



KLKT #3: Provocation by Sharon Watson

(automated transcript)

SPEAKERS

Sharon Watson, Shantel Ehrenberg, Unknown Speakers

(Introduction: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021 over spare guitar chords)

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This is a field recording of variable quality with a live audience at Siobhan Davies Studios.

(2021 audio file begins)

Nikki Tomlinson 00:01

Welcome, I'm Nikki Tomlinson. I'm co-director of Independent Dance with Heni Hale. And it's a pleasure to welcome you all this is the third and the final, in our talk series, Keep Listening, Keep Talking. As you may know, it's a partnership project between ID, Dance HE, C-DaRE, the Centre for performance philosophy at the University of Surrey. And we've had two previous talks, and several of you have been before. So it's great to see you back and welcome if this is your first time doing this. And today, we're very delighted to welcome guest speaker Sharon Watson, CEO and principal of Northern School of contemporary dance, and hosted by Shantel Ehrenberg, who's co-director of the Centre for performance philosophy. And I'm going to hand straight over to Shantel, who will introduce Sharon more fully, and she'll take you through what we're going to do this afternoon. And thank you for coming.

Shantel Ehrenberg 01:36

Thanks so much Nikki, and to my co collaborators ID and dance HE and C-DaRE. So we have the introduction to the session. I also want to just publicly thank GSA and Surrey for contributing financial support today for the provocation fee and allowing that financial support. So I'll be principally chairing and hosting this session and committed to continuing the conversation and work in this area of our field. The order of events, so to speak, aren't that far from what we've done on the past two conversations. So I'm just going to open with Sharon, giving a provocation around 10 minutes or so offering some questions potentially, then we'll go into breakout rooms last time was quite effective to go into about 40 minutes, breakout rooms that I think first it sounds like a long time, but it goes quite quickly actually. You know, because of the subject matter. And those will be organised around discussing Sharon's provocations and questions posed and the themes from that. Then we'll have a report back sort of session of of those groups, as we did last time. And we'll try and stick keep to that around 10 minutes, that'll be my challenge as chair, just because we want to have as much time as we can for that open conversation at the end, around about 45 minutes. We also thought there probably will be some sort of wrapping up in terms of these conversations series ending and although we don't have to make an action plan, it's kind of thinking forward what's after this because we don't have anything sort of in the diary per se, although it may have some idea about the next round table. Again, just warmly welcome, and thanking Sharon Watson for agreeing to join us as guest speaker for this session and Sharon and I discussed beforehand, I'm going to read out her full bio, actually, you may have seen it online already, but it also offers contextualization for the session. So Dr. Sharon Watson MBE do was appointed CEO and

principal of the Northern School of contemporary dance in May 2020. And prior to this, Sharon was the seventh and longest standing artistic director of Phoenix Dance Theatre. Trained at the London School of contemporary dance, she was one of the first female principal dancers invited to join the all male award winning Phoenix Dance Company trained with company from 89 to 1997, where she choreographed *Never Still* and *Shaded Limits*. Having left Phoenix to pursue a number of other ventures including setting up her own company ABCD Sharon returned in 2009 as the new artistic director, and since then Sharon is choreographed, *Fastlane*, *Melts*, *Never Too Still*, *Repetition of Change*, *Tearful* and *Wind Rush* *Movement of the People*, which you would have got a link to an excerpt to in advance during your tenure at Phoenix Dance Theatre. Sharon has received a number of awards and accolades in 2010. She was named as one of the cultural leadership programmes, women to watch a list of 50 influential women working in Arts and Cultures in the UK. She was awarded the songwriter Yorkshire Woman of Achievement in Business Award and named Yorkshire Woman of the Year in 2016. She recently received the Liverpool Institute of performing arts companionship award from Sir Paul McCartney, and it was recognised as one of 100 faces of a vibrant economy 2017 by Grant Thornton acknowledged at the 2017 Northern Power women awards as part of the very first top 50 Power list and in 2018, Sharon won the first English woman's award for arts and culture and was presented with an honorary fellowship by Northern School of contemporary dance. In July of 2019. Sharon received an honorary doctorate from Leeds University for her contribution to the arts. Sharon's recognitions are testament to her continued passion and drive to contribute to the local and national creative industries through the medium of dance. In November 2020, Sharon was appointed the deputy lieutenant of West Yorkshire, and in 2001, she was awarded an MBE in the Queen's new honour Years Honours List. Sharon is the trustee of Leeds Playhouse and Leeds 2023. And she's committed to improving diversity with the arts by supporting the creative voices of women and black Asian and ethnic minority artists. So it's a brilliant biography. So thanks again, Sharon. And I will pass it over you for a provocation.

Sharon Watson 06:13

Okay. Thank you, Shantel, I often hear that massive citation, and I think, wow, I'd love to meet that woman. There's just something about, you know, just hearing the titles of the works. And obviously, the accolades that I received in the, in the latter years of the work. And it's, it's a great moment to reflect on actually, what is actually taking place, what kind of activism I'm involved in, and what kind of actions I'm able to involve myself, and, and, in this case, the organisation in order to make change. I think it's important to, to kind of acknowledge what that says about me, because my provocation really, I was going to title it, and I think I've left this to the last minute to kind of figuring out what kind of what title I should have for this event this afternoon, but one of them was: Can you see me? and I actually thought, well, actually, I am being seen, I am definitely kind of somehow within the midst of all of what's taking shape, I'm being seen, the work that I'm doing and achievement is being seen. But there is a bigger question. And this is kind of setting the whole sort of the next 10 minutes for me in terms of communicating with you on what it is that we're hopefully going to have a discussion over about, I just want to say is lovely to see some faces that I recognise, and people that I'm familiar with. I just want to say that because I haven't seen some of you for such a long time. And how nice it is to see you in the room. So you know, some of you will know my history and will know the experiences that I've had sort of you have been to the school and will know the journey as well, that's reflected through the process that we've been through and where I am now currently as the chief executive and the principal. So I'm just gonna read my, my paper to you. And I think the questions are in there as absolutely in the title. It's, it's where it sits. And yeah, I'll just get on with it. So it's 2021, and my question is not, can you see me? but can you hear me? The work I do, as with many black people, as creative activists has to do so many, for so much. And, but not often, for ourselves. It's been over a year where headline statements regarding the murder of George Floyd in the US was palpable here in the UK, there is a cry for help. If you listen hard enough, you'll hear it from those who look like me, and those who are embracing the role of an ally. And what does that sound like? It's become debatable to those whose lenses are tinted with a denial of the lived experience, and therefore the call to action. 2020 has made me more visible, but I still ask the question, can you hear me? In moments like this, where I have opportunity to share my reality? I very much try to keep my lived experience at the centre of the conversation. And I do this because I'm not schooled in education of equality, diversity and inclusion. But I know my realities is exactly what the actions of these committees and policymakers are working towards eliminating the inequalities that sit within that. There's never been a time in my history where the need for equality inclusion had been more vocal, and yes, even more visible here with the UK. And it has felt necessary to add to the numerous and varied conversations which brings our voices to the tables of which we sit, up to a place where our collective understanding informs the possibilities of change. We recently had the great, to some, The Euros 2020, which for so many was a bittersweet experience. And it was no surprise, the outcomes and the

situation we're now dealing with to people of colour. Ask the question why? And we can discuss that later. But competent handling is required as we acknowledge our differences within our organisations within education within our cultures for which we consume, and which we invite other people to partake. Our approach to creating equality has often led me, to me being very granular, and quite forensic in conversations, which is often held within uncomfortable spaces for those were involved. And black and brown people are often conflicted the consequences of truth for the comfort of others. We, collectively have a responsibility. But it's also that accountable actions which helps us to remain and I say us, in the general, to remain authentic in our intent. We need to give contentious subjects space and time to be discussed, and there is hope. This is all not kind of to say that the whole world and everything around it is negative. But there is hope. But the conversations currently taking place are having an impact, not just within my immediate circles, but across organisations and education environments, where information is being fed to us through a pipeline, which I must be honest, I sometimes question the integrity and the honesty around who was feeding us the information. I believe identity is fluid, and should remain so. If you've been part of the recent discussions around BAME over, you will hopefully understand that the BAME acronym takes away our ability to democratise our lived experiences. None of us live within one characterization of one characteristic and to embrace our intersectionality provides us with a lens for which we're able to better understand our behaviours, our actions, our vision with vision statements, our policies, collectively, therefore leading to action. There's been an inertia since Black Lives Matter started. And I have to be honest, I welcomed it with both arms, because it has enabled me to have that visibility. But again, whether or not we're being heard, as someone who was standing up to be counted, standing up to be active, standing up to be creatively, creative activism, I wonder how much of that noise is just white noise. I have experienced disingenuous approaches to efforts towards change. And I'm heighten to the powers of structural inequalities, which systematically impact our organisational change. I am and I know I have to work hard, because not to lose momentum. I know I have to stay focused, and on track, and more than ever accountable to the result of us here at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, and where we are collectively evolving as people and as an inclusive community. And as an organisation that can measure it's tangible outcomes. The question: Can you hear me? And for me, and for those I'm working with this is how learning has begun to transition into practice for us here for me in the wider world. And we understand that we too, as learners must transition into being learner practitioners and walking the parallel paths of learning and practitioners we begin to experiment with ways to manifest that anti racist efforts beyond our conversations and into the world as a real action. I guess I am also curious and questioning how we develop sufficient educatedness, I don't know if that's a real word, and understanding as individuals, as our teams, as organisations that make up our body of creative activism, to be able to read to avoid re traumatising of racialised people creating peace for the wounds of the past to begin to heal. And there is a saying within the culture that I come from, that you cannot heal in the spaces for which you have been hurt. And what does that say about the world we live in. Because this becomes a broad and very long a very difficult space to navigate and contain. However, the vision is to uncover a way to authentically move towards a more equitable future together, working with all levels of leadership, and the levels of leadership I refer to are actually referenced within some of those accolades within my bio that there are people of influence and people of positions that can actually impact change, and from personal thought to organisational to co-create in the future and support in the sector. I work to become visibly, creatively, actively anti-racist with the team that I work with. But my big question in amongst all of that is: Can you hear me? I'm going to leave it there.

Shantel Ehrenberg 15:04

Thanks so much, Sharon. I'm sure everyone will agree with me provocative, but you know, I haven't known you very long, but particularly through the Lou Cope podcast, again, just warm and personable delivery of some very difficult material as well. Yeah, I think some of this issue of: Can you hear me? Really resonating with other other events that have been going on, on this topic for the past year and a half? So a few other themes previous to our preparation: whose voice is it anyway? We have disparity within our own thinking within our own fields. The context of voice and hearing, and the voice of the individual versus the group?

Sharon Watson

There's a couple more questions, I think, which is kind of within the sort of, yeah, whose voice is it? The disparity within our own thinking, is as far as the within our own thinking, the context of voice and actually what can be the rule rather than the exception in this journey towards change? And one of the questions I think was last year 2020, this roundabout this time, was a big question for me is, is it possible to step out of the way? And what does that mean for individuals when we're

talking about inequalities and talking about racism when we're talking about various forms of disparity? At what point does that become a job that we take on board personally or collectively?

Shantel Ehrenberg 16:30

is are there any questions with participants?

Audience

Yeah, sorry, Sharon. You said one other thing that felt really important, after you talked about, is it possible to step out of the way? You said something about the context, and I didn't get it. And I wanted to get it before we went into the breakout rooms?

Sharon Watson

What I said about: is it possible to step out of the way?

Audience

Yeah

Sharon Watson

As individuals as a collective, it was really to do with the fact that actually, we're discussing this within the context of racism with the voice that perhaps is missing from the room. And I guess delving a little further into that. I mentioned the granular conversations, at what point do you either get yourself involved or remove someone from that particular environment in order for the words to have gravitas? So I guess there's a bigger conversation around, actually, is it you that moves out of the way? Or is it the kind of the situation that moves you but it's open to discussion in terms of where I feel that that responsibility of self comes into play.

Audience

Thank you. That's helpful.

Shantel Ehrenberg 17:43

All right. So welcome back to the main room. So we're going to take this time, so we had five groups. And hopefully, you nominated someone, and we'll just find our way around it, to give each group a chance to share some of the aspects, so you can share back with the group have the conversation in just sharing where the conversation went in your breakout rooms.

Unknown Speaker:

Hi, everyone. What seemed to come out of it was that we were feeling like we, senior management is potential in our various institutions are potentially kind of mostly involved in a kind of tick box sort of situation in terms of everything that they kind of both ask of us and also give us access to like maybe in terms of diversity training and stuff like that, by the way, which we decided was, you know, potentially a waste of time and money. And that we thought that money as it's often just repeat, repeat, repeat from the year before. And that perhaps that time and money could be better spent for staff in some other kind of active training way, or finding some other way to have conversations perhaps about those topics. We talked about how senior management, they don't give us the support that we need. And they're not clear or communicative enough, in a way whereby it feels like they're asking us to solve their problems, that and meanwhile, they don't give us the the possibility, or let's use the word power to be able to be able to really do that. So we're kind of caught in the middle, potentially. And we also talked about how with potentially a lot of those people don't really want change because they're actually in those positions themselves, and hanging on to those positions in a very particular way in relation to a diverse community of leaders let's say, and we were all celebrating Sharon's position, new position. And also Sharon spoke about Nadine's lens on how she brought the community that was literally outside her window into the institution itself. And that also then led us into talking about grants and money funding, consumerist education. And we also talked about how the CAT scheme, especially in Trinity Laban, and we felt like they were doing fantastic work to kind of reach out and and foster a more diverse community of students. And then Sharon brought the perspective that actually, the thing is that the CAT

scheme doesn't necessarily kind of itself extend or reach out in such a way as to find and access a greater diverse community either.

Unknown Speaker:

Also it did start off actually with this question around standing aside, there's what we picked up from what Sharon was saying about the importance of standing aside and we had a bit of a conversation about how do we do that on a personal level? And how do we create space in order to listen and allow others to make change to effectively to take control and make and create something. So we sort of started there, and then we and then we went on from there. So that were thought, and you were raising up what you David and I thought was quite important to really kind of underline what it means to stand aside. And then we sort of ended with really rethinking about certain technical training that we might then rethink, why are we making the assumptions we're making, and there's a form of standing aside to really reposition the curriculum let's say, from somebody else's lens from another place, looking at it differently.

Shantel Ehrenberg

Thank you. Absolutely. Another room, happy to share?

Unknown Speaker 22:21

Thank you, Sharon, for the provocation, and for joining us, as well, at the end, very important end note, so I'll try and tie that in as well. We spoke about the importance of language, how it's changing all the time, and but it's so affecting. And as educators, we have a responsibility to be current with language. We talked about the big difference between hearing and listening and the importance of being listened to. And we were questioning whether we need to teach people how to hear and how to listen. We talked about we went off on a bit of a tangent about broader societal things like digital technology and how there's, the need to take responsibility, that with some of the things that happen within that, that there's voices rather than a voice and many need to be heard. Working in institutions, it's hard to change the culture. So as individuals, we feel we'd have to take responsibility. And we have to allow that space as it's just been mentioned, for other voices. And Shantel joined us at that point and mentioned about additional his first session, where she talks about the voice matrix. And we were talking about power, who's in power, whose power is it? Who's given a platform to speak? And then also, Shantel shared about a recent event, she went to that asking people in the global majority to speak reach traumatises them. We also talked about accepting our past education, that has probably not being enough. And our assumptions we need to challenge and to constantly need to do that. Where is the hearing and the listening taking place? And the need to have conversations in lots of different ways and directions. And Sarah mentioned that, and a thought that was a really, we all thought that was really important. And then at the end, we talked about the role and not the insert the exception. So we were talking about what personal roles might we have, as well as the organisational roles that there might be and Sharon shared with us about an audition, notice, that might have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion statement, but it might just appear at the end and that people might not get to it and it should be at the beginning. So a really easy thing to fix. And that would make a big difference. And I was also thinking about recruitment or audition panels as well how representative they are.

Shantel Ehrenberg 25:17

That was great, Karen, thank you. And just for everyone, Karen mentioned the SCUDD conference, The Standing Conference of University Drama Departments, and there was a talk by Dr Prarthana Purkayastha from Royal Holloway, which I found very provocative. And I shared with Sharon, as well, before today, so recommend following that up if you're interested. Other group, speaker, advocates, sharers?

Breakout Group 3 25:49

I can add a comment from my group, we talked much also about this idea of stepping out of the way, but it's also the need to challenge the ways of doing things, it's not a simple task for somebody to simply take up a position, first of all, how do we support them to it, this might be in boards, or whatever, kind of situations, but often the structures are so rigid and set. So there's very, very little scope for change. And so we this is how we tied in this idea of visibility, you know, being yes, I might be seen, but am I being heard, because often it might be one person was then representing a whole, I guess, you know, being on a board in the name of diversifying it. And I think we we left also with a really, really poignant question that's, you know, I don't know Carla if you want to talk about it or not. But you know, asking this question, that Carla

asked, what is the intention for me to be in the room? And, and to be seen in the room? So yeah, that's one aspect. I don't know if anyone else in my group would like to extend that. But also, that's how we picked up this needs to change the rules, rather than you know, so we talked about rules, in that sense, needing to change the rules in order to actually make change to the structures.

Shantel Ehrenberg 27:41

And anyone else from that group?

Breakout Group 4 27:46

I wasn't in that group, I'm the very last minute speaker for another group. And there's just a couple of things which, and which follow on actually this sense of like what it is to step out the way or to make space and I think, what our group, we're kind of doing what we're also we were also, I think what we were talking about, and I'm going to language is slightly differently, so stop me if I'm wrong, Catherine and Sarah is like what needs to be dismantled, in order for the space to be created, or for the stepping aside to happen? Because there's quite a lot of dismantling that needs to happen systemically, or institutionally in order to create the right kind of space for the stepping aside to happen. So that we I think that's what we were kind of the complexity of simply stepping aside just creates a void and the complexity of that. And Sarah, who hosted the last session with Matt Gough I think quite a lot came up about that, in that session, as well. Lots been said already, I'm just remembering also this idea that identity branding, is something that we talked about, right at the top of the conversation when Sharon was with us. And yeah, knowing that that's not okay. And at the same time, what as individuals within an institution or just in our lives can do also to support identities that might not normally be so easily seen or heard. And then we also talked about dissemination of like, how to disseminate change, so that change doesn't just happen in conversation or in a room that it's like, how do you make sure that your ripple effect is really acted upon? Yeah, have I missed anything essential out? Catherine or Sarah? No, I think we also just picked up on the Euro 2020 response. But we also discussed it in relation to the dance sector because there has been some really horrific social media racism towards particular companies in recent weeks. And yeah, we tried to unpick how we respond to that, how we support how we kind of so. Yeah, and also thinking around, you know, what is it about the Euro 2020 that triggered this kind of, yeah, people thinking they're allowed to behave this way. And the same way? What was it about these posts that put up in our sector that seem to allow people to respond? So trying to unpick that in order to think of how we respond and how we support? Yeah, we talked about that a little bit about, you know, where is that coming from? Trying to understand where that's coming from? It's very hard to put yourself in the shoes of those people and say, where does this come from? What fear is speaking here?

Shantel Ehrenberg 31:15

Thank you. I think there's one group that hasn't been represented, if anyone's willing to ...

Breakout Group 5 31:23

That was all great. Thanks for your all three of us kind of made notes probably on different things. So maybe I'll start with a few ideas. And then you can join in. Quite a few of the things have already been discussed came up for us as well. Particularly the thing about taking action, you were just saying. So yeah, listening but then what next? What, what happens with that information? We also talks about kind of intentions and thinking about what are the intent when you're interacting with other people understanding what their intentions for change are? We talked a bit about kind of situations in which we might want to question the way things are done, but don't know how to question or whether to question, potential kind of bad practice, which led us on to thinking about sphere of influence where we can't necessarily influence things that we want to influence. So understanding what our sphere of influence is, which relates back to understanding what the intentions of people are to make change. So kind of how do you I guess it comes back to taking action? How do you take action effectively, from where you are, and in the situation that you are and with the power that you have? We talked a bit about like, in that context, hearing when things aren't said as well. So hearing violence, and what that might mean, and that it's not just about listening for people who are saying something, but also maybe people who aren't saying anything, that's also important. Even though that's made even more difficult, because then we sort of feel like maybe we need to make assumptions. And we don't necessarily want to step into the limelight, and being an amplification tool, like medium for the voices of others as well. And then at the end of it, we were just talking about sort of how to make time and space for discussion amongst people that we like, particularly with students.

Shantel Ehrenberg 33:22

Okay, great. Thanks, Miranda. Yeah, so just chairing it, to open it out to any sort of response to all of that I really felt a lot of the groups are very, I felt they're very action oriented. And I think, you know, I'm furiously taking notes, some sort of like I'm doing something. But also to have the transcript and have recording of these things, because there's so many to respond to and look back on. But there's also that problem of getting frozen, particularly within this, there's so much to do and how to is there power in the step by step, you know, having these resources to at our disposal to move forward and take action as much as and listening is action as well, isn't it? What Sharon you've encouraged us to today's you know, different types of listening, what that is in order to hear and think about that perspective.

Unknown Speaker: 34:31

Thanks Shantel, yeah, I'm really kind of into this idea of what Katy was saying about dismantling the structures in order to make the stepping out of the way and I guess, again, possibly like everything that we're talking about, that's going to depend upon the personnel that are doing that. The those responsible for that dismantling, and what they're agenda is and where that really comes from it feels to me like that would have to be almost entirely from the black and people of colour community, as a way of kind of understanding the perspective of that structure in the first place and being able to critique it in a way, which is very which doesn't shy away from the kind of difficulties or privileges that are sort of inherent there.

Unknown Speaker: 35:43

And yeah, I'm just following on David, I kind of think that therefore, if nobody from the top down is in that category, then like this discussion of all our white faces, and how does that therefore happen when most of those institutions, higher education, conservatoires are ran by white males? Or not? A non black face, brown face somebody from different descent?

Breakout Group 3 36:24

Yeah, so I suppose what I'm kind of hearing is, is that the question around how, you know, to, to, you know, have to unravel the rules in order to make change, and there's kind of steps, there are a number of steps that have to happen before one can step aside. So, and I suppose that's pragmatically probably true. But I'm also aware of how we can get stuck a little bit like this, if maybe as in intimating that, you know, we'll sort of all get to feel like we're kind of frozen, and that we can't, we can't sort of battle against these kind of greater weight of institutions. And somehow we'll get so kind of bogged down with the day to day that we'll just lose the momentum. And, you know, I speak for myself in that I can see, you know, I've got sort of a wealth of stuff coming up in the autumn. And you could just kind of all you got to do is just sort of run with the immediacy of things. So I was kind of thinking, okay, well, on the way, what are the smaller things that I can do, in a way opening up conversation with my colleagues, a conversation I feel we haven't had yet properly, even with all this conversation that's been going on around us, I feel my department haven't really, really kind of spent some time together to talk about these issues properly. And to just try and sort of initiate that or suggest that maybe we could, you know, come together and maybe that's as much as I can do in order to change the rules in order to step aside in order to, you know, yeah, just try to think of that's within my gift, you know, to actually just raise my voice and say, I think we should talk about some of this. We haven't really done that. And I'm not, you know, I'm not at the head of department. So I don't have the authority in that way. But it's in my head. So I've got call to say it. So it's just a thought about breaking through.

Unknown Speaker 38:13

Yeah, because I kind of think also that, that, that therefore, you know, the value of this discussion is ours to be the beginning of something if departments are not even doing it yet. I mean, it has to start somewhere, doesn't it? So I think this is a huge, you know, just this ability, you know, what Independent Dance has set up here, and I think, then it's a real must to continue to do that, and invite people to talk more freely about what's going on and just share practice, as well, share things that work for you. On a very personal level, a departmental level, and then and then, you know, a more sort of stacked and institutional level sort of thing as well.

Breakout Group 3 39:02

Yeah, and just to follow on from what you're saying, as well, I'm aware that departments are very good at sort of sending you a link to this and sending you a link to that and we're all doing you know, we will see stuff and find stuff on the internet and send links. And then the rest of it, then I'm thinking you know, we haven't really kind of in a way unravelled our own

selves and our own wrongness and our own vulnerabilities in a conversation that kind of means you have to sort of meet yourself a bit about the assumptions that you you're personally have made or the or the kind of track you've been on. And you've made the assumption about, let's say something small, like the reading list, you know, or something, I mean, anything really like really kind of reflected in and of yourself enough to make the real change because in a sense, of course, it will start with one's own self and your own prejudices that you're not we haven't really kind of tackled in a way or your the assumptions that you've made that of that. Have a goodness of what you do, that's a bit kind of grande or the passion that you have for what you do. And actually, maybe you need to step aside and go. I don't know, is that the best way? I don't know if that's anyway. So that was just a thought I had

Shantel Ehrenberg 40:18

I think several people who are more versed in race theory, but I've also heard her Royona Mitra say, you know, we are the institution at the same time, you know, but there's definitely these levels that are real, they are real in which, you know, I work in a university in which the levels are very, so University Executive has control in initiatives that the school maybe doesn't always want. And there's battles and tensions between that. And then there's within conservatories, and people who are more maybe, on their own have other sort of structures to deal with. So how that is, that we take on that responsibility of being the institution as well. Is what I want to throw in there. And some of you might already know, I'm sorry, I'm not doing very good at multitasking, with the anti-racism at work collect. Anyway, I'll try and find a link and put it in the chat if you don't know about it, or shoot me an email. And I am happy to share it because it has a lot of resources. In terms of some of the things we're talking about as well.

Breakout Group 4

I can add to that Shantel, because both Catherine and I went to a recent workshop with the anti-racism at work collective who were talking about creating an anti-racism strategy. So this was kind of departmental level, it wasn't about waiting for anything to be imposed. It was about what are you doing with your colleagues? How can you support colleagues from the global majority? So they were talking about things like setting up reading groups, and creating different ways of having these discussions, having facilitated listening sessions, things like that, that and Catherine, please do chime in as well here. And Catherine and I have been talking about what we might do for within our work situation, as well. And I think that's really useful, because I, I can see, and yeah, I totally get that we are the institution. In fact, we had a wonderful operations manager that used to say that to us all the time, as a call to action that, you know, you don't have to wait for something that we can do that as an individual or as a collective of individuals. Yeah, just wanted to say thank you for, for reminding us about Royona's statement, because I remember, I remember her, I remember reading that sentence. And it was really helpful for me as somebody who doesn't belong to an I'm not in one institution. I'm a freelance person who moves between and through lots of different situations, which may be in relation to or usually are in relation to an institution. And yeah, that statement about kind of personal actions, but also sometimes quite joyously, actually being able to be a bit of a spider, between different places, and different groups of people in different groups of students. And different groups of dancers, for example, it's been really useful to kind of like, call myself out, when, when my own white fragility gets in the way of like, a much more kind of like, daily action plan, which I can carry in my rucksack, if you like. It doesn't. And I'm not, I'm actually I feel very liberated in not having to speak up the same hierarchy, you know, the same hierarchy every day for the last five years. And I know that's different, but there's some there's something in being in a group of people where some people are going to be modelling that I am the institution, as freelancers and as people who work as academics inside institutions that I don't know, that makes me feel like I can hold hands with people in institutions a bit more easily.

Unknown Speaker: 44:52

I was thinking sorry. I was just thinking about this. Someone mentioned before about the status quo and we are this idea of you know, we are the institution. And it made me think of, you know, individually. And this is not fully formed yet. But individually, can we sort of undermine the status quo somehow and be kind of cheeky and sneaky and sort of, you know, propose something, perhaps in a certain way, or respond to something in a certain way whereby it's clear that that is what we're trying to do. Or maybe it's not clear, but actually, it makes a certain point. Because often, I know that I personally, I go into meetings, and I just think I am here to offer and to have an input. But actually, I'm not really interested in what it is that's being spoken about here. I'd like to speak about X, Y, and Z. And so how do I manage to get any of my thoughts, feelings, ideas about that, you know, in a way, whereby those the agendas in those meetings, you know, sort of don't offer.

So maybe it's just a kind of politicians thing, whereby you sort of talk about the thing that you want to even if it's nothing to do with the topic that is being put on the table? I don't know. Anyway, just a thought.

Breakout Group 4

I agree entirely. Yeah, a kind of flashmob of you're asking the wrong question. Yeah.

Unknown Speaker: 46:28

Maybe one of the things that Carla mentioned in our group, which has stuck with me is about time, and the need for time. And it's always hard, I think, finding that balance between going to action, and what action you're going to take, and taking enough time to hear what will best support that action. So you can jump into it and make a change that maybe is not really founded on listening. So going back to this, do you hear me? That takes time. And it's trying to find that balance and how you make that time? And not just kind of jump? And one of the things that has worked really well, I think at Royal Holloway has been there kind of open groups that are for staff and students. And that is what is different about it's not about staff, it's staff and students. And it's on there's particular questions, little bit like today with the kind of provocation, but it would be a reading. And it's around the kind of issues we're talking about today and wider in terms of equality and diversity. But for me, what was quite challenging, but also really good was to have that mixture of staff and students and hear the different voices. I think that's maybe saying that might be useful.

Sharon Watson

I would just flag something around time. And I think it's the positives and the negatives, if we ask a student around the timeframe of action, they probably say it's very slow. And time can sometimes be seen as a stalling tactic. In that we need more time, we need more time to write this, we need more time for policies, we need more time for discussion, we need more time. And we've had a lot of time to do a lot of things. And I guess in a way, we just need to measure the spectrum in which we measure time and action. Because, you know, EDI training can be done tomorrow. And that is a is a knee jerk for the right reasons. And for us, which will enable us to jump. And I think that's right, some of our students will not be here with us for very long, but they do need the training. So we can't wait for that we have to make sure that we measure that in a way that is productive and useful. And there was something else I caught earlier, which was around the we are the institution and can we can we brake rank. I've got a feeling, you know, my activism, my creative activism will say, yes, we have to, those tables are not going to change. And there are no more chairs at the table. So we have to build a new table. And we have to put on their new food and new energies and new people. So there is something that runs parallel because the institute's are built to do what they do. And unfortunately, unless we are powered by our conviction, those changes are going to be long in the tooth and probably long after you and I have moved on from the current positions we're in in order to impact change. So there's something about demonstrating how we can bring another table to the room. It might not be on the same path on the same level but we definitely have to consider how we action and we become creative activists and put that creative bomb in the room by presented another table

Breakout Group 4

I totally agree. And because the time aspects of things because, and I mentioned this in the smaller group, I just would like to just reiterate that, you know, the last sort of 18 months, I've been much more active in our union. And I've been, I'm an executive member of our union. And, we've had lots to deal with, and there's bigger, you know, macro problems that we've dealt with. And but there's also very, lots of small bonds. And I think those small voices of individual staff, that I've come across problems within this equality, diversity, inclusion, areas of problems that we've been able to support that, and I think that it, I was fed up of walking out of the building, and not being able to help. And I felt that, you know, they don't have to be huge, but I think, quick and short resistance very, very quickly that this has come out, and the union say, well, we're not happy with that you need to now discuss that with us. You can't make decisions without us. We've now had that recognised so that we have a bigger voice. And I don't suggest that everyone, then now, you know, becomes a union member? And of course I do. But is that is that, you know, within, you know, a staff body, that you can kind of push and go, well, that doesn't work for all of us, you know, you have to communicate with us, the communication and how you feel about things can be pushed back very quickly. And we've had decisions with bad things turned quickly. Because we've said no. And actually, it's been liberated. Now, this huge list of things we haven't. But I mean, you know, just changing the chair of our EDI committee, who basically was the the CEO. For years, the chair of our equality and diversity and inclusion was the CEO who was white and who was running the building. So if you had a problem with the way that was happening,

you couldn't voice your opinion. You know, there was things that were in place that needed shifted, and it didn't even have to be a personal thing. It just had to be chairs have to change. So, you know, it doesn't have to be sort of confrontational either. I think that small increments very quickly can I think can change.

Unknown Speaker:

Now, I think my point about time was more about intention. And the idea of what in regards to the intention behind how quickly things are changing and trusting that intention. And I know and I really agree with what Sharon saying, in terms of there needs to be action. It's, sometimes the snowball effect that then all of a sudden, what is at the core of the change starts to morph into something different. And I think that's for me is something that's problematic, and something that needs to be watched out. Like, we need to keep an eye on that. And at times, I think and I'm going to speak quite candidly that there's a lot of jumping on the bandwagon to further careers, because there's a lot of money in racialised research right now. So it's the intention is the trust for me in regards to how things are changing and how quickly they are. Because there's certain aspects of it. I don't trust.

Shantel Ehrenberg

Thanks, Carla. I had made a note to it. I think this relates my feeling, it's not about the activism, it's not about me. It's not about performing anti-racism and me getting accolades. And I really have to try and catch myself out about that. But it also really frustrates me when I see institutions doing that.

Unknown Speaker:

Sorry Shantel to cut you off, but there's been spaces that I've been in where I've seen people getting accolades, and I'm coming to a point and there is a bit of thinking that I'm trying to, to come to terms with and whether or not I'm just reacting because there's a frustration in me that I haven't fully understood in myself properly. But I'm seeing people getting accolades for work on EDI, when and especially in terms of race matters, where my white colleagues are getting even monetary accolade and I'm like but where's the reparations for us? Where's where's monetary support for us who the people that are dealing with it constantly, but when the forefront of the people that are working on the equality, diversity and inclusion is usually white, and for me, in my case, white women and some white males, and it's like, but they're getting the accolades, but what about the space to actually, and it's not about, you know, sympathy. And it's not about just, you know, it's just acknowledgement that, you know, for me, when, when I was in, in a space where these colleagues were getting accolades, it felt like a slap in the face. And, there's no space to actively and openly talk about that, unless I go to a place of real frustration, and speak out, and then I'm the problem.

Sharon Watson

If nobody else can respond to that, I have to respond to that. I really do. And thank you, because that is, that's one of the spaces where the question of how do you actually step out of the way, because there are those that are qualified to be doing that, but the recognition of that Carla you've hit the nail right on the head, and I think it's the frustration that happens, the whole thing around language comes into play there. Because for you to kind of express your frustration, you that become the aggressive woman, you become the kind of all of these stereotypes that sit within you, and therefore the recognition becomes menial. So there are other bigger challenges around that. And this is where the allyship is important, because actually the honesty of those people that are seeing that in operation, and I think we talked about that kind of calling it out in one of the groups, I can't remember which of the groups it was, but calling it out is significant, it's really significant, because actually, as a black person to call it out, you are then absolutely layering the problem around the identities of people that are experiencing this challenge. And it is the ally ship that's got to help to change the narrative. That can be quite a contentious subject, because I can imagine, again, but as I said, with respect to kind of these moments and conversations that we need to give them space, these subjects need the time to be discussed. And I think I said it in the group that Chris, we were in. One thing I didn't say, which I very often say is that we're not going to get it right all the time, we are not going to be right all the time. And the realities of saying to someone you know, you can apologise. But you kind of need to step into that space, that uncomfortable space where we're having these conversations, and where we have to be candid around the honesty and the intent is got to happen. Otherwise, we're not going to make progress. People are going to constantly feel uncomfortable about talking about, you know, I say talking about blackness talking about, I need to understand your whiteness in order for me to be able to question and challenge and make change and inform. But if we can't have those honest conversations, we are going to carry on going round in circles. And no matter of

policy is going to change the status quo. So that space, if you're willing to step into it, be prepared for getting it wrong. But you also need to hold your hands up as well. And knowing that that's going to happen.

Unknown Speaker

Just one point that I mentioned in our group, and what Sharon's touching upon in about these discussions and being in the understanding whiteness. For me, I've been in certain spaces where I've had to say, can we speak please speak from the 'I', the 'we', and the 'me', because I think there's a deflection in talking about the system, and being able to change that system. But I also talk about that, because I do I want those changes need to happen. But to one for me to be able to understand what's within my immediate realm of change. It's definitely within my circle, my like immediate circle. So and I find within certain spaces, it's easy to deflect to talk about they, rather than I, me, and we and talking from that personal voice and asking those difficult questions. And I can see it quite easily when someone's in that space of talking from a theoretical point. And it's like, no, no, no, come please come to yourself. What does it mean from yourself? What is it and and if it doesn't, if it's not connecting, then just be really, like honest about that. And I know it's a big ask, but it's I think for me in those spaces, once that's happened, and once that's been a barrier that's been taken down, then those conversations become a lot more fruitful.

Shantel Ehrenberg

Yeah, I'm unfortunately I'm the person of time and it feels like we're just getting into the heart of it. But I think we also all know that this is long term. This is a, this is beyond our generation kind of work. But I do want to just echo that. These last comments, it's also what Sara Ahmed writes about in terms of diversity work, particularly in the institution, you know, that some black or global majority can be hitting their head against the wall with diversity, and yet they're the one liable for the damages, if there's any damage to the wall. It's really not right, and the importance of these various contexts in which speaking needs to happen where we would need to recognise particularly, you know, us the issue of whiteness, and contemporary and dance and other dance forms within Higher Education, which is what's the principal, the context because together, we are committed to that changing and we don't want to keep having conversations, we want action as well. We want to understand and do different and there's more I could say, but I will leave it at that. In terms of thank you again, Sharon, so much for guest speaker today on behalf of myself and the centre of performance philosophy. Thank you, Carla Trim-Vamben and Matthew Gough for their other contributions in the other sessions and for everyone's attendance and energies and commitments.

Sharon Watson 1:01:52

Thank you very much, everyone, and looking forward to the next round of conversation.

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

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