repercussions. The focus is always on self and how much they would be impacted. Isn't that exactly how our policymakers make policy decisions?

When half the class did not submit the first assignment in time, I urged them to discuss a late grading policy before I started accepting late submissions. Students began emailing me separately or messaging me on Slack to explain their reason for a late submission. I was happy to hear the reasons, but I could not accept them until we had a late grading policy. Since grades were to be determined by participants themselves, they could easily give themselves an appropriate grade depending on the validity of their reason. A few admitted that they had honestly forgotten the due date. A couple of their participants distanced themselves from me from that point forward. They stopped participating in class. I suppose they were angry because I did not say, "no problem; go ahead and submit yours late." I became the problem because their "failure" was made public. If I had made a decision, I would be faulted for breaking the rules of our contract. Decolonization does require everyone to think and behave like equals and not put our own needs at the center.

It was also interesting that a few people chose not to submit their second reflection paper probably because they had assigned themselves a low-grade range for reflection pieces and thought it was okay just to skip an assignment. Towards the end of the semester, barring one or two, no one would discuss the final paper guide-

lines on Slack. There was no time during class to have this discussion, so I discussed it with the authors of this piece, and we came up with a policy that was shared with others. There were no objections (at least none that we heard), and everyone went along with the dates and format we suggested. In effect, the five of us who were not writing final papers decided the policy for those who were writing the final paper! It was disappointing, but it was easy. So, even in the decolonized classroom, the five of us became the center.

Regarding grading, we could have agreed that everyone would receive an 'A.' We could have also run this class with no assignments, but at least my colonized mind never considered that a possibility. I also could never accept someone who came into the classroom, did nothing, and walked away with an 'A.' Still, a colonized thought, I agree. As the semester progressed, it was clear that more and more people gave very little time to the class. So, at the end of the course, when I disputed the grades of a few, two expressed their displeasure in different ways. X, who until then had labeled me the expert whose job was to guide the students, wanted a higher grade. My opinion or expertise did not count when it came to grading. They wrote a long message arguing why every grade point they had assigned themselves was correct. I gave in because that was the policy we agreed on. The other participant, Y, who had an issue with the grade I suggested, decided, after making their ire against me clear, to withdraw from writing this article with us. I felt outraged with both participants, and here is where I had to check myself. I was equal with the others in the class, but I wished I had some power at that moment because, for me, it was unfair - not to me but other participants in the class if grading standards were not uniform. However, there was nothing I could do. There are many conclusions to draw from our grading policies challenges, and it requires some deep reflection which I am continuing even as I share this experience with all of you.

Alicia: I found the joint decision-making process of the class to be the most difficult. It was tough to have these discussions with input from every person unless we were all discussing it in class. Not everyone would respond if we tried to continue a discussion on Slack after class. H mentioned they were uncomfortable using Slack at the very end of the semester. Also, it was challenging to settle on any one final decision when we were trying to operate in a system of equality because no one felt they had the authority to make that decision. The best way forward was to find a consensus that most people agreed upon because that would be most effective; however, the most agreeable solution was a task drenched in bias. Each person would have a different result that they thought best which was very hard to maneuver. With the late policy decision-making process, we never fully arrived at a conclusion because people would respond quite disparately with their opinions at different times. Unfortunately, there were not many voices in this discussion, so the late policy discussion was sort of left open-ended. I was one of the people who turned in the assignment late, so I felt I should wait to participate until I heard from the people who had turned it in on time to be respectful of the work they put in. It was very easy for participants to feel they were not responsible for joint decisions because most of us have grown up in an education system where the buck stops with the professor. I don't think we were used to feeling that equal level of authority with everyone else in the classroom.

Chanel: The process of joint decision-making during this course was very interesting. In the beginning, as a class, we did very well with creating the ground rules and the syllabus for this class. We agreed that this class would be a space where each time we encountered a problem, we would come together as a class to determine a solution. I felt confident that working together throughout the semester would not be a problem.

However, there was an assignment due during spring break (a due date agreed upon together) that not all participants turned in on time. This made me realize that we never discussed how we would handle late assignments as a class in our syllabus. As a result, many contributors addressed Pushpa, who was supposed to be our equal in this decolonized setting, instead of coming to the class to discuss their reasons for their late assignments. I realized that in a colonized environment, as a student, you usually talk to your professor about anything, including assignments, and no communication is needed between you and your classmates. On Slack, we discussed how we as a class should address the late policy. However, I felt that the discussion was unproductive because not everyone joined in the conversation, and still, there was no decision on our late policy. Like Alicia, I was one of the students who had not submitted on time. Though for me, I felt like the participants who submitted on time held power in deciding what should happen to the late submitters. I did not feel

that I deserved to make that decision. This could be a consequence of my colonized education. Usually, those that may be penalized have no place in decision-making, especially regarding grades.

As the semester proceeded, there was less and less communication and little direction on handling certain situations, such as having a participant audit the course, creating a safe space, and transforming the power dynamics between Pushpa and the class.

Our Decolonization Journey...

There was not much we could decolonize when it came to decision-making and policies. It was not so much that Pushpa was being put in the center but that most participants wanted to put themselves in the center and everyone else in the periphery. It was very messy and nonlinear. Being in the center comes with responsibilities, duties towards others, and some rights. Are we prepared for the center?

Lessons Learned and Turning Points in our Decolonization Journey

Ellen: This class experiment was entirely new for me. I had heard the term decolonization in conversations on social justice or in regard to unraveling the bonds of colonization. I had, of course, seen terms like; decolonize your mind, decolonize the system, decolonize your wallet, and so on. This class was my first dive into the complexities of decolonization for me. I knew from a past course with Pushpa that getting outside of my comfort zone would be encouraged, and I would have a lot to reflect on and consider after class sessions were over. On day one, I did not know where the semester would take me, but at different moments in the class, I reflected on my past academic experiences and ways of interacting with knowledge and the world. With the first reflection assignment, I was aware that I was going through a moment of deep learning. I noted this and was continuously checking in with where I was comfortable or uncomfortable and why. When we came together to discuss our collective decolonization process, I also found myself at an important moment of self-reflection; I needed to share my personal views and experiences. This was also a moment where I was able to reflect on our perceptions of a safe space, the concept was new to me, so I was working to understand what a safe space felt like and how best to cultivate them. During our discussion about safe spaces, it became clear that we all had differing ideas about this space, with a couple of participants expecting to be free from discomfort. In reality, a safe space is a place to learn, free from judgment. Participation in moments of discomfort was essential to my growth and the overall journey; I still feel I have only scratched the surface but am happy for the moments of growth. The validity and necessity of my own voice were probably the most significant lessons I learned, the tool I hope to take forward in my professional life.

Pushpa: Although I have taught this course many times, this is the first time I have attempted to apply what we were learning to the classroom. As many scholars have said, the process of decolonization must be messy, conflictual, and nonlinear. That is exactly what we went through as well in our experiment. There were a few key lessons that were also turning points in my decolonization journey. In this section, I will refer to the participants as students because I need a little distance to analyze my feelings. They are as follows:

(a) It is very difficult to decolonize our minds. The students could never stop putting me at the center even though, for some, de-empowering me was their most straightforward way of decolonizing the classroom. I definitely did not want power, nor did I miss it until I saw something very unfair happening. That is when I want power - the power to change and create balance. I admit it is a very colonized response to dealing with things you disagree with - this realization humbles me. I noticed this happening in the journals, too, where increasingly, it became a place to pat each other on the back (not me) and not a space to self-reflect. As a result, I lost interest and stopped contributing to the journals.

(b) I used the egalitarian structure to demand support when X made the space unsafe for me. My co-authors took the lead in leading a discussion around safe space and challenged other participants to move beyond their discomfort. I felt very supported. I spoke very little during this conversation. This

situation reiterated the academic binary of students vs. faculty. When a student had made the space unsafe, only another student could challenge them. This realization was disturbing for me.

(c) The anger against me when students did not get what they wanted resulted in me being put in the center despite my protests. The person in the center is vilified for who they are and their power; causing them harm becomes a goal of those who see themselves in the periphery. It dehumanizes the person in the center and prevents them from wanting to engage with others. Although I did feel dehumanized by some of the students, I fought against my urge to withdraw and stayed very involved in the learning experience. I could not, however, express concern towards people who had no concern for me. An important aspect of colonization is the dehumanization of the people in the periphery by the colonizers who placed themselves in the center. If decolonization did the exact opposite of dehumanizing those in the center, then one can say with complete confidence that a tit-for-tat approach will simply not change the system. It becomes a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. This realization was revealing for me.

Overall, this experiment of decolonizing the classroom was a great learning experience for me. After years of teaching, the challenges we faced did not shock me. I expected them, but I am proud that most participants in the class took the process seriously, took responsibility, and did their best. I also believe that as a teacher, we all did learn a lot about decolonizing knowledge and gained the kind of knowledge that none of us will ever forget.

Alicia: Throughout this journey in decolonization, I have had two major turning points that marked distinct shifts in my conceptions of decolonizing knowledge. The first of these turning points was mentioned earlier in the article by way of the debate that Pushpa and I had about students being inherently less entrenched in the world of western academic sources because we are not yet experts in that field. Secondly, as I wrote in the second survey, *"One of the biggest changes in my mind has been in regard to the current pc cancel culture, safe space, very modern GenZ America culture. I always was resistant to it and never bought in, but this class helped me form a more solidified and coherent opinion."* During my time at MIIS, I noticed the demand for a politically correct culture both in and out of the classroom. I think a lot of people at MIIS believe that a "safe space" means a space in which they should never take offense. That is to say, everyone should use such perfect language in a way that could never offend anyone. I tend to speak very freely and not choose my verbiage very carefully. I started to notice that some people in social settings were easily offended and very sensitive about word choice, so I began to filter myself or avoid certain people altogether. I found this carried over into the classroom setting, particularly in Pushpa's classes, where she helps craft an environment wherein debate can thrive and people can push each other to think differently or engage with different ideas. Inevitably, there were people in classes who felt very uncomfortable with this, and it made them stop participating and just shut down for fear of having someone challenge their ideas. At the beginning of class, it was evident that this Decolonizing Knowledge class was set up to challenge your thought processes and that anyone uncomfortable with it was free to drop the class. We had to have a high level of buy-in from the get-go because we had to work to build the class together, and we couldn't really afford any free floaters, not on board with the project. In the next class, after we received the survey feedback, I was meant to be the student facilitator; but I found myself very apprehensive because it was clear that at least one student, X, wished Pushpa led every class because as the expert on their subject. That discouraged me because I had been researching my topic since the beginning of the semester and felt there might be some who didn't even want to hear it, but they would never say that to my face.

I tried my best to facilitate an open discussion on the survey responses and focused on how others define a safe space. One response during our discussions that stuck with me is when a participant professed that she was unwilling to sacrifice her own comfort in favor of someone else's discomfort. This response came from the audit student, Z, who barely ever participated in class discussions and did not fill out our surveys. This, to me, felt like it completely missed the point of the safe space we were defining because part of that space is being comfortable with discomfort and being challenged. The discussion I facilitated in class was productive because many people acknowledged their lack of participation and admitted that they should have been more proactive in voicing their opinions. It was very nice to hear this self-awareness and reflection, and it put me at ease before I facilitated the class discussion on beauty standards. All that being said, I don't think we ever did

come to a solid conclusion of what kind of safe or unsafe space this decolonized classroom is, but I think it was a very important first step in the conversation to get people to start thinking about what they view as a safe space, so that they may ruminate on their point of view in the future. For me, this conversation remains one of the core transitions in my decolonization journey. However, my biggest lesson learned is the comfortability of living in discomfort, especially when confronting colonized thought processes within my own mind or behavior. This experiment was an exercise in identifying global trends of neo- or post-colonialism, as well as patterns of colonial thought processes within ourselves and the classroom. Overall, this experiment gave me much more confidence in taking small steps forward in recognizing institutionalized colonial patterns and theorizing on how to break those down.

Chanel: Coming into this class, there was an assumption that because this class heavily depended on in-class discussions, there would be no issue with peer participation. At the beginning of this course, we all came together to acknowledge that our discussions would serve as a safe space for all participants. We agreed that we would attempt to create an environment where everyone can feel comfortable sharing their ideas and experiences to produce well-rounded discussions.

From my perspective, the results of the class surveys revealed that many experienced discomfort, but in a positive way. They were challenged, as Justin put it, "in their decolonization journey." When asked in the survey if we had succeeded in creating a safe space, Niya said, "*The class has been a safe space since day 1. No more could be done.*" Lisa wrote, "*When someone makes a not-so-decolonized argument, Dr. Iyer did not challenge it, instead, she always encourages participants to discover more and to express ourselves in a safe place. Our participants as a class have also taken this approach to ensure the freedom of expressing each one's feelings.*" And Camaro said, "*I think everything that could be done has been done. Dr. Iyer has been incredibly supportive of this nontraditional methodology, which in and of itself is decolonizing! I have never felt less than safe in the environment we created.*" Justin wrote, "*I generally feel that we have done a good amount of work to make the classroom feel like a safe space to share.*" Ruth's response was interesting in that it was very self-reflective. "*On a very personal level, this class has made me acknowledge my very deep-seated discomfort with silence or inaction that I perceive as awkward or unhelpful--such as silence after someone asks a question. I think it's rooted in a desire to be supportive or 'helpful,' but I'm also aware that it can actually be very UNhelpful in some circumstances. One way I've dealt with this is making conscious attempts not to speak, or to wait until one or more people have spoken first.*"

However, X's comments derived from discussions on Slack that the space was unsafe, and their remarks about Pushpa's role resulted in the classroom being unsafe for Pushpa and, by extension, for all of us. We, the authors of the article, felt it was important to discuss the responsibility that we all shared in creating a safe space and why discomfort (of the right kind) was to be welcomed in a safe space. Our discussions on safe spaces, led by Alicia, disclosed that everyone was not on the same page in their understanding of a safe space, even if they said they found the space safe. Some thought a safe was only meant for one's feelings or ideas to be heard. The colonized mindset also made us shy away from the discomfort we felt when our ideas were challenged. I realized then that when some people stopped participating in class, it might have come from their discomfort or fear of their ideas being challenged. After this discussion, I concluded that we should have done more individual check-ins with everyone about their feelings about class; this could've solved the lack of participation during facilitators' discussions. Instead, I depended on the instructor to bring up moments of discomfort instead of me taking the responsibility to check in with others. For me, this was my turning point in the decolonization journey.

Christina: During our discussion on safe spaces, it was clear that participants did not like to be challenged or experience discomfort. I felt that Pushpa pushed us to understand that we need to challenge ourselves and get out of our comfort zones, which was part of the process of creating a safe space. But were we really learning if we did not challenge ourselves and get out of our comfort zones? This is something that I feel we all need to think about when really learning to decolonize our thinking in a classroom.

I contributed every week to our shared journal, but contributions from many of my fellow participants waned over time. In a westernized classroom setting, we are taught to listen to the professor instead of listening to

each other's ideas and reflecting on ourselves as individuals; however, this decolonized classroom required me to get out of my comfort zone and challenge myself. Another incident I recall happened right at the beginning of class. Someone had commented that it was interesting the class was all women but for one man. This led to others pointing out that we needed to be careful with our gendered language in this decolonized classroom since some identified as non-binary. Pushpa reiterated the importance of attention to language while not weaponizing decolonized spaces to punish or shame anyone who spoke inadvertently or was ignorant of some matters.

I can confidently say this class resulted in personal growth.

Recommendations

Many scholars have said that the process of decolonization is one of complete disorder. Our experience proves the messiness that ensued when we embarked on the journey. However, we believe that hindsight is foresight and have the following recommendation, based on our individual and joint reflections for anyone interested in decolonizing their classroom.

1. Time for Setting and Managing the Decolonized Classroom

    a. As previously mentioned by the authors throughout this article, we should have spent more time discussing how to decolonize the classroom. We reiterate the suggestion that we need to schedule some dedicated weekly meeting time to discuss our feelings, challenges, and concerns with our experiment. This could be done in small groups or as a class (depending on class size), and we believe this would have increased participants' buy-in. Our allotted time (day one and a short time on day two) for establishing these rules and procedures was insufficient.
    b. The initially agreed-upon rules of the class were slightly forgotten throughout the semester, so a regular revisiting of these established rules would have helped participants remember joint agreements.
    c. It is essential to have a common understanding of the creation and maintenance of safe spaces. The responsibility for safe spaces falls on everyone, and there is accountability for how safe spaces are maintained. Blaming one person or group makes the space unsafe.
    d. One of the most difficult aspects of this experiment seemed to be treating the professor as an equal partner. It appeared to be difficult to unlearn years of western education with the professor as separate and higher than the students. Early on in an experiment of this kind, we would recommend placing heavy emphasis on breaking down that power dynamic. This might be done through outside-of-class activities or exercises (we did have an informal coffee hour) with the professor as a student or just being very intentional and explicit in having the professor be an equal peer in every aspect of the class. Pushpa's classes always build community, and she found it frustrating that there was not much she could initiate in the decolonized classroom to get people to learn more about each other.
    e. A colonized classroom does not emphasize building community, and we did not make any extra efforts to build community and trust. Community building and trust-building activities must be incorporated into the decolonized classroom.
    f. Outline an egalitarian decision-making process at the very beginning and assign responsibilities based on personal interests.

2. Identifying and Acknowledging Stages in the Decolonization Journey

    a. As expected, participants were in different stages of their decolonization journey. If we assume the lack of participation was because of a lack of interest, we need to plan for another kind of

incentive to motivate students toward learning. This task is getting increasingly difficult in a westernized education setting that is extremely expensive and encourages students to work and gain skills along with their education. It makes it difficult for students to give themselves entirely to the learning process. Lack of participation is also inevitable in the latter half of the semester because of the time pressures students have given their various learning engagements.

b. Reiterating our earlier suggestion, having dedicated time to discuss our journey of decolonization might help us develop insights on how we might meet each other in a commonplace. If possible, it could be helpful to have a prerequisite course to introduce students to the framework and processes of decolonization before they begin to engage in decolonizing the classroom.

c. When someone is not on the same stage in the journey, how do we deal with them? This requires a lot of thought that the group must do collectively. Reminding people of the contract is an excellent way to encourage them to stay connected with the group, but it is also important for those who are moving forward faster to pause and practice compassionate accompaniment. For example, we had an outlier in our group, X, and while this person was never excluded, we are not sure they were entirely accepted as "us."

3. Provide Conflict Management Tools

a. Explore what it is to take responsibility. It means dealing with unexpected crises or making decisions that impact peers. It means not blaming others, especially the professor giving them the rap for everything that goes wrong. This is precisely what happened in our classroom. Apart from stressing joint responsibility for a decolonized classroom, specific steps to build responsibility should happen at the beginning of the experiment.

b. A clear articulation of the vision and the goals of the experiment should be developed together. This will help participants define their roles and commit to doing their part in the decolonization process.

c. Another suggestion is to educate people to frame complaints into questions leading to joint action for change. This can be done by teaching self-accountability steps. Know your role and be answerable for the outcomes of your behavior (actions) and choices. This includes learning to apologize.

d. Providing participants tools that will help them have difficult conversations, be emotionally intelligent, negotiate when dissatisfied with decisions made by others, focus on both impact and intent, and be sensitive to cultural differences is important.

4. Challenges the Westernized Education System through a Decolonized Classroom

a. To insist on participation or not was a big question for us. Lack of participation can lead to different conclusions, but if we consider diversity and inclusion, we must keep the space open for different kinds of participation and on different platforms. No participation (even if you claim it as a learning style) is inappropriate in a decolonized classroom because you will always remain in the periphery if your perspective is never considered. Having the conversation about participation, setting up various platforms for participation, and asking anyone who is an active participant to be mindful of the space they take must be done before setting up a decolonized classroom. A periodic review of participation levels must also happen. In a westernized education system, participation is evaluated and graded, which is punishing. Instead, if there are ways to encourage participation and make people accountable to themselves for sharing their thoughts, these must be explored.

b. Should we have grading in a decolonized classroom? Should we have a pass or fail class? Should there be assignments or no assignments? We could not reach a consensus on this matter, but the westernized education system insists on grading. We are also aware of various experiments to evaluate student success without a grading system. The results for all these experiments are fixed. It is important for those who want to decolonize the classroom to pay

explicit attention to this aspect of the classroom experience and maybe come to a joint decision that becomes part of the class contract. Getting rid of grading may be a simple solution, but all must simultaneously accept responsibility and accountability. How do we do that?

In short, we felt that we all floundered in our first-time experiment of decolonizing the classroom. Which, in retrospect, makes perfect sense because we could not have imagined some of the challenges. Irrespective of the challenges, frustrations, and periods of cluelessness, we feel we have learned a lot from this experiment and are sure this experience will stay with us for life.