



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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UNESCO Chair on Inclusive  
and Quality Education for All,  
University of Bristol

**Bristol  
Conversations  
in Education**

# Synthesis Report on the Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures (UNESCO Chair seminar series)

School of Education, University of Bristol

10th, 17th, and 24th February 2021



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## ACRONYMS

CHIRAPAQ	Centre for Indigenous Cultures of Peru
CIRE	Centre for Comparative and International Research in Education
EdJAM	Education, Justice and Memory Network
NORRAG	Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training
PISA	Programme for International Student assessment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TESF	Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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Recommended citation: Cortez Ochoa, A. A., Tikly, L., Hutchinson, Y., Paulson, J. & Sriprakash, A. (2021). Synthesis Report on the Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures (UNESCO Chair seminar series). *Bristol Conversations in Education & UNESCO Chair Seminar Series*. University of Bristol, UK.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5012450>

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# Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures (UNESCO Chair seminar series)

## Executive summary

Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures was a series of three seminars convened under the auspices of the UNESCO Chair in inclusive, good quality education at the University of Bristol. This was a joint effort that conveyed ideas from artists, activists, practitioners, academics, and international organisations' delegates. It aimed to share possibilities and reimagine education in more equitable, reparative, just, and peace-promoting forms. It further aspired to provide thinking to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s Futures of Education initiative. In this context, the School of Education's Bristol Conversations in Education co-organised three webinars on the 10th, 17th and 24th of February 2021 to address different facets of the topic at hand. Each seminar congregated nearly 300 participants from 79 countries. This report revisits the three events by summarising the presenters' insights and attendees' active participation in the chat and Q&A sessions. Annex A provides weblinks to the seminars' recording, transcripts, and the methodology used to analyse the data. Attendees kindly filled out an evaluation form, which is presented in [Annex B](#).

## Suggested ways forward for the Futures of Education Initiative

- Encourage further debate targeted at decolonising education and sustainable futures.
- Ensure that the initiative fully represents Western and non-Western perspectives.
- Diversify the perspectives on conceptions of education for sustainable futures.
- Bring in global and local languages to the debates wherever possible.
- Support curricula that critically address Eurocentric and human-centric perspectives.
- Ensure Western and indigenous languages are promoted in school.
- Support democratisation of education governance (i.e., teachers and communities).
- Promote the understanding and reparation of past injustices in school and beyond.
- Stimulate curriculum reform to tackle systems of domination and colonial legacies.
- Initiate a global reparative programme in and through education that tackles past injustices and climate degradation, especially in the global South.

# Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures (UNESCO Chair seminar series)

## Introduction

This report provides a summary and analysis of a series of three seminars on Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures. The seminars and report were organised under the auspices of the UNESCO Chair on Inclusive and Quality Education for All at the University of Bristol, in collaboration with the Centre for Comparative and International Research in Education ([CIRE](#)), The Education, Justice and Memory Network ([EdJAM](#)), the Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures ([TESF](#)) Network Plus and Educational Futures Network (EFN). The seminar series aimed to consider how ideas about the futures of education can benefit from current efforts to decolonise education.

The idea of sustainable futures lies at the heart of [UNESCO's Futures of Education: Learning to Become initiative](#), which aims to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet by equipping learners with diverse ways of being and knowing. The initiative is designed as a co-construction process that activates broad public engagement. The initiative provides an impetus and context for the seminar series whilst a selection of the background papers produced for the [Futures of Education](#) initiative provided a useful resource and point of reference for each session.

Yet much of the knowledge, values, and skills expected to be learned in formal education systems have been Eurocentric in nature. That is to say that they draw primarily on Western frameworks and histories, excluding other ways of conceiving the natural and social world. Protests, including those led by the Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall, Indigenous and other anti-colonial, anti-racist social movements, have called for education to be decolonised and for diverse knowledge systems to be the basis for realising equitable and sustainable futures.

Overarching questions guiding the three events	Summary of content
<b>1. In what ways are agendas for decolonising education and sustainable futures connected? What are the tensions? What does decolonising education for sustainable futures involve? How should it be conceived and enacted?</b>	The first seminar introduced the Futures of Education initiative. It sought to explore the meaning of key terms, sustainability and decolonisation, and critically examine the linkages between them and decolonial and environmental justice agendas in education.
<b>2. What are the roles and responsibilities of educational</b>	This event addressed how activists and organisations have been reimagining education.

<p><b>organisations/institutions, individuals and civil society stakeholders in decolonising education?</b></p>	<p>Representing different perspectives and nascent and more established practice, speakers shared their struggles and approaches to anti-colonial and anti-racist education. This seminar had at its core a deep concern for initiating conversations about these matters while generating the conditions for constructive dialogue.</p>
<p><b>3. What forms of repair and reconstruction are required for sustainable futures of education? What are the possibilities for 'reparative' justice in and through education, given education's enduring complicity with coloniality and environmental injustice?</b></p>	<p>The panel critically discussed the possibilities of reparative justice, in and through education, in the context of education's enduring complicity with coloniality and racism. Speakers addressed connections between education as a memory site, the case for climate reparations and indigenous and feminist perspectives.</p>

Each event brought together leading figures in the debates about decolonising education for sustainable futures to address these broad questions. The panellists in each session included one author of a related background paper. In the context of a global pandemic, the roundtable events were held via three 1.5 hours online seminars assembling more than 300 participants in each event from 79 countries.

This report provides a synthesis of the conversations that took place at the triad of events. It draws on transcripts of recordings of each of the sessions (including the presentations themselves along with the questions and answers sessions and contributions to the chat) as well as notes taken during the events. Links to the transcripts and the methodology used for analysing are provided in Annex A. Furthermore, this report discusses some of the ideas raised in the events drawing on academic literature and think pieces from UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative. A follow-up survey with attendees is included in Annex B.

# The seminars

## Connecting decolonial and sustainable futures in education

### Overview

Professor Leon Tikly (UNESCO Chair in inclusive, good quality education) and Dr Keith Holmes (UNESCO, Future of Learning and Innovation team) were the convenors of this opening event. It began with a short video clip [Learning to Become](#), which sets out the context and vision behind the Futures of Education initiative. This was followed by a panel discussion and questions and answers. Below is a summary of each of the presentations, followed by a discussion of some of the main themes to emerge during the presentations and the subsequent chat and question and answer sessions.

### The panel

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Professor Noah Sobe  
(UNESCO, Future of Learning and Innovation team)



Professor Leon Tikly  
(UNESCO Chair in inclusive, good quality education)



Professor Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw  
(Faculty of Education, Western University, Canada and Common Worlds Research Collective)



Professor Catherine Hoppers (Professor Extraordinarius, University of South Africa; Professor of Education, Gulu University, Uganda)

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### Presentations' summaries

**Professor Noah Sobe** opened the panel by providing further background to UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative. Sobe emphasised the critical role of knowledge and learning in shaping the futures we want for humanity and the planet. He explained that the current initiative is preceded by similar previous initiatives, including the Faure Report (1972), "Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow", as well as Jacques Delors' (1996) "Learning the Treasure Within". Like the current initiative, both provided a future vision of education, albeit from the perspectives of their time. The current Futures of Education initiative is headed by the President of Ethiopia, Her



Excellency Sahle-Work Zewde. It is global in scale, involving many consultative events (the seminar series is an example), encouraging participation in the initiative. The initiative also includes a survey to gather diverse views concerning the future of education. He emphasised that this is an ongoing conversation expected to continue beyond the Futures of Education report (due to be released in late 2021). He pointed out that the realities of the Covid-19 pandemic underline the importance of education for developing resilience to future pandemics. He suggested we take advantage of this “very potent moment” because today’s decisions will impact our lives in the long term. Based on the world’s experience with the pandemic, he posited that change is possible. Still, education has a crucial role in equipping humanity for the many challenges ahead of us.

In his presentation, **Professor Leon Tikly** sought to highlight the link between sustainable futures and decolonisation. He challenged existing, dominant political discourses that continue to regard untrammelled economic growth as the basis for sustainable development. Notably, he commented on the adverse effects of economic growth on exacerbating poverty and inequality, contributing to environmental catastrophe and limiting the possibilities for socially and environmentally just development. He challenged the idea implicit in dominant, Western models of development as a linear process, in which societies invariably transition from traditional into high mass consumption societies. This contrasts with models such as Kate Raworth’s (2017) model of doughnut economics, in which development is understood as a complex, non-linear process prone to crisis. In this view, sustainable development must operate within planetary boundaries and simultaneously contribute to processes of equitable and just human development. He went on to argue that tackling complex human needs and environmental catastrophe and achieving sustainable futures fundamentally relies on bringing dominant ideas about the future into critical conversation with non-Western perspectives but that the possibility to envision different futures continues to be shaped by relationships of ‘coloniality’ that continue to privilege some, mainly Western, ways of understanding the world.

Drawing on De Sousa Santos’ (2017) notion of ‘epistemicide’, Tikly argued that local and indigenous knowledge systems along with the languages and cultures in which they are embedded have been damaged and systematically marginalised since colonial times and that education has been complicit in this process. He concluded by arguing the importance of current demands to decolonise education. He suggested that this involves three inter-related dimensions of decolonising the curriculum and research to make it more relevant for the challenges of achieving sustainable futures and the concomitant need to democratise education through challenging institutionalised forms of racism, increasing access for historically marginalised groups, diversifying Faculty, engaging student’s voice and breaking down the barriers between universities and the communities they are intended to serve.

**Professor Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw** started her presentation by highlighting the challenges posed by climate change, ecological devastation and pointing to human beings’ role in creating this crisis. She framed her talk around the concept of “human exceptionalism”, a Euro-Western idea in which humans can act upon the world with impunity. Following this proposition, Pacini-Ketchabaw argued that frameworks that centre superiority on human rationality and agency are not enough to

embrace people's ecological and communitarian being. In that sense, education is implicated in reproducing this idea of human exceptionalism and its limited capacity to allow for alternative thinking. Thus, education can be a space to "reimagine" and "re-learn" people's relations with themselves and the world. She is for an education that embraces indigenous cosmologies and languages to acknowledge the "multiplicity" of this planet. She concluded by restating that the world is not singular but interdependent and interconnected and advocated for "learning with the world and not about the world".

**Professor Catherine Hoppers** addressed issues around decolonisation in Higher Education Institutions. Her talk invited the audience to challenge basic cultural structures, codes and organisation of knowledge in separate disciplines. Hoppers introduced the idea of becoming "Ethical Warriors" to confront colonialism. Hoppers argued that knowledge generation in universities and scientific institutions is grounded in enlightenment ideas; nevertheless, current societies demand more plural and inclusive methods. They also require practical approaches rather than simply theoretical ones. She also drew on the necessity to bring in conversations with indigenous perspectives asserting that "we have to accept that all the forms and traditions of knowledge must co-exist in public without duress". Hoppers concluded by prompting imagination and humility to devise new ways forward.

The session concluded with two invited critical reflections by Moira Faul (Executive Director of the Network for International Education and Cooperation Policies and Development (NORRAG)) and Seun Adebayo (a PhD researcher at the National University of Ireland). Moira Faul drew on NORRAG's contribution to the Futures of Education initiative, which addressed decolonising and education in emergencies. She recognised some concepts from the presentations resonate with their work, particularly the critical role of research as a culture in higher education. In her view, resistance is essential to counteract the dominant economic paradigm and tackle environmental and social injustices. Seun Adebayo suggested sustainable futures should be reviewed by considering their meaning for different contexts. He stressed that political, economic, and social factors framing conceptualisations of sustainable futures typically influence such conceptions' outcomes.

### **Cross-cutting themes**

Several cross-cutting themes emerged during the presentations and in the subsequent chat and question and answer sessions. Figure 1 presents the most frequent words mentioned in this opening seminar.



clear (see also Hoppers, 2021) that realising sustainable futures requires challenging colonial knowledge and building on diverse forms of knowledge. Drawing on the Common Worlds Research Collective (2020), Pacini-Ketchabaw emphasised the need to fundamentally reorient education to emphasise the fundamental interdependence between human and planetary sustainability (further debates can be consulted at UNESCO, 2020a). Likewise, in another background paper, Desjardins et al. (2020) suggest enacting what they call a Social Contract Pedagogy paired with Global Citizenship Education to tackle pressing issues around democracy, sustainable economic development, and the common good.

The audience suggested that integrating indigenous knowledge into mainstream education systems should be done “holistically”; that is, acknowledging the foundations of such knowledge and cultures. This includes an appreciation for the land, which might contrast with Western extractive practices (see also, Mengisteab, 2020; Vasavi, 2020). Hall and Tandon present compelling research on the relevance of knowledge democracy, drawing on international examples of indigenous knowledge for sustainable futures (UNESCO, 2020a). However, in the seminar, it remained debated whether emergent philosophical underpinnings of education can bring different cosmologies together or whether the goal is acknowledging and mutual respect between different cultures. Moore and Nesterova (2020) advocate for a framework that allows remaking education rather than selecting indigenous worldview pieces. This implies rethinking education in the light of past as well as future; injustices, and opportunities. Finally, Tikly emphasised the need to link struggles to decolonise education to demands to democratise education, a point that was taken up in the chat (see also, Tikly, 2020).

## From theory to practice: decolonising education for sustainable futures

### Overview

Professor Leon Tikly welcomed everyone to this second seminar and summarised some of the previous session's key ideas. Following on from the previous session, this event sought to address the question of how institutions can respond to diversity. Two of the presentations were from Bristol-based presenters who also sought to address in their presentations the legacy of the city's past associations with the transatlantic slave trade. The session started with a video clip entitled [Universal City](#) and featuring Bristol's poet Lawrence Hoo that engages with Bristol's diverse nature as a city and with its colonial legacy.

### The panel

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Yvette Hutchinson  
(Quality assurance and  
teacher training  
advisor for the British  
Council and a  
convenor)



Dr Tania Saeed (Lahore  
University of  
Management Sciences)



Professor Alvin Birdi  
(Associate PVC for  
Education Innovation,  
and convenor of  
Decolonising  
Community of  
Practice, University of  
Bristol)



Ben Spence  
(Headteacher,  
Maypark Primary  
School, Bristol,  
Representative of  
Global Teachers'  
Network)

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### Presentations' summaries

**Yvette Hutchinson** introduced the British Council's work in seeking to foster positive cultural relations, knowledge exchange and understanding with partner countries through English language teaching, education, working with civil society, and through the Arts. Hutchinson presented an initiative that started in August 2020 with 26 staff from around the world who were interested in addressing issues around decolonising education in the aftermath of the tragic murder of George Floyd. The various activities addressed in the initiative included topics such as the slave economy, Black histories, land reclamation, the need to review the British Council's art collections and the importance of mutuality as an important value for future engagement with other countries.

A key component of the British Council's decolonisation series was an emerging "conversation" among staff members that did not exist previously at this organisation. One of the activities undertaken was entitled "New narratives" and sought to present African and UK young people's reciprocal perspectives. This exercise allowed for critical understandings of individuals' perceptions of dominant narratives and how these views affect people's willingness to network across social, economic and political realms. One question that arose from this conversation was how to ensure that we're not subconsciously replicating colonial power structures in the way we design partnerships. She concluded by pointing out the positive impact these initiatives are having on policies, programmes, and professional development within the British Council.

**Dr Tania Saeed** presented arguments and ideas from her background paper (Saeed, 2020). Saeed started by arguing that understanding the post-colonial context is fundamental for considering issues concerned with decolonising education. She challenged the long-standing colonial values in the education systems of the Indian subcontinent, touching on aspects of language and dominant agendas for education and development in the global South. Following this premise, she argued that the domination of the English language could be seen as a form of epistemic violence. Saeed problematised the increasing marketisation of higher education which is currently tied to performance indicators. These trends have negatively impacted the funding and provision of humanities and the social sciences and have relegated other forms of knowledge, such as indigenous cultures and languages. She contrasted this approach with the need to celebrate the diversity of disciplines and knowledge(s) in university curricula. Likewise, national curricula that favour one language undermine pluricultural richness in multi-ethnic societies, such as Pakistan, which has more than 70 languages. Saeed further argued that many academics like herself who received an education in the global North share a responsibility to ensure that "the next generations are given the space to explore, learn and reconnect with their heritage, without being caught in hierarchies that overvalue or undervalue different types of knowledge". She expressed hope for decolonising education and the view that change is visible through the work of existing grassroots social movements that demand cultural recognition and epistemic justice. She asserted that "decolonising knowledge has already started".

**Professor Alvin Birdi** started his presentation by reflecting on the importance of putting ideas about decolonisation into practice at the University and outlined his work as part of a community of practice around decolonisation. He collaborates with academics from the University of Bristol in an online course about [Decolonising Education: From Theory to Practice](#), available on the FutureLearn platform. Although Birdi's work focuses on the curriculum, he argued that the decolonising agenda is much broader and needs to consider attainment gaps between ethnic groups, the makeup of institutions' staff and branding, among other essential aspects. Going back to decolonising the curriculum, he reasoned that this endeavour has to be seen as an ongoing process, which should be embedded as a continuous reflective practice in the University. Therefore, it is essential to understand that decolonising the curriculum cannot be done overnight.

Birdi presented some quotes from Fraser and Bosanquet (2006) paper where academics express their understanding of the curriculum. He argued that the curriculum is critical to

understand the historical roots and legacies of the knowledge taught and learned at Universities. He shared the following quote to illustrate further his point:

*“what the older generation chooses to tell the younger generation...[it] becomes the site on which the generations struggle to define themselves and the world”*  
Pinar et al (1995).

Birdi's work with academics regarding decolonising the curriculum addresses the content of it, as well as its applicability. He challenged the idea of the universal applicability of knowledge and the often-found lack of relevance and context-situatedness of instruction materials. He suggested that thinking about the provenance of ideas is fundamental to discern whose voices have been silenced and the agendas and power structures underpinning them. He also stressed the essential role of inclusion, relevance, and space in the curriculum. These elements are meant to faithfully present students with opportunities to be part of their learning and study what is important for them and their communities. These ideas further are related to his activities at organisations such as Cargo in Bristol. Birdi concluded with a note on the need for interdisciplinarity in the University. He posited that everyday issues are complex, requiring different disciplinary perspectives and insights, which contrasts with how knowledge is promoted in higher education institutions.

**Ben Spence** started by explaining her professional background and active participation in Black teachers' networks. In the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, she and those around her began a conversation on examining primary and secondary curricula to address racism and decoloniality. Her team realised from the outset that addressing these issues would involve engaging organisations beyond the school. She argued for the need to diversify the voices heard within schools and recognise its challenge, especially regarding the necessary skills to embrace a decolonising agenda. She has explored different avenues to develop anti-colonial and anti-racist content with her team, being Bristol one curriculum one of those strategies.

Spence argued that the struggle to decolonise is not only the responsibility of black teachers and requires a collective effort engaging a plurality of voices and perspectives within the school, including those of children and their parents. She also acknowledged the possibility that mistakes will be made along the way. Through her experience working with children's experiences and perspectives on their identity, she became aware of the diversity that underpins the UK. Most importantly, making changes to the curriculum so that the school's diversity is considered has helped students develop a sense of belonging. Spence used Lawrence Hoo's poems as an example of resources used in the classroom to address racism and diversity.

Bristol poet Lawrence Hoo was invited to respond to the inputs by the panellists. In his words, much of what was said was “a lot too much conversation too far down the line”. He expressed a concern that these discussions only began following the Black Lives Matter in 2016, the removal of Colston's statue in Bristol in 2020 and that the actual reparative part of the movement should be more progressed, in his view. Some attendees agreed with this comment. Whilst acknowledging Hoo's

remarks, the convenors also pointed out how important it is that institutions and organisations have started processes towards decolonising education.

## Cross-cutting themes

The most frequent words mentioned across this second seminar are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Most frequent words from the panellists (17<sup>th</sup> February 2021).



### *The role of institutions in decolonising education for sustainable futures*

This theme engaged with several practical examples of how decoloniality and sustainability are addressed at different educational institutions in the UK and abroad. As Tikly suggested at the beginning of the session, conversations concerning Eurocentrism and the need for a decolonising approach are often difficult to initiate, especially when they involve giving space to voices that have been excluded in the past. Members of the audience posited the need for safe spaces to have this dialogue and nurture mutual understanding, in line with views expressed in some background papers (Assié-Lumumba, 2020; Corson, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a). Between them, the presentations provided by the panellists powerfully argued that “starting a dialogue that did not exist at the institutions” is critical to begin a transformative agenda.

Dominant hegemonic languages, such as English, French and Spanish, can perpetuate colonial legacies and act as an ideological instrument with the effect of marginalising other forms of knowing and living (e.g. Hoppers, 2020; Moore & Nesterova, 2020). As such, Western languages’ hegemony can be perceived as an example of epistemic violence (see, for instance, Saeed, 2020). In this regard, Wagner et al. (2020) point out that there are more than 200 million school-age children globally whose mother tongue differs from that taught at the school, with refugees, migrants and indigenous populations the most commonly affected. This theme adds to the discussions held during the first



seminar of the series, particularly relating Tikly's work on the critical role of language of instruction in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tikly, 2020).

### ***Decolonising efforts in non-formal settings***

The panellists provided examples of decolonising beyond formal educational structures. Saeed argued that civil society and informal education organisations are essential in counteracting colonial legacies and local hierarchies. In her view, different forms of ethnic nationalism and the mostly unquestioned role of religion in societies limit decolonising agendas' efforts. She added, research, social movements and policy should work together to offset the reproduction of the pre-existing power structures, as addressed in her paper (Saeed, 2020). Alongside these ideas, the panellists communicated a need for resistance to coloniality via alternatives grounded in the communities. Likewise, Birdi emphasised community endeavours' vital role, such as local projects in Bristol, to preserve the planet and devise reparative justice methods in line with published literature (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a). Birdi's work concerning [Decolonising Education: From Theory to Practice](#) further resonate with Labate's (2020) and Vasavi's (2020) papers around the outdated curriculum, knowledge production and ownership. The authors above theorise around the future landscape of education and knowledge at traditional institutions, such as universities and other spaces in the community, and those mediated by Artificial Intelligence, e.g., massive open online courses. That is to say, new forms of knowledge that respond to individual and collective interests as presented by emergent digital technologies might eventually contribute opportunities for more democratic, equitable, and transformative learning.

## Education’s ‘reparative’ possibilities: responsibilities and reckonings for sustainable futures

### Overview

Professor Arathi Sriprakash welcomed everyone to the third and last of the seminar series and explained that this session would explore the themes of reckoning and repair, building on conversations from the first two seminars. The session was simultaneously held in English and Spanish with the support of EdJAM (the Education Justice and Memory Network). Sriprakash offered a summary of previous sessions and invited the audience to revisit the two links to the video recordings.

### The panel

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Professor Arathi Sriprakash (Professor of Education, University of Bristol)



Tarcila Rivera Zea (Founder and president of [CHIRAPAQ](#) - Centre for Indigenous Cultures of Peru, expert member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues)



Dr Keston Perry (Lecturer in Economics, University of the West of England)



Dr Julia Paulson (Associate Professor of Education, Peace and Conflict, University of Bristol Principal Investigator [EdJAM](#)).

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### Presentations’ summaries

**Professor Arathi Sriprakash** reflected on UNESCO’s Futures of Education phrase “learning to become” and suggested it implies that “the future is not static or fixed, but through learning, it can be made”. Drawing on her recent collaborative paper for UNESCO, she argued that thinking about the future requires an in-depth review of historic and present systems of domination and that in order to transform these reparatory and decolonial processes are necessary. She gave examples of the need for and potential of material, symbolic and pedagogical processes of reparation and

highlighted how education could play a central role in these processes. She posited education as a site for the recognition of injustice, the redress of injustice and, therefore, a site for change. After this stimulating introduction, Arathi introduced the first speaker.

*“Ñañaykuna, Turiykuna, ukun sunquymantam rimaykamuychik llapankichiqta. Runasimi rimaqmi kani, Inkakakunapa wawanmi kani, tawantinsuyumanta hamuni”*

**Tarcila Rivera Zea** greeted the audience in her mother tongue: “From the bottom of my heart, with my sincerest regards, I say hello to you all in the *runa simi*, which means humans’ tongue. This is my Inka ancestors’ tongue, from South America”. She commended the convenors for the opportunity to have this conversation. Rivera Zea explained that globally, indigenous people are nearly 480 million, with 50 million in the Americas<sup>1</sup>. Indigenous peoples have been subjected to dominations of different sorts historically, and in post-colonial times, have wrestled for gaining rights in newly formed States. She talked about the Eurocentric heritage of formal schooling, which neglects pre-existent ways of knowing and being. The attempt of Western education for “educating” original inhabitants limits their freedom and opportunities for inclusion. Rivera Zea argued that the power structures in place legitimise values and knowledge that neglects original people’s cultures since colonial times. She also posited that these colonial structures permit various forms of racism and discrimination, mainly against women. Delegitimizing indigenous peoples in educational settings alienates them and communicates an idea of dispossessing, not being part. Rivera Zea encouraged an initiative called “Hacia nosotros(as) mismos(as)” [Towards ourselves], which sought first to heal the pain and low self-esteem of indigenous communities as a precondition to communicate to others their cultural wealth. She claimed that this initiative had not permeated the curriculum yet; nevertheless, the programme has benefited several individuals from her movement. For Rivera Zea, reparation has an opportunity in respecting others’ differences. For her, formal and non-formal education have a critical role in reparative and peaceful futures. Rivera Zea advocates for a “reparative/healing” education that “dignifies” and allows opportunities for everyone regardless of their ethnic origin.

**Dr Keston Perry**’s presentation was titled “Climate reparations and reparatory justice”. First, he addressed an important issue about climate-related losses. Using a map of climatological events in 2019, he brought the audience’s attention to natural disaster events that impacted the global South, particularly Hurricane Dorian, which left sizeable material and economic impact in the Caribbean. Perry addressed issues around centuries of coloniality targeted at exploitation and extraction in various parts of the American continent that contrasted with the otherwise conservation mindedness of original inhabitants, arguing that climate change negatively impacts this already exploited region. He presented a figure showing the European Union and the United States of America as the main contributors to total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since 1751. Also, he illustrated the

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<sup>1</sup> An [ILO](#) report indicates that, in the world, there are 476.6 million indigenous people, of which 238.4 are women. Indigenous communities represent 6.2 per cent of the world’s population.

disproportionate effects of climate change, including economic losses and environmental and physical devastation, on countries in the formerly colonised world. This point was central to the talk in drawing lines between these phenomena and the material and immaterial losses of colonisation, globalised capitalist expansion and climate change that go uncompensated for the most part and add to countries' vulnerability. That is to say, as Perry convincingly demonstrated, the actual economic costs of climate crises are unevenly distributed. Thus, he argued this situation should prompt a climate reparations programme that includes re-educating historical injustices and the legacies of colonialism and offering material and epistemic forms of compensation as potential avenues for bringing justice, equality, and respect.

**Dr Julia Paulson's** presentation explored reparative possibilities in and through education, mainly regarding teaching and learning about histories of violence and injustice, including colonial histories. She started by contextualising her work around these topics and the upcoming work at The Education, Justice and Memory Network ([EdJAM](#)), which will be commissioning research to explore these questions further. Paulson drew lines to highlight the complicity of education in perpetuating systems of domination. She outlined that theorising and work around reparative possibilities in education are rich in Indigenous, Black, decolonial and critical sociological traditions and is also being explored in transitional justice and education in emergencies. Paulson indicated that attention to violence in education is largely absent from mainstream international development and education initiatives like the "global learning crisis", which frame challenges ahistorically and in deficit terms. Truth commissions, Paulson outlined, increasingly engage with education, looking back at education's roles in violence and making recommendations targeted at educational reform.

Still, she critically addressed the partial scope of these previous efforts regarding their impact on change and their gazes, mainly focused on conflict-affected areas in the Global South rather than exploring colonial and settler-colonial legacies as sites requiring transitional justice. Paulson speculated that efforts that aim to develop reparative pedagogies may open space for further demands for and momentum towards economic, political and epistemic forms of repair. A couple of practical examples of reparative pedagogy from the EdJAM project were presented. One of them is the Bhopana Audiovisual Resource Centre in Cambodia, which developed an App to share and learn the 'Khmer Rouge History' and enable intergenerational dialogue. She also presented the work of Fundación Compartir and the Colombian truth commission. This project includes seven schools in Cúcuta, which share the motto "Truth as a public good", giving central importance to "truth" across the curriculum and in their daily interactions. Paulson encouraged the audience to engage with the EdJAM events and sign up to the mail list to know more about their international work on education justice and memory.

### Cross-cutting themes

Several cross-cutting themes emerged during the presentations and in the subsequent chat and question and answer sessions. Figure 3 presents the most frequent words mentioned in this final seminar.



(see also, Corson, 2020; Saeed, 2020). The EdJAM project examples highlighted how civil society organisations and artists can lead on approaches that open opportunities for dialogue, often outside of formal educational spaces, and constructively intervene in formal spaces. These pedagogical possibilities for repair can connect with and support equally crucial processes of material, political and symbolic reparation, all of which are crucial for sustainable futures that acknowledge and seek to transform past injustice.

## Summary and suggested ways forward

Figure 4 summarises the themes that emerged across the three events; it provides a useful framework for pulling together some overarching conclusions and ways forward arising from the three sessions.

*Figure 4. Themes across the three events.*



It is clear from the sessions as a whole the importance of taking account of the colonial legacy in the way education futures are conceived. Regarding the opening session, this entails remaining cognisant of the extent to which dominant ideas about progress, development, and the future are often rooted in Western-centric assumptions, ways of seeing the world and are often communicated in Western languages. As discussed in the second session, Western-centric ideas and values are often reproduced through our educational institutions employing a Eurocentric curriculum and the predominance of global (read Western) languages of instruction. In session three, the presentations highlighted continuities between colonial violence and the discrimination and physical and epistemic exclusions that indigenous learners encounter in formal education and between colonial and capitalist expansion and the effects of climate change.

It was also clear from each of the sessions that the dominance of Western-centric ways of conceiving education futures have been and continue to be resisted by those involved in education and indigenous groups and social movements in civil society. In this regard, change to the status quo is both necessary and possible. In session one, the discussion hinged around the importance of conversation and dialogue between different cultures, epistemologies, and ways of knowing the

world and considering plural futures for education articulated in different languages. In session two, the discussion focused on the possibilities and challenges for decolonising our institutions and the importance of linking these struggles to wider democratisation processes in education and society. In the third session, the focus was on the need for UNESCO to take account of the importance of reparative justice in the way that the futures of education are conceived. Examples were given of imaginative pedagogical possibilities for repair that can form a basis for sustainable futures and acknowledge and seek to transform past injustice.

### Suggested ways forward for the Futures of Education Initiative

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations are made for consideration by the Futures of Education initiative team:

1. The futures of education and sustainable futures needs to be conceptualised in non-Western-centric terms. This has the following implications:
  - a. UNESCO should draw attention in its communication strategy around the initiative, the Western-centric nature of discourse, and actively seek to foster diversity by including ideas about education for sustainable futures derived from non-Western and Western understandings of the world.
  - b. Prioritise bringing differing conceptions of education for sustainable futures into conversation and dialogue with each other as a basis for generating inclusive visions of education futures, including artists, activists, and practitioners.
  - c. Debates should, wherever possible, be conducted in global and local languages.
2. UNESCO should actively support efforts to decolonise education systems as a necessary precondition for achieving sustainable futures and equip learners with an understanding and respect for diverse ways of conceiving the world and realising sustainable futures and the SDGs. Specifically, this means:
  - a. Support efforts to decolonise the curriculum that critically reflect diverse knowledge systems, including values, and challenge Eurocentrism and human exceptionalism.
  - b. Ensure that local and indigenous as well as Western languages are developed through education and, wherever possible, used as a medium of instruction.
  - c. Support efforts to democratise and expand access to education, teaching, and research and include educators, learners, and communities in education governance processes.
3. UNESCO should actively promote reparative justice as a necessary precondition for achieving sustainable futures and encourage pedagogical approaches that equip learners with the cognitive and emotional capabilities to articulate sustainable futures and account for past injustices. This requires that UNESCO:
  - a. Promotes the importance of understanding and addressing past injustices in formal and non-formal educational spaces, including capacity building programmes and teacher professional development.
  - b. Advocates for curriculum reform that consciously tackles systems of domination and avoids reproductive forms of coloniality.



- c. Instigates a comprehensive and international reparative scheme that addresses within its realm, past injustices, including climate-related affectations to the global South, Black and indigenous communities

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## Annex A

The transcripts contain the content of the presentations made and the attendees’ contributions to the chat, and the question-and-answer sessions with panellists. All these materials are available for consultation here:

1. [Connecting decolonial and sustainable futures in education](#)
2. [From theory to practice: decolonising education for sustainable futures](#)
3. [Education’s reparative’ possibilities: responsibilities and reckonings for sustainable futures](#)

The summary of the presentations here was sent to the panellists for their approval, and it is expected the extracts represent their perspectives accurately.

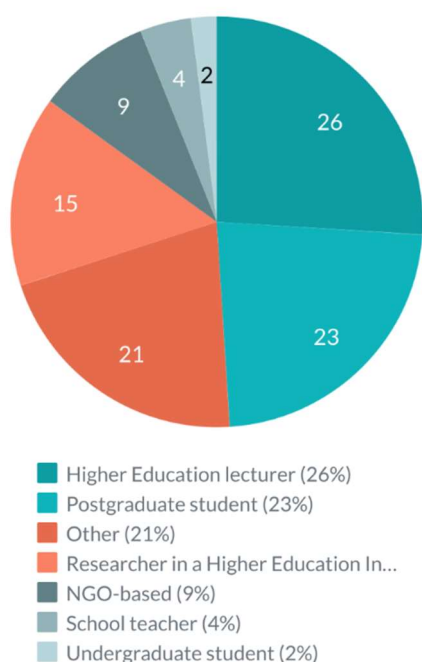
Content and thematic analyses were conducted using NVivo 12 to denote critical coincidences and divergences across the presentations. Regarding content analysis, word clouds are presented for

each seminar, and a selection of the most frequent terms mentioned in the events are discussed. The analytical themes reflect on the key, central ideas posited in the seminars individually and across the series. This exercise helped delineate policy and practice recommendations, feeding into the Futures of Education initiative and beyond.

## Annex B

An online follow-up survey gathered the seminar series’ participants’ perspectives about the three events’ strengths and opportunity areas. The participants’ insights can inform future events held at Bristol Conversations in Education and UNESCO’s Futures of Education Initiative.

Figure 5. Participants' occupation.

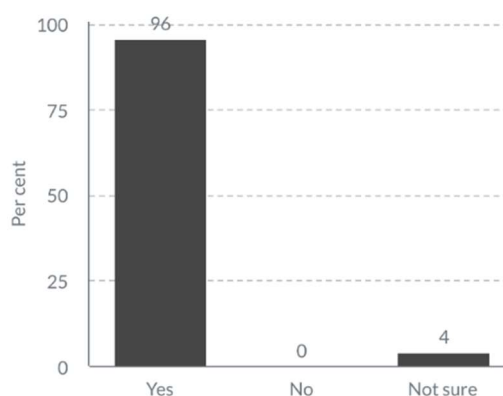


Together, almost two-thirds of the seminar series’ participants worked in Higher Education or studied a postgraduate degree. In the audience, there were retired academics, as well as free-lance consultants.

*“The talks have been so inspiring! I learnt so much about what is happening around the world and the impact one can have on one another. I truly hope for positive change. And for the conversation to keep going.”*

*“I hoped for a much clearer connection with sustainable futures, which barely got a look in.”*

Figure 6. Would you recommend the seminar series?



The participants were asked about the areas of opportunity of the event. Some of them expressed the following:

*“Extend the conversation to French African speaking countries.”*

*“Maybe a bit more time for discussion.”*

*“more debating.”*

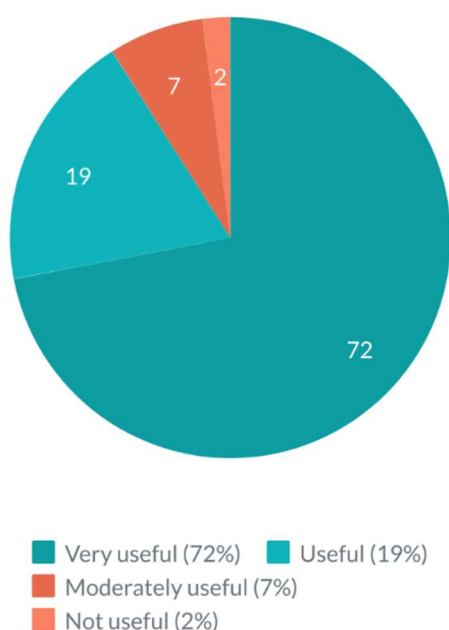
*“Captioning for people with disabilities.”*

*“Maybe a sharing space, or place to mingle and put all the ideas and resources people shared along the way could have been available.”*

*“Special consideration should be given when showing videos with strong local accents, the one showed in the second event was quite hard to follow and understand without subtitles/texts in English.”*

Regarding the strong points of the event, the participants praised the topic and guest speakers’ plurality. They also commended the punctuality of the seminar series and consideration of English and Spanish speakers. Being able to watch the recording after the events was also appreciated.

Figure 7. How useful was the seminar series?



*“It is one of the rare occasions where the decolonisation of education could be discussed.”*

*“I would not have been able to visit Bristol to attend a session such as this. It also would have caused a massive carbon print for me to attend a physical session and for the Peruvian academic to attend in person. Session was free so accessible to more people.”*

*“It shows us what they are thinking in other parts of the world, and that it is not very different from our own place. This encourages further work on issues such as decolonising education, from language to content.”*

*“Too many generalisations and not nearly enough examples of circumstances on which the generalisations were based.”*

#### **Potential areas for exploration in future seminars**

- Examples of post-colonial studies research including the parallel between black history and gender.
- A session dedicated to decolonising the curriculum taught in England.
- Any experienced scholars or policymakers based in African countries.
- Collaborations with Universities in Asia and South-East Asia. More cross-disciplinary conversations with panellists from different subject areas.
- Future of teachers’ professional development.