

Panel U2 Beaumaris 1 Friday 7 December 11.15-12.30

Inclusivity in Academia: Research; Teaching; Work; Accessibility (0386)

Chair: Jennifer Leigh, *University of Kent, United Kingdom*

Panellists: J Leigh, *University of Kent*, **Phaedra Petsilas** *Rambert School of Ballet*, **Holly Smith**, **Nicole Brown**, *University College London, United Kingdom*

Inclusive initiatives and movements for change tend to happen in isolation. Yet, as academics, professional and administrative staff, teaching fellows, graduate teachers and students, we do not fall into neat categories. We teach, research, and work. We may have two different employment contracts, or be employed and a student at the same time. Any discourse around inclusive practice in academia needs to take this into account. We propose a discussion on inclusivity that does not separate staff and students, teaching from research, and instead considers us as all sitting in the same precarious boat of academia, looking at making it more inclusive for everyone.

Questions for discussion include:

- What does inclusivity mean to you?
- What does this look like in practice?
- What needs to happen in order to make inclusive practice the norm?

We will hear four presenters (Jennifer Leigh, Phaedra Petsilas, Holly Smith and Nicole Brown) exploring inclusive practice from their perspectives. These provide a foundation of how inclusive practice is interpreted and applied within the contexts of research, teaching, work, and accessibility. We will then open discussion to provide an opportunity for debate on different ways of being inclusive in academia. As an outcome of the discussion we hope to demonstrate the wide applicability of inclusivity, and a renewed sense of motivation to make changes in our immediate environments, which may expand to changes within and across the sector.

Research

There are many ways an attitude of creativity and playfulness can positively impact on HE research (Brown & Leigh, 2018a). Being creative in research means engaging with research tools from a range of disciplines, and playfully connecting what may not be linked. Creative and playful methods allow for modes of communication that incorporate and use but do not solely rely on words. Certain experiences are difficult to express in words. Using creative and playful approaches asks participants to draw on multimodal forms of communication (Jewitt et al., 2016).

Creative and playful research enables participants to reflect deeply on their experiences. The element of fun allows them to go deeper into their own experience, and process and share more and richer elements (Statler et al., 2011). This is particularly useful with those who struggle to have their voices heard, due to issues of power, capacity or privilege. This makes them inclusive research approaches. The stories we choose to tell about ourselves on the surface are different to those that directly tap into our emotional and sensory experiences.

In turn, the data generated by these creative approaches may affect the audience (Wilson, 2018) and the researchers in ways that words or text alone may not.

Teaching

Within the context of elite dance training, most learning experiences are embodied and processes or products are ephemeral. The nature of the training attracts students who are primarily kinaesthetic in their approach to learning. A high proportion of these conservatoire students have specific learning difficulties. The journey between their embodied understanding/practice and the articulating of that practice can be a long one. As opposed to traditional university courses in which verbal and written skills are presumed to be more explicit in students, conservatoire dancers in training may find language harder to access.

The gap between movement and language is potentially vast, and part of an inclusive pedagogic process would be to bridge the gap between the two through multi-modal approaches such as creativity, and visual and embodied pedagogies. These kind of approaches would encompass the notion of inclusivity with relation to foreign speakers and students with specific learning needs in any discipline or setting. The journey to articulating practice and reflecting on practice can be innovated which in turn facilitates verbal and cognitive skills and as such is inclusive to everyone.

Work

Recent discourses in the media have highlighted precarious conditions within academia. Staff went on strike to improve their working environment (The Guardian, 2018). A group of particular interest are doctoral students employed to teach, often referred to as Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs). Surveys by the NUS (2012) and THE (2014) have found extensive variation in the recruitment practices, contractual status, training and development, responsibilities, workload models and pay rates for PGTAs.

A fundamental problem is the disparity between the numbers of doctoral students and academic positions which become available. For example in the UK there are currently 100085 doctoral students:206870 total academic staff (HESA 2016/2017). The biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES, 2017) continues to show that half of these students are seeking a career in HE. These students find themselves facing huge competition for permanent posts, where experience of teaching, learning and assessment is expected in addition to a PhD and publications. This has led to a 'buyer's market' where university employers can exploit staff.

A minority are now employed on traditional Teaching and Research contracts, with increasing use of hourly paid or temporary staff. Part-time, temporary and hourly paid staff are consistently shown to be lower paid, more likely to be female and from ethnic minorities than staff on traditional contracts.

Accessibility

Viewed superficially, Higher Education as a sector appears to be welcoming and embracing of diversity and inclusivity. However, chronically ill, neurodiverse or disabled academics are not commonly seen within academia (Brown & Leigh, 2018b). The environment is not

particularly welcoming or conducive to declaring one's health conditions or indeed any wider concerns. Following the suicide of a successful university professor, there are increasing concerns about the mental health of academics (Inside Higher Ed, 2017). Academics are succumbing under the pressures of work (BBC News, 2018).

Those working in academia can make a personal choice on whether or not they would like to publicly declare their conditions. In reality, many members of staff struggle with their working lives as well as with the ableist attitude and specific expectations they encounter. The performative requirements of producing measurable outputs for RAE/REF have had the consequence of intensifying academic labour. This contribution draws on indicative findings from the Ableism in Academia conference that was held on the 23rd March at UCL IOE.

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