**Netherlands
Film Academy
GEECT Twin
Conference
2019**

amsterdam
köln

EMBRACING
DIVERSITY IN
EUROPEAN
FILM SCHOOLS

6102
Conference
GEECT Twin
filmschule köln
ifs internationale

Dear reader,
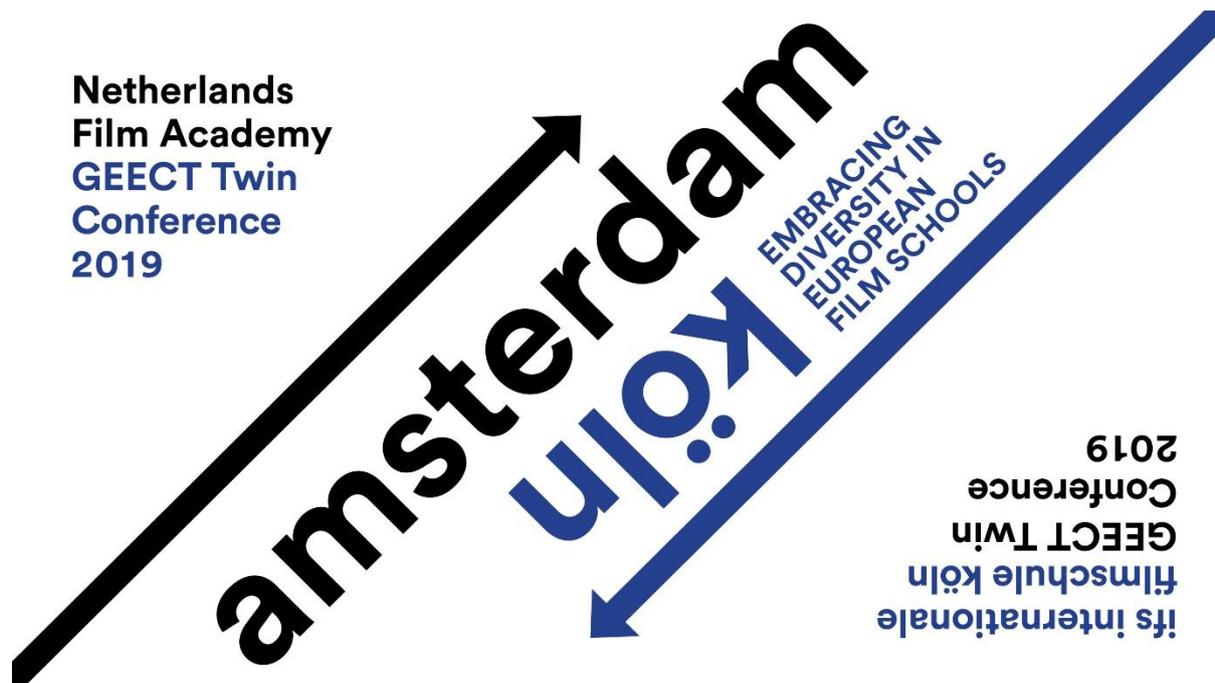
The Netherlands Film Academy (NFA) and the internationale filmschule Köln (ifs) are working together to make the twin conference ' Embracing Diversity in European Film School' a great success. The first part in Amsterdam, from January the 23rd till the 25th 2019 couldn't worked out better than it did, thanks to all the effort, energy and openness of all the participants, moderators and students joining us in Amsterdam.

To ensure the continuity and connection between both conferences, we've asked Elonka Soros (keynote speaker during the conference and Diversity and Inclusion Consultant) to make a conceptual reflection of both days in Amsterdam. Together with the visuals of graphic recording artist Christiane Büchner we hope this document provides you a clear and significant insight of what happened during the first part of the conference.

If you are planning to come to the second part in Cologne from 6 to 8 March, we are looking forward to continue this lively process with you. If not, we hope these insights can contribute to an including way of thinking.

'Everyone's story needs to be told'

The Netherlands Film Academy

Bart Römer
Nicolette Jongkind
Mieke Bernink

It was my pleasure to share with you in the experience of the GEECT conference *Embracing Diversity in European Film Schools* [Netherlands] and to speak to you about some of the industry considerations on this theme. These thoughts and reflections are distilled from my observations, conversations and notes taken during the event.

This Netherlands event was not the first leg of a cosy conference about doing good deeds towards under-represented 'others'; rather it is was a conference that started a process of challenging and questioning the will and the ability of European film schools to survive (and ultimately thrive) as teaching institutions in a modern Europe and a globalised film industry.

The conference through two keynotes, four workshops and six case studies took delegates on an intellectual, physical and emotional journey that embodied the complexity and diversity of perspectives on this matter.

Each element offered a new insight or sensation that challenged previous thinking, feeling or assumption on the topic of diversity and inclusion and culminated in a reminder that we* must not take it for granted that the perspective from which we approach these issues is either correct or the only one possible. Awareness of the potential for our own perspective to be influenced by biased assumption, which may lead us to take unfair decisions or judgements is just the start of a process of action to create a level playing field for all talent.

The format of the GEECT conference also served to remind participants that one size does not fit all and that there is no quick fix or easy answer. When we think we have worked out how to put the diversity and inclusion blocks in their places; something (institutional, social, political) or someone (student, colleague, stakeholder) comes along and shakes up our ideas and we have to think again.

Demographic change, shifting tastes and attitudes, technological innovation, industry demands, the world in which European Film Schools operate is always changing. Each member of staff and faculty will need to acknowledge that inclusion will always have to be worked at– individually and institutionally. If we wait until we think we have found the perfect systems, the perfect words, the perfect actions, the time will never come and then it will be too late.

Elonka Soros.

*we = individual self

SUMMARY & REFLECTION: The Keynote Speeches

The opening keynote [Elonka Soros – a business functional approach] Diversify or Die asked the collected delegates to consider the people and perspectives included in, or excluded from, European Films Schools in terms of the student body, the teaching staff and the curriculum. It outlined how personal and collective biases (conscious and unconscious), preferences and cultural norms may unintentionally be locking out talent from under-represented groups and acting as a barrier to progression within film schools and thus the wider industry. It pointed to stereotype and _micro-behaviours_[1], using the example of gender, visible ethnic minority & disabled people's representation/imagery in film school websites and prospectus, to illustrate how intentions to be inclusive can be undermined by actions.

Acknowledging and keeping in mind that we live and work in systems with which our creative outputs will inevitably interact, the keynote challenged delegates to reflect back to their own institutions, departments, courses and exchanges with students (prospective, current & alumni) to determine how fit for purpose, today and into the future, the current models and modes of operation are. It confronted delegates with examples of industry beginning to bypass traditional education routes in order to self-supply with talent from groups under-represented in the university pipelines and suggested that urgent action is necessary for European film schools to maintain their respected position, to remain relevant and sustainable as seats of learning, creative centres and functioning businesses.
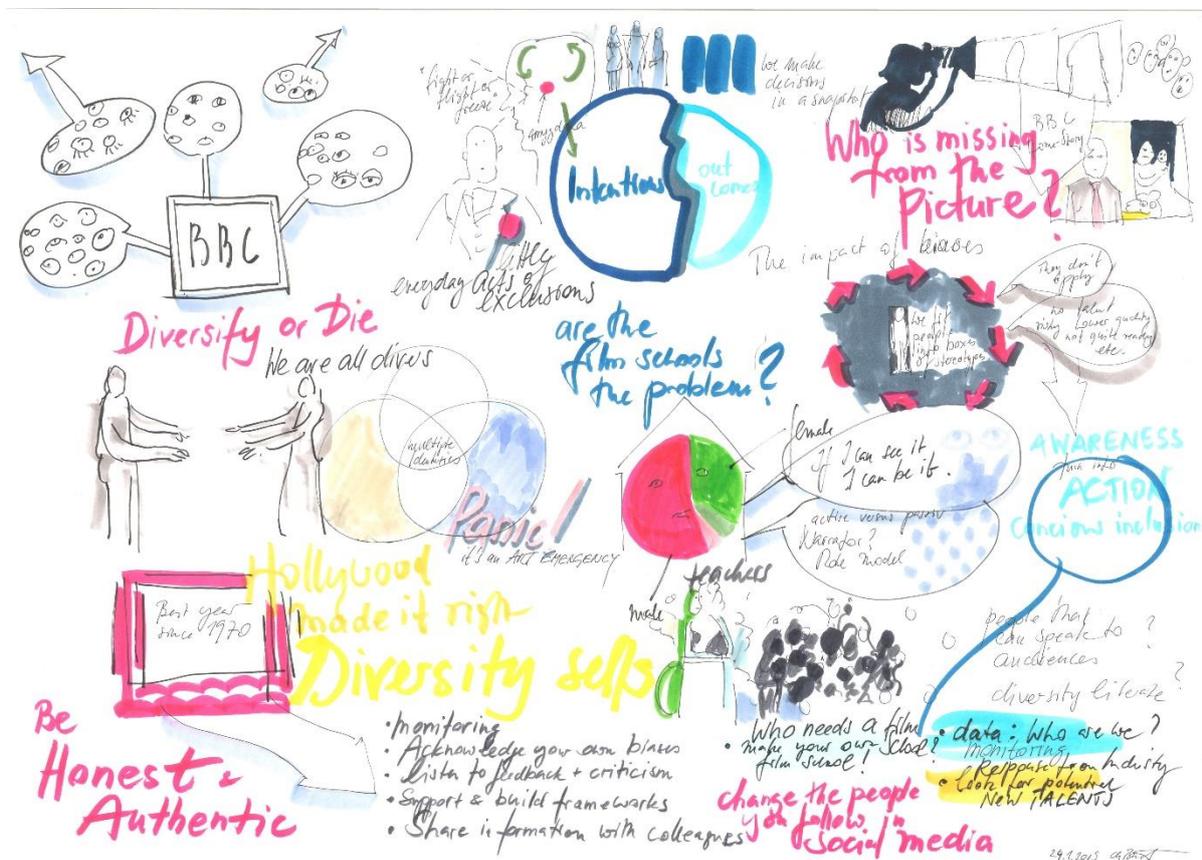
The closing keynote [Orwa Nyrabia - a creative artistic approach] also highlighted the urgency of moving from a discussion about *'Embracing Diversity'* in film schools to having a plan, enacted, which provides the space for creative talent from all backgrounds to thrive in an educational setting. This keynote asked us to confront societal, institutional and personal *bias blind spots₂* that will affect the success or otherwise of the stated intention to embrace diversity. Personal anecdote depicting micro-behaviours that people from minority ethnic backgrounds experience in daily life and in the world of film served to further explore the, sometimes unintended, ways that prejudice or bias presents blockers to talent and stifles creativity [taxi driver anecdote]. The notion of stereotype on screen - in portrayal in the creative works - and off screen in the expectations of ability or knowledge in the student body where people are different from the majority was also presented for individuals to reflect on how their personal behaviours, thinking and actions might be limiting progress and talent [camel tourism anecdote]. European film schools cannot expect to survive in the globalised creative space by teaching a narrow and possibly outdated canon. A mutually respectful exchange of thinking, and an ability to appreciate other perspectives are necessary for success.

Similarly presented for reflection was the position of approaching the idea of embracing diversity as 'doing good' rather than as intrinsic to our shared humanity and the impact of the 'saviour' framing on film school workplace behaviours and relationships with fellow teachers and students. In this context the words used to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion were also presented to be challenged. Pluralism and the concept of coexistence rather than inclusion aligned to integration was proposed as a way of thinking when making decisions for future action. Underpinning this keynote appears to be the concept 'nothing about us, without us'.

REFLECTION ON KEYNOTES: There are several shared themes which may provide useful background thinking for conference part 2 as the discussion moves on towards action.

1. **Urgency** – the challenges of relevancy and sustainability facing European Film Schools in globalised creative industries. The move from talk to action. *How might you communicate an action focused proposition that any institution in the sector can pick up and run with following the conference?*
2. **Personal impact** – acknowledging and understanding the individual role in pursuing an inclusive creative culture in institutions and acting to correct personal bias or assumption. *Is there a simple mechanism by which you can hold each other to account for promises and talk made during the conference to encourage and stimulate personal action?*
3. **Collective action** – identifying systemic barriers to inclusion and acting to mitigate / correct these as institutions and a collective (European Film Schools). *Can you leave each other with four or five agreed broad actions that can be implemented anywhere?*
4. **The clarity of the offer** – what does the European film school offer that cannot be acquired through other means in a digital and globally connected world*? How might diversity and inclusion be evidenced & articulated as contributing to the added value of an education at a dedicated institution of Higher Education?*
5. **Talent** – it is there in the real world from all backgrounds and is ready to be admitted to schools and courses. *There is enough evidence, reports & case studies; best practice exists within GEECT- some was shared during the conference. Why not, just do it?*

Referenced terms.

[1] Micro-behaviours: Inequities and Affirmations
https://ombud.mit.edu/sites/default/files/documents/micro-affirm-ineq.pdf Mary Rowe MIT

[2] Bias Blindspot: "ingrained habits of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason, and make decisions." http://blindspot.fas.harvard.edu/FAQ Banajee & Greenwald Harvard University

SUMMARY & REFLECTION: Workshops.

I attended two workshops Representation and Language and Body Language. Links to summaries of the all workshops have been provided by the people leading the sessions and I will not go into detail on that here. Instead I have extracted a key quote from the sum-up presentation of each of the facilitators that captures the fundamental elements of the workshop and will share my brief notes on this alongside some possible reflections/questions to be considered through into the next part of this GEECT conference on Embracing Diversity.

REPRESENTATION:

"Learning to be uncomfortable and dealing with each other's pain is important if we are going to make a difference." Zoë Papaikonomou

Discussions on representation, othering, stereotype, offensive language, cultural appropriation etc. are bound to be uncomfortable. They have at their root, pain, upset, anger, embarrassment. However, understanding different perspectives and interpretations and being conscious of the impact of one's work is becoming a core skill for anyone working in the modern industry. Offence whether intended (often discussed in the context of free speech, artistic freedom, creative expression) or unintended (stereotype leading to inauthentic portrayals) can be costly for production houses. Value is increasingly being placed on a culturally intelligent and diversity literate workforce that is skilled and able to discern between creative, justifiably challenging content and unnecessarily offensive material.

Reflections for participants/questions to consider?

a) How open is your institution to the practice of acknowledging the feelings and experiences of those from minority groups when a perspective contrary to the mainstream (and/or a teacher's personal viewpoint) is put forward in a film school setting?
b) How equipped are teaching staff to manage and control their own emotions and those of their class so that mutually respectful cultural exchange can take place during 'uncomfortable' discussions?
c) How are students from minority backgrounds/groups under-represented in your institution supported and encouraged to share their perspectives? Is yours a safe space?

d) What place has been made to teach, research, and explore these issues in the curriculum?

e) What actions do European Film Schools need to take to ensure a culturally intelligent and diversity literate staff, student body and curriculum?

f) Do you have the right staff with the rights skills for 2019 and beyond? What was best for yesterday is not necessarily the best for today or tomorrow. Notion of co-teaching/dual teaching.
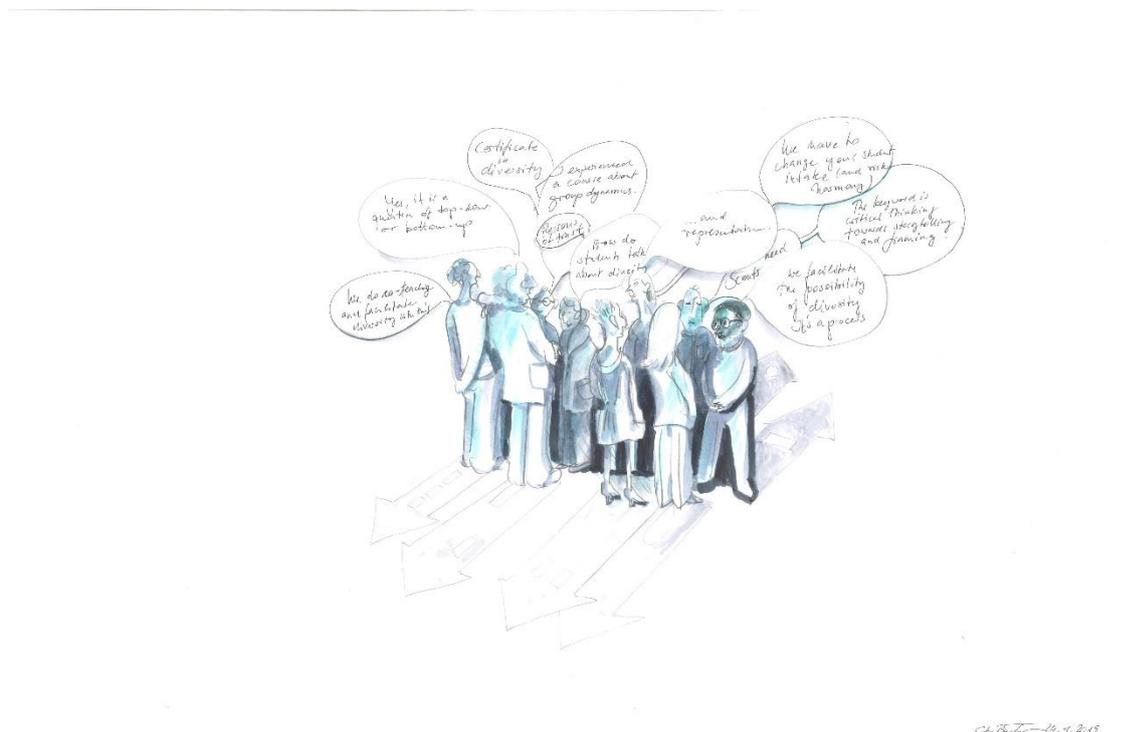
LANGUAGE AND BODY LANGUAGE:

"How we treat each other when we work with each other is inclusion." Maartje Nevejan

Being aware of personal impact (the ways in which we interact with students, colleagues and other stakeholders) whether it be in verbal communications, informal and ad-hoc meetings, classroom and examination situations, screenings and events. Checking individual and institutional micro-behaviours (inequities and affirmations). Considering, how personal impact ripples out and becomes a culture.

Creating safe spaces for people to tell their own stories is critical to innovation and creativity. Building trust through awareness of the potential barriers for those who are different to be able to feel safe in spaces that those from majority backgrounds might take for granted. Understanding that difference goes beyond physical appearance and working to create a respectful 'listening' and inclusive culture where everyone feels able to bring their whole self to the shared creative learning

and crafting process. Remembering that one-size does not fit all, and that creating a level playing field will involve making adjustments for some.

Being able to collaborate in diverse and inclusive teams is becoming a core skill in the modern film industry.

a) How safe is your space? When difference is expressed how is that valued?
b) How good is your institution at listening to and acting on feedback, especially when that feedback appears to be a criticism of the status quo?
c) How is inclusion role modelled by teaching staff? Language used? Treatment of individuals and groups? Micro-behaviours.
d) What considerations and adjustments have been made to ensure that all students, staff and visitors to your institution feel welcome, safe and valued? How are these communicated to everyone?
e) How are personal and professional skills such as cross-cultural collaboration, diversity and inclusion taught and built into the curriculum?
f) The concept of 'privilege' and an awareness that personal social characteristics rather than merit may provide advantages in terms of creative freedom and creative safety for those in majority groups while disadvantaging and creating barriers for those in the minority. How do you weight and account for 'privilege versus talent' in your assessments?

CANON EXPOSED:

"Diversity is, in essence, more a state of mind rather than bodies in a room." Mieke Bernink

The challenge highlighted here is the process of acknowledging and understanding how personal tastes and learned preferences, often formed in early life, (and indeed in another century for many teachers at European film schools), can impact the choice of works studied, methods of appraisal and perspectives taught. The decisions made at these fundamental stages can be barriers to a film school education for talent from minorities and other underrepresented groups. It is therefore vital that this thinking is not just the practice of the few in a film school setting but becomes part of the fabric of an inclusive culture.

How then to take the understanding through into a critical review of current systems and practices with regards to selection of content, film makers, formats, guest speakers, staff members etc. Sharing the thinking and need for inclusion with colleagues, before taking action to ensure relevancy and attractiveness of a film school education for students preparing to work in a globalised modern film industry?

Reflections for participants/questions to consider?

a) How might a critical review of the systems and processes related to the canon in your institution be conducted?
b) Who do we trust when it comes to the notion of what is best?

c) What role might students/colleagues from different disciplines/audiences/ play in redefining what we mean by 'best' when it comes to the canon?

d) How do we build this thinking into the fabric of institutions, and hold those who are unwilling or unable to perform to account?

e) How do we make the benefits of an inclusive canon tangible and consequences of the status quo real?

f) What might be the impact if we embed personal objectives, Key Perfomance Indicators (KPI) and targets around diversity and inclusion into our systems and processes in this sphere?
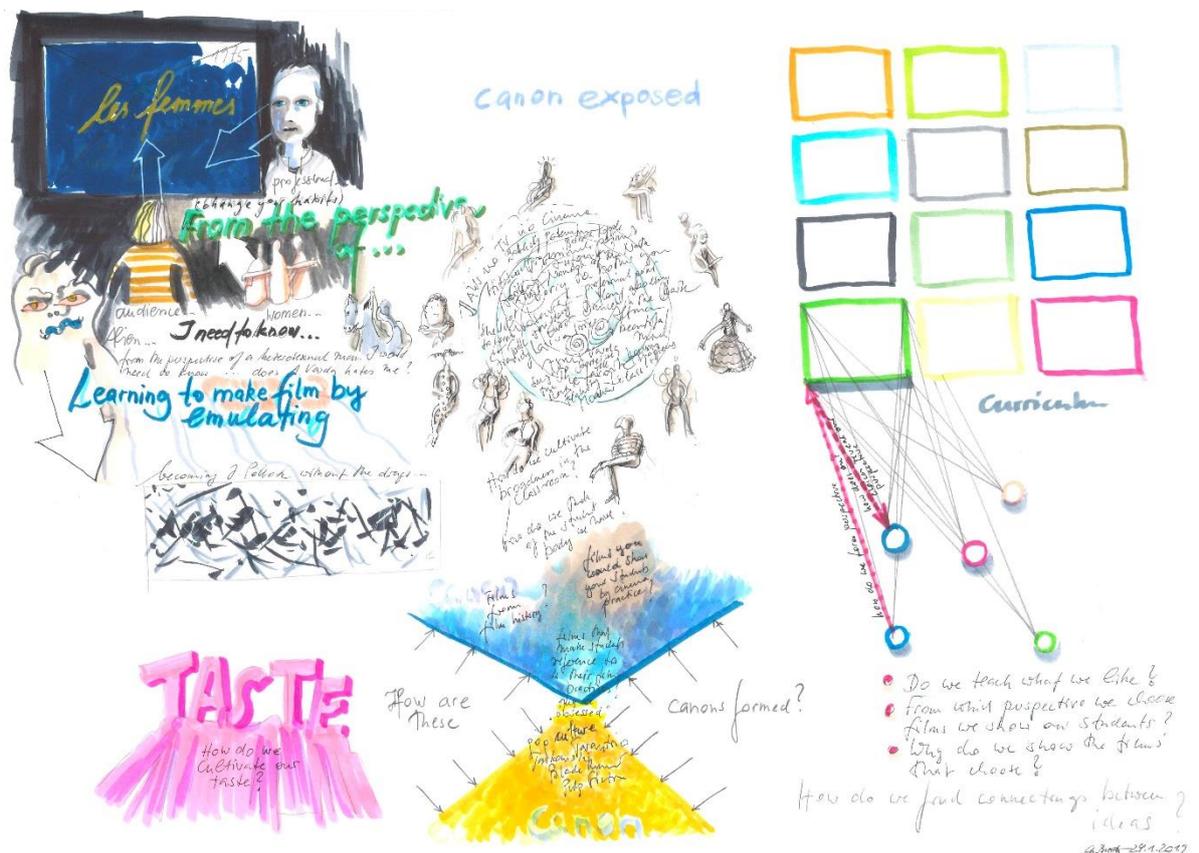
POWER & POLITICS: Paul Tyler presented in Lego … **"an ecosystem that captures all the different ways, or stakeholders that all in some way, have an impact on the way in which students are filtered"**

Viewing the European film school in all its purposes, functions, people and outputs from the perspective of internal and external stakeholders. By putting oneself in the shoes of others it is sometimes easier to understand their motivations, aspirations and concerns. It is also a useful exercise in which to test 'in group' biases and assumption; to help each other slow down thinking and move to from the emotional to conscious evidence-based decision making. Systems and processes are built and operated by people. Inclusion or exclusion within systems and processes is perpetuated by the people within them and change starts with these people too. There is no quick or magic fix. What goes on inside an institution (the culture) always has an impact on the success or otherwise of partnerships, collaborations and outputs. The creative, the artistic, great craft skills cannot exist in a vacuum, they need outlets and willingly engaged audiences.

Critically assessing who and what is there now provides a sound foundation upon which to build plans for the European film school in the next 5, 10 or 20 years?

Reflections for participants/questions to consider?

  a) What are your **values** and how is respect and inclusion embedded and embodied within them?
  b) How do European Films Schools engender an inclusive collaborative culture where 'us' and 'them' becomes 'WE'? "The suits" and the creatives, "the money" and the creatives, "the establishment" and the creatives, "society" and the creatives etc. What barriers to inclusion might 'in group' assumption be creating? How might each group encourage and support the other to call us out on our bias blind-spots for mutual institutional benefit?
  c) Each individual has autonomy and power. How is inclusive and respectful behaviour role modelled by leaders and teachers in your institution?
  d) What are the individual acts that have had big impact towards inclusion that could be rolled out to wider teams, departments, institutions and industry? Where can film schools lead on best practice to demonstrate added value to students and the wider sector?
  e) Where is the AUDIENCE in day to day discourse? Audience is a different concept to society. The audience is engaged and participating with or without you. How might understanding diverse audiences support the development of inclusive film schools that thrive (rather than just survive) into the next 5 plus years? Thus, tipping the balance of power in the film schools' favour as opposed to other options for learning and industry talent search.

END WORDS FROM STUDENTS that participated: and a few from Orwa Nyrabia

I loved this… *"Let's not expect a camel."* from Orwa Nyrabia, as for me it sums up the main themes in student conversation and embodies the underlying purposes of the conference.

Students from different backgrounds to the majority often expressed frustration at being confined by the limits of their teacher's or institutional perception.

This included (but is not limited to);

a) assumptions about ability or understanding
b) steering students into telling stories about subjects that are perceived to be 'diverse'
c) coaching/coercing female and minority ethnic students to tell their stories through a male & majority ethnic lens & voice *'help me to make my films my way and not your way'*
d) not listening to feedback *'everybody else is OK with this, so it is your problem if you are not'*
e) telling students that their personal experience and perspective is not valid in a higher education setting *'*
f) assumption about motivation or aspiration …*'my dream is not your dream, but my dream is a good one too' 'support me to become the best me that I can be, not the best that you think I could/should be'*

Consider whether you are seeing and appraising this person as and for *them-self,* the individual before you, or are you falling into the trap of perceiving them through a stereotypical lens, as representative of a group.

Data participants:

During the conference in Amsterdam there were 70 participants listed:

10 students; 5 students from ifs Cologne and 5 students from NFA Amsterdam and

60 participants from 19 different country's:

country	nr.
Australia	1
Belgium	7
Bulgaria	1
Canada	2
Croatia	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	2
Finland	2
France	2
Germany	10
Ireland	3
Israel	2
Lithuania	2
Nederland	7
Norway	4
Portugal	2
Sweden	2
Switzerland	2
United Kingdom	7