

3 Principles for Transforming Inclusion

1. Inclusion is about how we understand Power, Identity & Difference.

a) Identity

We have been taught to reduce identity to something singular and fixed eg. I am a woman, I am British, denying all other parts of what makes us who we are. In fact, our identities are plural and dynamic, changing in context and time (eg. in this moment my access to resources is highly significant, or my education is relevant, or that I am the only woman on the room is relevant). Yet we have created a world built on identity thinking that fixes us to colour, 'race', country, religion, 'gender', and so on.

When observed collectively, this identity reductionism helps to create and maintain patterns of experience for certain groups historically, systemically, ongoingly. This is not accidental, this identity reductionism is inbuilt in the thinking and structures of our societies.

At the same time, this creates the paradox that groups of people with patterns of experiences need a vocabulary that helps experiences be named and seen and responded to (eg. Black Lives Matter).

b) Power

We have unconsciously learned to see, or view different identities with different power eg. white men in suits are often understood as 'professional' compared to black women not in a suit. Thus 'white men' can speak more, lead more, decide more, earn more and benefit more in society than 'black women' can.

All groups (including us here now) have power centres and power margins that can shift in different moments according to how we relate to our own and each other's identity. In any group we consciously and unconsciously create and participate in keeping power in certain places, centering certain life experiences over others.

c) Difference

When we encounter 'difference' we unconsciously, automatically centre what we know and are familiar with, and add a value judgement, comparing the difference to what is 'normal'. I.e. we make an evaluation of 'different and less than' or 'different and more/better than'. This relationship with difference is embedded in our societal discourses and structures. Eg. white people in other countries are called 'expats' and there are TV shows to promote finding new homes and lives abroad. When 'people of colour' come to the UK, they are 'immigrants' at best, with a whole identity and experience established through laws, policies, media etc.

Transforming inclusion requires us to rethink how we understand identity, learn to see/read the power that lives within each moment of relationship, and therefore change how we relate to 'difference'.

2. We are each participating in 'A World Built for Whiteness'.

No matter what colour our skin is, we are **all** reproducing the inequalities of 'the system' we are part of. This happens because over time (not by accident) we have created a world where European patriarchal norms have become the dominant norm ie life is built and centred for white, male, hetro sexual, able-bodied, slim, higher class/wealth, christian ways of being. This system and its history lives through us in our thoughts and actions. It is internalised, and actually affects our physiology.

Exclusion = Discounting = Oppression. Oppression creates physiological trauma in our individual and collective bodies. The impact of trauma in our brains and nervous systems can limit how we have voice and engage with the world.

Systemic advantage as a regular experience of life, actually atrophies parts of our brain that stop us being conscious of our privilege. We become less able to see other peoples experiences that are not the same as ours.

Racism is NOT about the goodness and badness of people. Transforming inclusion means moving away from this narrative of goodness. If we make individuals the problem, we are still not engaging with the problems of the system which produce racism and other oppression. We must begin with individual moments and learn how to connect them to what is happening at a systemic level. ***Transforming inclusion requires us to urgently start linking the personal and the systemic.***

3. Diversity & Inclusion are not add-ons: Decolonising ourselves & our spaces.

We need to decolonise ourselves and our spaces so that certain life experiences and needs are no longer centred as 'the dominant norm', in ways that create 'otherness'. Until we do this we cannot expect our spaces and endeavours to be inclusive or inviting for everyone.

Transformative inclusion requires:

- i. initial revealing and learning about power, identity and difference, in us personally and in our structures
- ii. learning how to hear and respond to all lived experiences, when they are different to our own, and when it is hard to hear
- iii. continual processes of proactively enquiring, hearing and responding to who and how others are impacted by and experience our actions, choices, behaviours, spaces, events.

In this way there is no right answer, no solution or fix. We need to create continual processes of listening to all lived experiences and responding to what they reveal for us all. ...And for sure, what we hear won't always be comfortable and easy. It is essential to build enough support to meet the challenge.

Transforming inclusion requires building conditions and support for inviting what is difficult to hear. It means building our courageous selves, each other and spaces, ready to find our transformation through our discomfort.