

Transcript: Paul Wilshaw 'Enough is Enough' poem + Q&A

Presented at The Open Road Carnival Conference (North), 12th March 2022

Hosted by Callaloo Carnival Arts

[Clare]

I'd like to now greet Paul Wilshaw joining us via Zoom, sorry, just adjusting the camera and Paul is a member of an arts group called 'Mind The Gap' and he's a passionate campaigner for equality and access for people with all disabilities and he's going to start off his presentation to us by giving us his poem 'Enough Is Enough' and then we're going to take some questions if you've got questions for Paul.

I think it'll become apparent what Paul's interests and passion is and his campaigning stance on disability from his poem. I thank you so much for joining us today.

[Paul]

Thank you. Enough is enough and it's time for a change, but why is it still that representation in the creative industry is still lacking for artists with learning disabilities?

Now don't get me wrong, it's getting better but there's still so much more to be done.

People with learning disabilities make up 1.5 million of the British population and in the coming years this number will grow.

Speaking as a person with a learning disability I don't ask for anything more than anyone else. I want to be respected, to be treated equally, to have access to everything that a non-disabled person has.

I want to hear more from casting directors, managers, producers and audiences saying 'No' to the status quo and helping to make the changes we need.

I want to see more talented actors with learning disabilities in theatre and on screen playing rounded characters, not just a Pity character or a hero character.

The truth of the matter is we all have light and shade, we are all complex and full of contradictions.

I want to see shows where having an actor with a learning disability in the cast is no longer a talking point but part of a new creative landscape.

I want to see people with learning disabilities working backstage, in technical stage management, directing, producing, being showrunners.

These opportunities need to be available and accessible to everyone.

Adjustments might need to be made, but ask the person as they will say what they need if you ask them.

Help fight injustices in your theatres and on television and film sets if you see it.

Trust yourselves, ask questions about why things are done in a certain way - could they be done better to be more inclusive and acceptable?

If your life is not being reflected in stories in theatre on TV film and radio you feel alone and that is isolating.

These industries should be there for everyone - a way to escape, a way to belong a way to intrigued, but you know what? I'm fed up with words now.

I want to see action and we all need to hold each other to account. The time has come to stop talking about the changes we need.

We need to act to make change - real, long-lasting changes so that future generations of people with learning disabilities and disabilities in general can't remember a time when they were not included.

Q&A

[Clare]

Well I'd like to kick one off Paul because one of the issues that I often observe in my work in education is that there is an underestimation about the capability of people with learning disabilities and I just wonder whether you might share some of your experiences of how you've overcome managing people's underestimation of you?

[Paul]

I had a friend of mine and a person from Mind the Gap saying that they were fed up of trying to break down the doors of people so she's going to just ram them (laughs) through herself and I thought it's brilliant because I think we keep chatting about this, I've been to so many conferences around this subject and it's great, the conversation needs to carry on because it's not at all done, however, I don't want to be 60 years old still talking about this conversation and that's kind of where it is.

I think a lot of the time we need to, I think it's fear, there's a lot of fear still and, oh, especially around if you've got a learning disability it's 'they can't do this', 'they can't do that'. The whole point is if you give that person the time and the support that will help.

At Mind The Gap, for instance, instead of now us going down to open auditions our artists we actually asked casting directors to actually come into Mind The Gap and actually do a workshop with our artists so that you've got a chance of seeing all of our performers.

So it gives you the chance to see what we can do other than just having this whole big script and thinking that you get to know a person in 10 minutes or 20 minutes after an audition.

Do a whole workshop with us and then you see us as performers.

[Clare]

And I think that that sounds, I am absolutely blown away by that idea, I find that to be revolutionary.

One thing that we've been asking as people with disabilities is for us to be met where we are rather than for us to try and scramble up to where they are and, wow, yeah, talk about ramming the doors open, 'you've only blown the bloody doors off!' Haven't you!

[laughing]

So thank you for sharing that personal experience and also like a very, really excellent way of us perhaps thinking about that within our practice is that if there are other ways where we can go forward, rather than people come forward and thank you for sharing that.

Has anybody else inspired by any questions? Thank you and I have Donna? Harriet, sorry!

[Harriet]
No worries!

[Clare]
Sorry I've only met you once, sorry!

[Harriet]
Hello Paul! I just wonder how, how kind of Covid and the whole Zoom process and how you got on with that and during lockdown? Whether you found anything that made it more accessible with the whole communication stuff.

[Paul]
Yeah, it was a really interesting time for Mind the Gap as a company we actually were just before the pandemic we were doing our show 'A Little Space' which actually went on tour and unfortunately we were actually coming down to Plymouth I think it was and the cast had to come back but we've now actually filmed the show and it, the film has now gone over to Australia as part of the Sydney Opera House's and UK collaboration so we got that.

We also done a thing called 'A Doodle Book' and that was working with York St John's and I haven't got one with me at the moment but the Doodle book was sent to schools, it's been sent to community groups and it's to help creativity and we also then found out that it was taken up by companies abroad as well. So we had companies abroad wanting it as well so, yeah, that took off really well.

The performers coped really well, a lot better than what we expected as well because we have our academy and we also have an artist group and one day I think we were up to about 80 or 90 percent of people who were coming onto Zoom sessions so we were really happy about that.

[Clare]

Thank you so much Paul for that and it's good to know that with our creativity, as people with disabilities, comes to the forward in these in these difficult situations.

The 'Thrift' poem that we were sharing with you is about the fact that people with disabilities find themselves in the toughest of spaces and we nevertheless will continue to thrive.

I'm sorry but I'm going to have to bring our interaction to a close now as we are very pleased that you are our closing speak for the morning today and it's been really valuable to hear first of all your emotional response but also for your very considered practical and theoretical responses to widening participation and access and making sure that get what we deserve nothing more than anybody else but then nothing less than anybody else indeed.

So thank you again Paul for joining us today.

[Paul]

Yeah thank you for having me.

