

# Diversity Statement

Though I was raised in relative poverty to a working class family, on a rural council estate in the North of England, all whilst struggling with undiagnosed dyslexia (and suspected ADHD); I have had a relatively privileged upbringing afforded by my skin colour, gender, sexuality, and being a citizen of a significantly imperialist nation. My own societal battles largely stem from fighting against the class system in UK education (as both a student and an educator), and rare instances of being the victim of racism in China, and sectarianism in parts of the UK. Compared to the troubles of others I have witnessed and yet to see, I know my own in this regard are small, however. Perhaps a reflection of the injustices I have had to fight myself, or the political leanings and teachings of my parents, I always sought equity and inclusion growing up - even where this was in a very un-diverse environment.

A child of active anti-fascist parents, I spent much of my youth helping in their activities with the Troops Out Now movement and industrial action for the National Union of Miners in the UK, in addition to work for the Anti-Nazi League. When I became an adult I was also active with Unite Against Fascism, and have peacefully faced down far-right groups in street protests defending ethnic, religious, and gender minorities across the world. I have also stood peacefully in the face of armed aggression in solidarity with Palestinians seeking to defend their land and/or human rights in the West Bank, Bahrainis seeking basic democratic freedoms, Trade Unionists in their right to organize and assemble, and a variety of protests against state violence at home and abroad.

As both a performer and lecturer working internationally, I have worked with various underrepresented groups in different societies. In the UK and Ireland this has covered musical collaborations with traveller communities and the elderly, traditional folk music at LGBTQIA+ events including Pride, specific work with accessible theatre companies and workshops for disabled artists (though as one myself, I am increasingly preferring the legal term used in the UAE - "People of Determination"), and work with a range of sub-cultures prevalent in London and other multicultural metropolises. Through the course of my MFA, I conducted specific research on accent in relation to class structures within the UK. Further afield I have worked with a variety of minority populations including Uyghurs in China, Druze and Bedouins in the Levant, Uzbeks in Moscow, Slavs in Kazakhstan, Bosniaks in Republika Srpska, and Republican communities in Northern Ireland. In my work at IDSA in London, and at Leeds Conservatoire, I worked extensively with working class actors in training from a variety of backgrounds, many of them traditionally underrepresented within the UK performing arts sector.

It is through such experiences and more that I have learned the realities of other lives first hand. As a person deeply engaged in current affairs, human rights, and how history informs and intersects with these; I continue to develop and inform my world view, whilst simultaneously attuning myself to the specific conditions which affect the individual in the societies they inhabit. Perhaps central to this is the basic necessity of any performing artist – the ability and desire to empathize with another person's situation, in order not only to humble oneself to another's existence, but also to facilitate their story being told without muddying it with my own personal subjectivity.

My international work has also ensured I have an astute awareness of how groups in a majority in one sphere may suddenly become minorities in another, and the bigotry or prejudice which often accompanies this – from Sunnis in Bahrain, to Shias in Palestine; White people in China, to Han Chinese in the UK; and across a variety of other areas where individuals are alienated due to age, race, religion, class, gender, and/or their sexuality. In all these areas, part of my work for which I am thankful for is where I am able use the power and knowledge I do have (either in the locality of the workspace, or my privilege within the wider society), to create and give space which can facilitate free expression when it may not have been

forthcoming otherwise.

The key to truly enhancing EDI in a learning environment is threefold:

- An awareness of one's own privilege within the society in which you are working, and how that may cause you to be perceived, in addition to the real physical differences which they may cause within the society itself.
- Ensuring a thorough and detailed analysis of the students you are working with, the demographics and culture of the society they inhabit, how they choose to identify, and ensuring space is created in which such diversities can be seen and/or celebrated.
- Never assuming to be an authority on the lived experience of the individual, and honoring your ability to facilitate a positive learning environment, and safe space, for all.

I aim to ensure all these points are supported by my teaching philosophy, and that my understanding and use of claimed workspaces within the power dynamics of my pedagogy enables students to engage with and learn in an environment which they themselves have ownership of, in a manner often contrary to the lived reality they experience outside of our workspace. Key to this are the formal discussions from the outset of working together on who we are, why we are here, how we train, and what we will strive to achieve together. I actively engender the ability of my students to challenge hypocrisy, discrimination, and lack of understanding in the workspace in a constructive manner, and am confident from much feedback that this yields positive results both within their learning, and the wider societies they inhabit. Alongside this I welcome constructive dialogue on my own work and institutional syllabi, including where changes of subject material may aid in the diversifying or decolonizing of curricula, and/or give space to creative endeavors of individuals or groups .

In addition to my current knowledge and continuing development, I am more than willing to engage in additional training, learn from the diversity of pedagogies and perspectives of your colleagues and students, and support or develop college initiatives around equity, diversity, and inclusion. In particular, I align myself with prevailing ideas that a belief in diversity is about more than a particular head count: it must reflect the quality and depth of interactions. I am certain that unless we want to ensure EDI initiatives remain a box ticking activity, then we can and must all address the issues which we find difficult in society in a healthy and pragmatic manner, whilst simultaneously building the core importance of why we seek to build such initiatives – that we may celebrate the rich tapestry of society which comes from recognizing and celebrating the individuals within it, for all they bring to the table, and the many perilous routes they have taken to get there.

**Daniel MacAlistair Gott – 2024**

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