

SEDA Autumn Conference 2024



Session Title: Implementing and evaluating an Inclusive Curriculum Framework to enhance racial representation in performing arts programmes.

Session Type: Research Papers (20 minutes)

Main presenter(s): Dr Janet Ramdeo, University of Surrey

Co presenter(s): N/A

Session Summary: Ethnic and racial representation in the performing arts remains an issue. This session discusses a SEDA funded project that saw the successful implementation of the university's Inclusive Curriculum Framework, specifically to enhance ethnic and racial representation in performing arts programmes. Centralising racially minoritised students' voices for change, the framework statements were used to identify gaps in provision. The project resulted in an action plan embedded in School of Arts strategy for authentic and sustainable change.

Session Outline: How do we tackle the lack of diversity and representation in university performing arts programmes? Ethnic and racial underrepresentation remains an issue in disciplines like music, drama and dance, not helped by Eurocentric curricula, lack of diversity of discipline staff and continued uneven attainment and retention (Sharma et al., 2019), with implications for attracting diverse groups into an industry which does not fully represent them (Daly, 2022). This was raised by students at the university's School of Acting.

Can the university's Inclusive Curriculum Framework address the lack of ethnic and racial representation? The Framework, created and piloted in 2022/23, became the required tool to identify necessary changes to curriculum design, delivery and assessment in the School of Acting. With the support of a SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grant (2023), this project looked to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the Inclusive Curriculum Framework, in part designed to enhance racial and ethnic representation across curricula.

Is racially minoritised students' voices the key driver to change? Adopting the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet of centralising the voices of people of colour, narrative inquiry was utilised to interview fifteen racially minoritised final year undergraduate and postgraduate racially minoritised students to understand ethnic and racial curricula omissions through their training experiences. Findings illuminated learning experiences that lacked racial authenticity, perceived disadvantage in casting decisions and experiences of stereotyping and essentialising. Findings also highlighted the different challenges faced by home students and international students.

How can authentic ethnic and racial representation be enhanced? Implementing the framework enabled the School of Acting's staff to identify meaningful actions towards delivering inclusive



and anti-racist pedagogies, practices and programmes. Actions include specific modifications to curriculum design to ensure diverse acting and performance teaching practices for authentic learning experiences, which are now embedded in the school's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

References: Daly, D. (2022). Actions speak louder than words. An investigation around the promises and the reality of representation in actor training. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2022.2078873>

Sharma, S., Catalano, E., Seetzen, H., Julia Minors, H., & Collins-Mayo, S. (2019). Taking Race Live: Exploring experiences of race through interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education. *London Review of Education*, 17(2).