



ID Higher Education Round Table 2020

Recognising Institutional Racism in Our Classroom

4 September 2020

3pm – 5.30pm

Hosted on Zoom by Independent Dance (ID)

Chaired by Dr Adesola Akinleye and Henrietta Hale (ID)

[Notes from audio recording:](#)

We have transcribed the audio recording verbatim, so that full comments are noted rather than summarised or interpreted in any way. All participants' comments have been anonymised.

Welcome and introduction by Heni Hale (co-director, Independent Dance)

ID offers an HE roundtable annually as a facilitated working group, offering an informed but neutral space to bring people together to share knowledge, resources and actions. Our aim is to create a space where everyone can have an equal voice.

This year the roundtable comes in the context of crisis caused by the global Covid_19 pandemic, which continues to highlight deep structural inequalities in the UK and internationally and notably in arts and education. Dismantling systemic racism and seeking change has become an urgent and essential area of focus for all arts and academic institutions.

Many of you are already well down the road of looking at the ways that colonial thinking and racism plays out in classroom, staffrooms, curriculum development and recruitment and some are less far.

For ID's 8th annual roundtable, Independent Dance invited Dr Adesola Akinleye to co-prepare and co-chair a session titled *Recognising Institutional Racism in Our Classroom*.

Our decision in this instance to work in collaboration with Dr Adesola Akinleye comes with a recognition that institutional thinking doesn't really have the answers and that knowledge

coming from lived experience and practice is really key. It has also come about through in-depth discussions ID as an organisation has been having with Dr Royona Mitra and Dr Arabella Stanger alongside their Contemporary Dance and Whiteness Project with Dr Simon Ellis. This has spurred a series of projects at ID addressing and developing stronger awareness of intersectional issues in practice.

ID commissioned Adesola to write a text which many of you will have seen (it was sent out prior to the event) that aims to act as a provocation for today's discussion. It can be found [here](#). What we hope to gain from today is a) the possibility to have a deeper discussion about a very difficult subject and b) if it arises, a set of achievable actions towards change; these actions could be shared and exchanged perhaps without complete agreement or consensus but with the possibility that they could be applied in multiple ways.

Introduction from Dr Adesola Akinleye

AA introduces herself and the first breakout group task

I am Senior Lecturer at Middlesex University (UK) and a visiting artist at MIT (USA) in 2020. I identify as half Nigerian and 'half Tower Hamlets/Hackney council house', English. My Nigerian side is passionate, and the Hackney Tower Hamlets part of me is quite blunt. Therefore, please forgive any lack of subtlety bearing in mind that this is my personality!

AA proposes that dance gives us an embodied, somatic or non-verbal starting place for understanding the world that we have the privilege of being engaged in – and that other people may have lost over the course of their own development through education; as we know, education often teaches us to get stiller.

AA hopes that rather than a direct digestion of verbal questions around institutional racism, we might be able to engage with them from engaging with our somatic knowledge first, to see what small nuances can come from dance, but also to acknowledge that dance itself has been situated for a long time within a colonial frame, with a colonial attitude towards who and what dance is.

So there is a dual thing we can do today as dancers – one is to extract the knowledges of our somatic understanding in order to engage socially, but also to look at ourselves and unpack what we perceive dance to be, how dance is projected beyond us, and how we can support dance not to be another institution that follows colonial and racist thinking/regimes.

To ground the idea of racism, AA offers exemplars from her personal experience of being made homeless a number of times, firstly at the age of six as a result of being evicted by a landlady wanting a 'white house'. This was at a point where she was the only white person in the house. Rehoused in Shoreditch, which at the time was a stronghold of the fascist party National Front who met locally, took street action and leafletted constantly. In dance training, all her teachers in her formal training in UK were white and not one encouraged her; in fact she was positively discouraged and told she would never get a job as a black dancer. Particularly ballet teachers would tell her this. Luckily 40 years later she is still dancing. However even yesterday she was in a meeting with a colleague who doesn't look her in the eye or recognise her presence; these kind of micro-aggressions are mentioned in the essay.

These experiences therefore come from a number of institutions; court systems, councils, the university where racism is shaping personal histories; she offers them as examples of how people can experience racism.

Here AA references Alice Walker, using a shaker to banish academic air, to banish hierarchies, bringing us back into our bodies. How we move can be a starting point to find the truth of what we are saying. She encourages us to bring in the spirits of ancestors and suggests women who have explored their artwork to find their intellect, including Alice Walker, Maya Angelo and Katherine Dunham and any others who inspire us who we would like to bring in.

AA offers a structural approach to the conversation

Image of a rhizome. The rhizome has lots of shoots above the ground that seem independent and not connected but underground are connected through roots. This is a structure for unpicking ideas, finding how things that don't seem linked can be linked, how we can jump from idea to idea – maybe only later they are revealed to be connected. This is an alternative to the more usual notion of using a tree, a hierarchical system where one idea connects to another.

Rhizome-thinking encourages us to use intuition to jump from idea to idea and find connections later. It is prominent in some Africanist and many indigenous worldviews.

Introducing Task 1

A practice-based task in break-out groups with the idea of questioning language that we use. Even language that appears to be trying to get to the root of questioning racism can be embedded with problematic ideas. There are things already implied in our use of language – language has been hijacked - which we need to unpack and undo.

AA highlights some examples of current terms she finds problematic:

White privilege – just the word 'privilege' sounds as if everything is ok but some have more, in fact the reality is that the privilege is being ok and that some are really not ok. Privilege is what everyone should have – it's the 'ok experience', not something extra or special

Minority - in a democracy this comes with the idea that this is not a group of people with any power or voice because democracy dictates that majority has power. It is immediately disempowering that group

Diversity - Implies diverting from a norm – sets up a centring of normalcy. AA prefers 'variety' where everything is equally different

Institutional racism - AA challenges this term itself – she would rather use the term 'collective racism', or racism of the majority being comfortable. An institution is only made up of the people in it – the term implies some larger power directing people that can't be stepped out of or stopped. If we are all challenging things we can collectively change things.

AA references the choreographer Liz Lerman – as the academy is desperate to make real connections outside and within our practices. This is a quandary in terms of the curriculum,

how things are dropped so something new can come in, how we address what dance is when it is not just about learning different techniques, how we get to what different approaches and genres say about our world views. This helps understand how we can think and collaborate outside our own practices.

If we can tune into a movement first maybe we will find new languages for talking directly about strategies later

15min task :

Choose three of these words in groups of 6/7 people and explore how they manifest in movement in your own practice and then share with each other

The task is to move and then talk in relation to the following key words/phrases; these have come from AA's upcoming book 'In conversation Dance, Architecture and Engineering' which is based on the research and development choreographic work she has been doing with dancers, musicians, architects and engineers about how we connect with others in the city and how we perceive other things and the edges between things.

permeability

chasing stillness

silence

dwelling

being in relationship /rhythm with

Further context for this task

Hoping that starting with a somatic unpicking of how we identify and place ourselves in the world to feed or nurture the later conversation; an embodied starting-point.

Aiming to make manifest the bits that are difficult to language – that difficult space so that we can sit with the trouble.

Whole group returns from breakout rooms

AA recognises the conversation is happening in only two hours. Her intention was to start with the body since racism often starts with the body. She invites everyone to introduce themselves and reflect on task one and their reasons for coming here. Everyone has around a minute given time limitations.

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Replies/introductions:

I'm here because dance is racist and dance is exclusionary across a whole bunch of things and the absence of conversation and discourse leads to greater problems. It is institutional, people are complicit and we need the discussion to make change with real actions

I want to listen and to see how that sits with all the thoughts I have been sitting with, or continue to sit with

I am here to listen and to try to understand better how to work with some of these issues and to work with them with my students and colleagues and in the world

I think overall whatever job I have, my job is to engage with this on a daily basis and to find ways of shifting into mitigating all the problems that are happening and to find ways for those problems not to exist. On a smaller scale, one of the things which interests me is how to do that in countries where there is a majority and a minority in terms of race, and how this interacts with democratic structures. Here for listening and doing

Dance as fundamentally racist has been my embodied experience as a Brown South Asian woman studying here and working in HE, and it is a conversation that is long overdue. I am very grateful to be here

Some of the words that came up for me just now were frustration, desire, wanting closeness and shame, and this I thought was interesting in terms of where I am at in this work. Also working in a fine art context, many of the people I am working with are people of colour and I notice a big absence of conversation about the difference between the staff and the students. I want to be able to engage skilfully and meaningfully and be able to look at where racism might be inherent in me

All of the things which have been said and more. Hard to offer something very short. Find ways to implementing and practicing anti-racism as a pedagogue and researcher and also find structures for people who are white like myself to work personally on the blindness we may have to many things

I feel I am here to listen and to continue to develop understanding and practice in relation to anti-racism

AA :Perhaps the next people who speak could talk about what kind of discourses you are involved in, to move the conversation on

I am here to listen and partake and maybe my thinking and my investment hasn't gone as far as being able to do what you just asked Adesola. But I know I have been in situations which show there is a lot of work to do, and I am willing to do that work

Unpacking layers, blankets, things are not talked about. I witness and recognise a lot of different in how people of colour (teachers and students) are treated compared to how I am treated as a white academic. So, I think these differences are not acknowledged. Taking action and asking questions is pivotal right now. I am here to ask questions, eg what do we mean by diversity, how we might not shy away from asking questions which can lead maybe to action in terms of change

I am interested in talking about things which are not talked about. It's really difficult. I've worked in HE for many years; this is my experience of being in groups which are there to talk about problems which derive from racism, and the problem isn't talked about. So, we have to keep asking questions and keep coming together; nothing will happen if we don't come together

AA : can I say something about calling out. It helps if you are white to call things out, if you are working in an institution and *that* can begin a conversation

How do we undo structures and start to build something different; how do we think about creating something which is different from what's out there already. Having these ongoing conversations, commitment to dealing with it all and working on yourself as a white person, and not letting it go through lack of time

Inspired by Adesola's essay where she asks what micro-aggressions are specific to dance, and this was also in my mind during the breakout session just now which I loved; what can we learn from dance about how racism works, which is a slightly different question from how we can what we learn from dance about how to dismantle racism. How is racism manifested in particular ways in dance? What micro-aggressions are specific to dance? And how do micro-aggressions work on zoom?

I am here to unpick my thinking shaped by my background and having time to untangle some things which I haven't perhaps shone a light on

I need to become quicker and more agile at calling out, because I am white.

Referring to Adesola's essay, I realise I need to keep looking for the invisible systems and the unseen dimensions in my own work as well as the systems and structures around me. How to not be a bystander and ensure that I see, how not to be ignorant and take responsibility

We've had a lot of conversations in our building with staff and associate artists we've had some very confronting conversations worked and lived experience of people in our building unpick, name, be accountable, take responsibility for. What is up on our walls, and who are they meeting, and how are they met. Struck by the conversation today around how dance is racist as an artform

I work for a white-led organisation, understood and identified by the field as a white organisation, I think I have been really concerned with discourses around what is invisible to us as white people and how we as white people can do work identify what is invisible without placing that labour at the feet of Black people and people of colour. I also find the perspective of equity really useful as opposed to equality or inclusion, so recognising where equity doesn't exist and structural reasons for that. I am also interested in thinking about forms of solidarity that might replace allyship

I am aware in institutions that talk is there at times but equally institutions tend to move, act and respond slowly. I am interested in a more active approach to support the change we are also interested in here

I have a lot of kinship with all that has been spoken already. I agree with this idea of consistency with addressing what we are talking about, not letting it be flavour of the month or dropping it. Paying attention, listening, equality, access, for me predominantly our students come from a working class background so their time with us is often the first time they have been exposed to conversations around race, politics, gender. It's all very very new to them. I am really interested in how to be skilful engage with our young students conversations. They are part of change and they are the change

Our in our breakout group talked about chasing stillness and the sense of panic and urgency that came from exploring that very briefly and those are words that came up for me in the frame of this conversation. I think everyone agrees that change needs to be really accelerated and at the same time completely meaningful; and very deep and I am curious about how to do that and how to do it collectively. Chasing stillness could be quite an

individual activity and while I have work to do on myself, we are not alone, collectively this is an incredible group of people and forum and so I am here to be a part of that

Hard to know what to drop into this. I want to say something about calling it out. It's important to address things in the moment and to get more agile – I'm taken with that. But there is something problematic about that term, or the practice of it is – it can be used in a bullying fashion. I think we need kindness as well, and rigour in trying to addressing change and noticing difficult moments. So calling out shouldn't be about your role but about identifying and sharing, rather than accusing. I have witnessed that among students - the enthusiasm of finding new cause has caused them to really hurt other people if others haven't yet caught up with them, so I think skill, honesty and kindness are called for.

I was really taken with Adesola's essay and what came up for me was about training and value, and how we have to rethink. This tension between aesthetic and technique. How we can create a world which allows for variety to change us. It's not enough to be ready to overthrow our assumptions and change – how to we actively overthrow them? I'm interested in the word entitlement and what it means to reinvent it, how we can use it to a positive effect in some way. How are you really undoing it all eg in module content. How do you use your power, or undo your own powerbase and bring in? The notion of the white establishment always re-establishing itself under the premised of change, when no change is happening

I came to learn from other people's perspectives and be part of the conversation. I was really stimulated by Adesola's provocation and when she ended with those words used with good intention eg white privilege, institutionalism racism, ethnic minority and the challenge to reconsider those words. It made me think about our language coming out of our historical context. eg if you think England is my country, people who don't look like you would be a minority. I think of home as transcending two or three countries..it's a more global perspective. It makes me think about racism in dance history, simply because you are invisible, because you don't appear in the history that is called British dance history. There is an opportunity here to create intersections here : what is the intersection between choreography by African-Caribbean, people of African descent, people of Indian descent, English descent. If we were to look at history as the intersections of how those people connected over a period of time, we would get another history, where invisibility is less or where there are pointers to other histories. Thank you Adesola.

One of the reasons I'm here is that I really value this roundtable and learn so much from it every year and felt it was particularly important to come this year to listen and to learn. I'm struck by a couple of things; the lack of acknowledgement and the importance of working with colleagues and students, everyone in the whole institution is involved. The need to interrogate and peel off the layers to eventually acknowledge what is happening and to take action. And the other thing, which I'm wary of, is that this could become a series of tick-boxes. It needs constant viewing from all different angles, and we need to invite people from

outside to challenge us. Clear actions that actually change the way we do things, and the way we think and speak. I'm also interested in questioning the language we use – there are several arts institutions now not using certain terms, for example BAME in any of their literature. Change in language and perhaps for some of us the anxiety of getting that wrong; I want to learn more about this

It was a powerful experience for me at the Contemporary Dance and Whiteness workshop to acknowledge my own racism and the way in which I am shaped by racism, the way in which I continue to perpetuate the shaping of racism. So I am here as part of that dialogue and continued thinking and taking responsibility to develop my own literacy and racism and have an urgency and zeal to be part of opportunities to make new history

What keeps coming up for is the relationship between institutional and personal and where they crossover, and where they don't – and perhaps they cross over more than I think

What I say might be slightly outside of the box here. I'm occupying my space right now consuming my energies at the moment with trying to find strategies to address the avoidance of conversation, the uncomfortable space, the lethargy of action and the question of terminology when it suits. It is quite a heavy discussion and conversation and a space that is very very uncomfortable but it's a lived space, it's real experience. And I think that's an understanding of now. My responsibility is to help change that narrative in the position that I currently sit but I find that is going to be a challenge in itself. While the leadership is one aspect of looking at these inequalities and differences, actually the job is much bigger outside of these four walls that I sit in, so it is consuming

I've been interested by unsettling this conversation is and have been surprised at how physically that has manifested for me, and questioning where to place myself. Today I was looking at the words and realising that the words Adesola offered us are words I use in my practice and of those I am interested in silence, and what might emerge from silence, the hesitation to speak but maybe that silence might produce something positive– something could grow. Difference and being in relationship with difference, how we might live that through our practice. Hesitation is quite a big thing for me at the moment, and coming back to what we draw from our practice and being with others. We can make something new together.

It's important for me to come away with things I can actually implement. It's all been said. We are the institution.

I don't know what to say in the short time but one of the things I've been exploring is ideas of unconscious bias and how that plays out in leadership and the things we do. Something I really appreciated in Adesola's provocation was its embodied perspective – because there's so much you can read and ideas that can pull you in different directions – but if we can explore things from that embodied position we might get a three-dimensional, process-oriented understanding of experiences and that feels important in understanding racism and knowing that it is a long-term ongoing thing to engage with

One question that is very present for me is what it is for a predominantly white department to invite BIPOC artists in particular into its spaces and how it's possible to do that from inside an institution that is systemically racist without perpetuating those prejudices or whilst challenging those prejudices. What can we learn from dance about racism works? Is there something we can learn from dance and choreographic practices perhaps in relation to form, perhaps not, to learn how to take care with how invitations are issued or practically arranged. Not suggesting that dance or choreography has something positive to demonstrate, it might be a response to articulating how racism is at work in these practices currently.

What can I gain from this? How can I help? A few words that come to mind are honesty, having honest conversations, and being comfortable in having conflict...challenging things. A lot of what I have experienced is in Adesola's essay but one of the main things I really want to try and have some conversations around is power; I know I have an amount of power to help with representation on my programme – I am the only Brown person on my programme – having to bring in some sort of representation of visiting lecturers so that students can see a variety of people and abilities so they don't think dance is just white with one brown person. But also so that I feel empowered to have that conversation with my line managers, to change job descriptions, so that people of colour feel like they can apply. Looking at the screen here, I'm here because there's not many of us, so that's the main reason also. Should I be here? I have these conversations with my peers, saying I write white and I dance black. If I'm feeling that, my students must be feeling that. I've also done a Masters in that room. I could tell it would get a First before I even got my assessments. These things I really want to have honest conversations about – which I do with my peers – it seems a bit daunting and I feel nervous saying it here but I shouldn't do and I'd like to talk about that.

I am interested in how I can support students of colour. They are having these conversations all the time, and they are not taking place anywhere else heard, so I want to see how I can support them in the best way

In terms of actions, I don't know what they are other listening and making space, although I realise that feels like a very passive stand to take so I would like to identify a bit more how to support the change.

Introducing Task 2 : 15min

In this introduction, Adesola emphasizes the importance of discourse and this being a shared concern, with solutions arising between people rather than solely burdening Black people and People of Colour within a team to do the labour of decolonising a department.

Each breakout group chooses one of the prompts in Adesola's essay to explore in conversation.

Prompt 1

Part of the approach to an anti-racist classroom is for all people (teachers and pupils) within the room to develop a practice of noticing their own power? This also resonates with owning the power of dance knowledges within a culture that oppresses embodied knowledges.

Prompt 2

Discuss process as a practice for dealing with racism rather than fixing: rather than fixing issues which involves assuming understanding of another person's somatic experience, what kinds of energy does it take to create an on-going responsive and nurturing space for a variety of pupils. Where and how is that energy sapped?

Prompt 3

What is the goal of teaching a student to dance? How do we notice, teach, discuss, encourage students we find unattractive, aesthetically difficult, ugly, have an 'attitude'? Aesthetically, 'Unattractive' and 'ugly' are often linked to 'different'. Where is the notion of 'difference' in our classrooms?

Prompt 4

What micro-aggressions are specific to dance? How do we show solidarity for each other in the wider institutions we work in?

Please refer to Adesola's essay [here](#) for the full context of these four prompts.

AA refers specifically to prompt 3 which she describes as quite controversial and was discussed extensively in the preparation for the roundtable. She defines 'unattractive' and 'ugly' and how they are linked to difference. Sometimes people literally can't see the potential in someone who appears different to them, and for this reason they are unable to see a possibility in them. AA encourages us to unpack this, as many people today have referred to wanting to support their students and asked how to best make an environment for them.

Questions to have in mind while discussing in breakout rooms:

What are the things that education can help with?

What are the things connected to justice? When do we need to speak out, and how?

What is personal work and doesn't need to be in the public domain in terms of sapping energy from other people?

Breakout room conversations not recorded

Reporting back from breakouts :

Group 1

Responsibility is individual as well as institutional. It's a problem if an institution such as LCDS can graduate entire years of non-black students, and we need to recognise that, it shouldn't be hidden in the way that it has been – it's a clear indication of what is going on in our sector. Intersection of class, income, other routes of education serve to perpetuate problems; people need to be better at noticing what's going on, attending to it and speaking about. You need to talk with your students about all aspects of them, and to go back to intersectionality, no-one is defined by their protected characteristic, they are multiple things, and many of the students you might have will have further things that are causing them problems where they're being excluded. Conversation is really key. There are things to notice about your institution, how your institution will reinforce racism, and be mindful, be aware of the attainment gaps in your institutions and your courses. All of the things that people have been talking about – they are what have brought in your 2020 cohort and your 2020 cohorts will be reflective of the thinking that you have had, and that needs addressing

You also touched on the impact of the demographic profile of the staff.

What perpetuates those staff to remain, what perpetuates those staff to be appointed in the first place, what those requirements are, all these REF points, all these things that perpetuate a certain type of person leading in a certain position in a certain institution. We were talking about the range of people and lives. Blank slate is something I would like to see happening.

It's really important that everyone engages in the wider conversations outside of the dance sector and engages in wider cultural discussions about race. And I think aside from the classroom there is a reckoning that needs to be had with your non-white staff, that you need to understand the experiences, the conversations, the exclusion. The historic departments that have been white it's because people have actively excluded not because people are not there. The wage gaps, the retention gaps, all of those things. Like being a swan is *still* prioritising white women, so there is a conversation to be had between ourselves as well as the one about supporting our students.

We started with talking about the wider global context and relevance of this and I feel (not saying that it shouldn't be addressed) but I find it very agitating..not that we shouldn't apply care to every detail in every micro-moment where we feel we didn't act or where we should have done differently, what might we do or how much work there is left to do..I feel like there's bigger, stronger action. There's only so much we can indulge this personal reflection; there are bigger, clearer, stronger things to say and do. In our group some emotion actually came out which I hadn't seen much of yet in what I'd been hearing, and I feel this is part of these habits and these structures that aren't necessarily useful. Because it is an ongoing

process, can we allow anger and clumsiness and messiness to exist. These are typically all the systemic problems that perpetuate how we are and things that we do, and it's much bigger than dance

Group 2

I'm hesitant to speak after such eloquence. I'm very grateful for what's just been spoken and I'm letting that resonate with me. We were addressing the idea of what we might find unattractive or what it might be to experience ugliness when working with students. There was an example shared about being confronted with attitudes of disinterest or disengagement and this wasn't connected to race directly, it was more about attitudes to working. This led to a discussion about what it means to create spaces where people might be ready to work or where the spaces might be enabling or develop a practice. What it is that we might expect of students so we deem that they are ready to work in the way that we want them to work; what are the fixed ideas that we have about this, can we be more expansive, more embracing and what it means to be able to work together. This led us to talking about how important it is to build relationships with our students and how that takes time, how important it is to go through some shit in order to do some stuff. We recognised that our relationships are involved with processes that might not feel comfortable straight away. Also how important it is to encourage and enable ambition, to nurture and push in alignment with each other.

Group 3

We talked about micro-aggressions, a lot about issues that are going on in the background. Tending to deal and respond to people who are forthcoming but trying to be more aware of people who might not be proactive like that or not relate so well to me. Who am I ignoring..speaking as a teacher.

I can talk about something I notice in myself which is a lack of fluency in relation to support particularly because I am quite transient as I haven't been attached to an institution or don't live in it with one group of students – I move through lots of different groups which homogenises them and erases some of the diversity and nuance that needs specific attention in each situation. So I am questioning how I might want to ask institutions to do it differently so that when we're in a classroom we can be in the discomfort of that with more time.

We talked also about the importance to look outside of ourselves as institutions as well, of course role-models are really important and for there to be representation – I hear the comments about LCDS and I am currently a member of the faculty of LCDS. But I also think it's important for institutions to look out and see what people are doing and have been doing for a very long time, be proactive in going to see work by other people, not only in the institution..not everyone has to come in..we have a responsibility to go out

Group 4

It's interesting from my perspective as a black leader. When I read prompt 3, which is where we started, it's about the fact that we understand how our systems work and policies, well we have plenty of them. There is a suggestion that we need more time but well we have had a history of time and in various ways we find excuses to try and address the problems. It is about the accountability and having come into this role and experiencing where there is a lack of accountability because you're managing up, you're managing from the top, which is a real disgrace and I'll be very open and honest about it because even in this room today, the number of limited Black and Brown faces round this table is also questionable and within that accountability does come into play when we're asking questions about change. The experience we're expecting our young people and cohorts to have – and for us to be able to change anything - unfortunately does not happen because we have not considered how changing the cultural references in the rooms, the recruitment that these things can take place. There's something about understanding who your allies are and in terms of action, you need to understand that because if you don't have Black and Brown people in the room, you become responsible for that job, and if you don't understand who it is that you can stand up to and say actually I don't agree with this because it does discriminate, then you also need somebody else who also looks like to you to stand up and agree that this is inappropriate. Actually very often it's the black or brown people who will stand up and call inequalities or call difference or call change. We're not at the table, there are not enough of us in those rooms, so we already have a problem because we can't always be there presenting the challenge and asking for the change. So understanding what your white positions in those rooms enables you to do is about the action that you need to take. So you need to figure that out amongst yourselves, how you're going to make that change. I wanted to add something about the appreciation of cultural difference which is not a case of going out and saying that's lovely, you need to understand that when someone is shouting, it's not that they are aggressive, it's understanding terminology, language and difference, it's understanding that in a classroom if someone has a different attitude to the way they work, it's not about the fact that they are aggressive or an aggressive Black person or they've got an attitude. There are cultural differences which people are choosing not to recognise and until we do that – and actually talking about getting rid of their bottoms, or 'ballet bottoms' – it's not going to happen. They are culturally different. But if you don't recognise that, you're going to keep demonising someone about their physicality which is not going to have a difference in terms of the way they work. And then of course that results in a very negative space and a negative student. I have to go but would love to be able to pick this conversation up and those who are working in the industry but it's a big conversation. It's not comfortable space either so when we're talking about Black and Brown people, I think you need to prepare yourself for those spaces where you become complicit because it's easy – so what does that mean about change, and that's where I talk about action. Do contact me for further conversation because I do want to be in those rooms where I am telling the CEO of an organisation and a school that they have managed to miss out a reporting section on inequalities. Let's talk about it.

Group 5

We talked about the notion of 'cultural studies', and in effect that structure needs to be undone, and we need to talk about culture streamed through all of the modules. Academics need to be much more informed and talking to each other, and modules talking to each other in terms of content. We also talked about students and how we are learning from them and what they bring, and therefore we are guided by them and their interests, their dance practices outside of university. We ended on the notion of contemporary and what we mean by that and maybe that word needs to be unpicked.

We also talked about who accesses our programme and how that access happens. e.g where I work we pretty much offer a place to everyone who applies so rather than us choosing students, it's very often the students choosing us rather than the other way round. Often that's about people out in the world knowing what we have on offer . I'm from a very working-class background and my access to dance was through GCSE Dance and dance amateurs a billion years ago and so I'm very concerned that the downgrading of dance and arts subjects in schools means that predominantly now, year on year, applicants are coming from private dance education, and that's a very specific socio-economic group, whose parents can afford classes. Often it's white middle-class women who are accessing our course because they have dance experience and they search for a dance course at university. So we need to look outside our institution and how we create greater access for the students who are coming, to know what we're doing. Even our first years – contemporary dance is a massive shock already as well, it's challenging for them, particularly improvisation. They hate it in the first year and like it by the third year. They're not one identity, they come from really different multiple backgrounds. So I try to meet them where they're at and try to work out how I can support their learning. Something to do with class and access, and particularly Adesola talked at the start of this how she grew up on a housing estate – that's really important as well, how we create access for everyone from that socio-economic background if they have an interest in dance.

We were talking around the different breakout prompts. I remember being on a programme which was described as inclusive, and a teacher said I couldn't write about Hip Hop – it had to be about ballet, in a roundabout way. It was about their ego. There's something about checking our ego and empowering students to embody the knowledge they had before they came to university; I feel strongly about this in terms of the power that we have. Let's break down what we mean by 'meeting' the students and breaking down learnt institutional pigeon-holing assumptions. Embrace students language. Lots of my students have Patois as their first language. My first language is Creole. When we're talking in class, I don't expect them to talk to me as if they're writing an essay. Let's help them embrace that language in their writing too and how to use it in a way that makes it feel valuable in academia. I really don't feel like I'm valuable in academia right now. The prompts really resonate with me.

Running over time..

Closing comments

HH : Thank you everyone. This feels like just a beginning – it always feels like that with the roundtables. For everyone who is still here, ID is open to hearing from anyone who wants to continue to organise this collective group or organise the conversation that might support different kind of actions. I don't have the answer but as a group we can find ways.

Q – is it possible to have a follow-up? So much has happened here

HH – we will look at it, we will want to follow up and for it not to be too delayed

Attendee : ID should articulate a desire to the sector to have this conversation, because the wider sector is not having this conversation. The dance sector is not having a conversation about race, at all. It's shameful it's not. I was incredibly disappointed on the educational networks about race when there was loads about Covid. Frankly watching people being murdered for 7 minutes at a time is disturbing, it has an effect on you. In the 90s when western people were being murdered by IS, those videos were edited. We are constantly being shown violence against people. We all know micro-aggressions are not micro, we all know that they have a profound impact on you and how you exist in the world. And for non-white members of staff, we equally have personal pressure in our institution, so the silence, the non-conversation is complicity and there is a need to speak out. A call-out to the sector from Independent Dance would be really appreciated, I don't think you should carry all the burden and then the HE perspective needs to get together and talk more articulately.

In our university there is a galvanisation across the creative arts teams coming together to talk about this issue. I'm very aware of the need to stand up and be accountable, and to have a wider conversation across the cultural industries. Need to have discussion and action popping up everywhere

There's a potential to host this forum in an ongoing way – perhaps with a rotating chair, or shifting between different chairs and perhaps taking place in different institutions. A common thread has been speaking the unspoken – would it help some to be able to host a forum like this. It doesn't have to be led by ID each time. Please get in contact if you are interested

Is there a way to collate what is going on in different institutions, so we can share best practice. We could report back, cross-reference practices.

We could create a resource-pool. There is actually a lot going in different HE organisations and in the wider dance sector outside of HE. In my experience I would say that in the last few months at least, racial justice and structural change has been the thing on the agenda, which

is a positive note and I'm excited it's happening a lot more. It is number one on the agenda but that might not be everyone's experience

There are discussions going on with ACE right now and a lot of critique about ACE on this issue

It needs to be messy – there's something about not being attached to an institution. This isn't only about dance in HE, it's not a singular issue belonging to one sector. We need to go out in multiple directions. For me it doesn't feel as helpful to have conversations staying in HE, it needs not to be contained in the offices or classrooms

Perhaps it's about communicating commitment further than we are

HH : Thanking Adesola for all her work on the essay, planning and chairing role

AA : taking individual responsibility to take it somewhere else is key. Having a rotating chair sounds a great idea. There's small, personal things around supporting artists who are hourly-paid for example – a lot of diversity in departments is in the hourly-paid lecturers. Small supports can also be really helpful and valuable as well as the bigger strategic discussions. Reach out and include people, bring the fresh air of new voices and ideas. Stay with the discomfort and trouble

With thanks to all the HE Roundtable 2020 participants :

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