WORKING WITH DEAF AND DISABLED PERFORMERS: AN INVESTIGATION INTO DIRECTING PROCESS AND THEATRICAL INTERPRETATION

by

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ABSTRACT

There are over eleven million disabled people in the United Kingdom, yet it is still rare to see a deaf or disabled actor playing a lead role in theatre. Arts Council England (ACE) recognise that work with deaf and disabled performers has become the domain of a few specialist companies (Bazalgette, 2014), and its recent strategy urges arts organisations to share the responsibility for increasing diversity equally across all minority groups (ACE, 2015, p.4). This practice based research investigates the implications, for a director, of working with deaf and disabled actors for the first time. It reflects on the rehearsal and performance of *Couple*, a play with five actors including a deaf actor and an actor with cerebral palsy, which incorporated BSL and English. The complex process of making theatre that is accessible to actors, regardless of ability/disability, is discussed in regard to recruitment, casting, script, language, physicality and acting. This study examines the principles that guide inclusive practice and concludes with recommendations for supporting and resourcing directors to increase diversity in their work. It offers insight into ways to maximise the impact of ACE's diversity strategy in relation to deaf and disabled actors in the wider theatre community

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2010 Arts Council England (ACE) set out a ten-year framework, highlighting five strategic goals aimed at 'achieving great art for everyone' (Arts Council England, 2010). This implies an on-going need to address the history of imbalance across the arts in relation to diversity (Nwachukwu and Robinson, 2011). ACE (2009, p.67) defines diversity as the arts representing everyone, irrespective of 'race, ethnicity, faith, disability, age, gender, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage and any social and institutional barriers which prevent people from participating'. In recent years there has been progress towards increasing the visibility of some minority groups; Sealey (quoted in Hughes, 2013, p.2) comments that over the past twenty years 'the inclusion of black and minority ethnic actors in drama schools… has generated the visibility of these actors and changed the face of British Theatre'. This is a significant move, yet there are substantial parts of our society, such as disabled artists, that are still largely invisible. There is a growing acknowledgment of colour-blind casting in theatre (Rogers and Thorpe, 2014, p.428). Yet it seems the principles underpinning this practice, which 'ignores the appearance of an actor…anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role' (Young, 2013, p.56), have yet to be applied to disabled actors. As Gardner (2013) suggests 'it is time to question why all minority casting is not equal'.

In the United Kingdom, there are over eleven million people living with an impairment or disability (Department of Work and Pensions, 2013), yet ACE notes that the inclusion of disabled artists has become the domain of a few specialist companies,

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such as Graeae Theatre Company (Bazalgette, 2014). Consequently, the majority of

mainstream organisations are not sharing the responsibility for increasing diversity in

the arts. In an attempt to rectify this situation ACE has announced 'a fundamental

shift in its approach' (Bazalgette, 2014). From 2015, it will 'publish annual data on the

composition (disability, ethnicity, gender) of the workforce of individual National

portfolio organisations' (Arts Council England, 2015, p.4); theatres core funded by

ACE will need to demonstrate specific progress towards increasing opportunities for

disabled artists. Companies and practitioners who have not considered working with

disabled artists in the past may be required to explore new territory and discover

ways to adapt their practice in order to include disabled actors.

1.1 Research Aims

This research aims to investigate the implications of working with a cast that includes

deaf and disabled performers. By re-appropriating the principles associated with

colour-blind casting in work with deaf and disabled actors, my practice aims to make

theatre with actors regardless of ability/disability. This thesis provides the

accompanying critical reflection in practice based research. I consider issues raised

during the rehearsal and performance of *Couple*, a performance with five non-

professional actors including a deaf actor, who has no speech and communicates

using British Sign Language (BSL), and an actor with cerebral palsy, who has

reduced mobility and vocal dexterity, and uses a powered wheelchair. Primarily this

study centres on my role as a director. It will examine the directorial decisions made

in rehearsal and my reflections as a director witnessing my work in actual

performance. I focus on key issues encountered in my practice, which relate to physicality, language, and acting.

Issues relating to work with disabled and deaf actors in theatre are complex. Kuppers (2003, p.5) notes that, 'disability is a deeply contested term'; as this term is prevalent in my research, a brief overview of the definition of disability will be provided before reflecting on my own practice (Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Shakespeare and Watson, 2002; Miller and Sammons, 2004; Sandahl and Auslander, 2005). Examination of existing research and practice provides an insight into the rights of deaf and disabled actors and into what might constitute good practice when working with a diverse cast. So, as a foundation for analysing my work, this thesis also considers studies of the limitations placed on disabled actors in the past (Barnes, 1992; Barton, 1996; Swain *et al.*, 2004; Kempe, 2014), and current developments in theatre with deaf and disabled actors.

This study seems timely in adding relevant discourse to the accelerating debate surrounding diversity in the arts. The field of theatre, disability and communities seems lacking in terms of recent studies of a diverse cast working together. Existing research (Dacre and Bulmer, 2009; Eckard and Myers, 2009) focuses primarily on learning disabled actors, or on theatre exploring disability itself. Nevertheless, one educational study (Band *et al.*, 2011) offering an analysis of a first-time collaboration between practitioners and disabled performers is relevant and referred to in reflection on my practice. As this thesis describes my first experience of working with a diverse cast, my hope is that the findings of this investigation will be beneficial to other

directors who are working with disabled or deaf actors for the first time. It may also draw attention to the support and resources required by practitioners in order to increase diversity in their work. Theatre has been at the forefront of shaping our beliefs and broadening our understanding of society for generations; Masefield (2006, p.127) claimed 'of all the arts, drama especially can change the way the world acts', suggesting it is the most suitable genre for challenging our understanding of disability in society. Consequently, not only could this study be relevant to practitioners and policymakers, it might also provide a means by which the prejudices that remain towards disabled people in our society can be challenged.

1.2 *Couple*: Practice as Research

Couple was performed at A.E Harris, a venue run by Stan's Cafe (2012) in Birmingham, in June 2015. The script for the play was assembled from extracts of published texts, thematically woven together with a piece of new writing*.* The performance incorporated British Sign Language (BSL) and spoken English. Set in 1980, with flashbacks to the 1940s, *Couple* told the story of a husband and wife, Mr and Mrs Allen, for whom love had grown cold. The cast remained on stage at all times and were established as performers moving in and out of dramatic roles, creating the narrative in each scene. In order to further imply a team of performers unveiling the story before the audience, *Couple* began with an empty stage; the cast rolled out a floor covering, positioned set and props, and costume changes were visible. Once positioned, set remained in place throughout, representing several locations: Mr and Mrs Allen's kitchen; a station café; the park; a church; the post

office. My hope was that these staging and script choices would help to emphasise equality amongst the cast and might demonstrate the range of roles available to deaf and disabled actors; yet my ambitions added pressure to rehearsals and the performance. All actors and production team were volunteers; rehearsals were thus restricted by work and family commitments. The schedule consisted of eight evening rehearsals, two daytime rehearsals, and two performances.

1.3 Defining Disability

Kempe (2013, p.19) notes that 'there remains a massive amount of misunderstanding and indeed misinformation about disability'. As a director working with deaf and disabled actors for the first time it was necessary to examine my understanding of disability and to uncover the principles which guide my work. My ten-year old daughter has cerebral palsy, 'a condition that affects muscle control and movement' (SCOPE, 2015). Thus, prior to this study, my knowledge of disability extended to her experience; I had not worked with deaf or disabled adults and had no knowledge of BSL. My belief was that in order to resolve the imbalance in relation to diversity in theatre, directors simply need to be more open-minded, and willing to cast disabled actors in non-traditional roles. My contrary experience in directing *Couple* was that working with a cast of deaf, disabled, and non-disabled actors was much more complex. Gould (quoted in Nwachukwu and Robinson, 2015) suggests 'a disability-focused organisation…cannot be properly understood without understanding the social context in which disabled and deaf people make art, and the history of that context'. This implies that insight into society's perception of disability,

and how disabled actors were regarded in the past, is integral to considering the implications of working with deaf and disabled actors in theatre today. As such, studies into the social, political, and theatrical structures that excluded disabled actors in the first place provide a crucial basis for increasing understanding of disability and learning how to dismantle barriers to inclusion in my practice.

Discourse regarding deafness and impairment is an example of the complex nature of the term 'disability'. According to the Equality Act (2010) you are disabled 'if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities'. However, individuals with similar impairments differ in regard to whether they consider it to have a negative impact on their daily life, so, terms relating to disability are ambiguous. Although, deafness is considered a disability under the Equality Act (2010), Ladd (cited in Campbell and Oliver, 1996, p.120) argues that 'deaf people whose first language is BSL should be seen as a linguistic minority'; yet many people with acquired hearing loss who do not use BSL consider their deafness to be disabling, others in the deaf community do not consider themselves disabled. Due to the complexity surrounding the definition of disability, there is often a distinction made between deaf and disabled performers in arts-based literature.

Scholars discuss two contending theories of disability, known as the medical model and the social model. The medical model seeks to identify disability through medical diagnosis and considers the health of an individual to be their disadvantaging factor (Oliver and Barnes, 2012, p.11). Sandahl and Auslander (2005, p.7) explain that this

model 'considers the disabled a problem population who possess conditions needing amelioration or cure'. This understanding has been the basis for many of the stereotypical theatrical portrayals of disability in the past (Kempe, 2013, p.62). If diversity is to increase, it seems that theatre must move beyond this understanding of disability and attitudes or methods of working which resemble this model of disability must be challenged. In considering my approach to directing *Couple*, it was thus the social model which informed the decisions that were made in rehearsal and performance. This alternative theory was born out of a reappraisal of the definition of disability by academics and disability rights campaigners in the 1970s (Franklin, 1999, p.224). Shakespeare and Watson (2002, p.9) identify that the key elements of the social model are 'that disabled people are an oppressed social group. It distinguishes between the impairments that people have, and the oppression which they experience…it defines 'disability' as the social oppression, not the form of impairment'. This theory affirms each individual's right to be treated with respect, as equal, and a need for our society to accept difference (Miller and Sammons, 2004, p.25). It seems that these rights have been withheld from deaf and disabled actors in theatre. As a director working with a diverse cast, it was necessary to consider how these rights might be substantiated in my practice and to avoid adding to prejudice towards the disabled community.

1.4 Developments in Theatre with Deaf and Disabled Actors

In studies of theatre with disabled actors in the past there is overwhelming recognition that theatre-makers must change their approach to casting and avoid

further stigmatization of the disabled community. Wood (cited in Conroy, 2009, p.10) comments that 'all the arts…representation of disabled people so far has been totally negative.' This uncompromising statement is echoed by others (Kuppers, 2001; Swain *et al.*, 2004; Lewis, 2006; Sandahl, 2008; Kempe, 2014) who recognise that the majority of roles assigned to disabled actors have been clichéd and archetypal, reinforcing negative stereotypes of disability. These studies are relevant to my work as a director; they assist in uncovering how a positive representation of the disabled community can be promoted in my practice. Literature summarises the most common role types traditionally played by deaf or disabled actors, these include: one who is 'pitiable and pathetic' (Barnes, 1992, p.7); the victim of violence or neglect (Barnes, 1992, p.10); an evil character or bitter avenger (Kuppers, 2001, p.25); the supercrip, one who triumphs over adversity (Swain *et al.*, 2004); sexually deviant, asexual or unattractive (Barton, 1996, p.199). These scholars urge theatre-makers to avoid casting disabled actors in these role types and to develop methods which consider the rights of actors. However, there is a dearth of research which offers examples where alternative approaches to diverse practice have been developed.

Much of the recent progress made in broadening opportunities for deaf and disabled actors has been spearheaded by companies such as Graeae Theatre Company and Birds of Paradise. Their work 'champion's accessibility' and explores the 'aesthetics of access' (Birds of Paradise, 2015). These companies promote the talents of disabled artists through training initiatives and professional theatre productions. Graeae (no date) is described as 'a force for change' in 'world class' theatre, which places 'disabled artists centre-stage'. Their pioneering, inclusive rehearsal and

performance methods offer a model which can be carried forwards into this research, and by other directors who seek to increase diversity in their work. This model presents the skills of deaf and disabled actors as equal to non-disabled actors by employing a range of deaf, disabled, and non-disabled actors in complex theatrical roles which are not focused on ability/disability. In addition, it removes barriers to access by exemplifying innovative approaches to language and physicality in performance. Although my research does not extend to audience accessibility and is not attempting to replicate these companies, the methods observed in Graeae's work have influenced some decisions made in my practice.

Palmer and Heyhow (2008, p.1) state that 'the presence of actors with physical impairments in the world of theatre is now, one hopes, fully acknowledged'. This suggests that the limitations placed on disabled actors in the past have now been removed in the wider theatre community. Indeed, there is some evidence of this, for example, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the National Theatre recently held open auditions for disabled performers in response to a petition from a disabled actor/director (Startin, 2014a). Nadia Albina, who describes herself as having a physical disability (Gardner, 2014), is in her debut season performing with the RSC (2015). The National Theatre (2015) have cast Kiruna Stamell in her third production and previously employed Sophie Stone, the first deaf graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Tracey, 2014). The characters played by these actors are not written as deaf or disabled, so it seems that the values of colour-blind casting are beginning to be extended to deaf and disabled actors in theatre more widely. Nevertheless, with ACE recognising the need to review its diversity policy, the idea that disabled actors

are 'fully acknowledged' is overly optimistic (Palmer and Heyhow, 2008, p.1). It is still extremely rare to see a disabled actor playing a lead role in theatre (Startin, 2014b); as Startin (2014a) observes, casting directors may have increased their 'appetite to engage' with disabled actors, but it is 'not a sea change'. Therefore, it is relevant to consider why some directors are still hesitant to engage with deaf and disabled artists.

There are significant barriers to breakdown in relation to working with deaf and disabled actors. Sealey (quoted in Gardner, 2013) believes, 'prejudice towards disabled actors remains rife'. It is not only the assumption that disabled actors can only play disabled characters that is a barrier to increasing opportunities; even plays which include a disabled character are still being cast with a non-disabled actor in that role. In a recent theatre review Birkett (2015) criticises casting choices as 'even though three out of the five characters are disabled, *Kill Me Now* is a play with a cast, crew and writer without any disabilities'. This indicates that, in addition to beliefs regarding the type of roles that can be played by disabled actors, there are other reasons why directors choose not to consider diverse practice. Miller and Sammons (2004, p.25) suggest that these might include fear of portraying disability negatively and being insensitive, or concerns about audience reactions. Tracey (2015) also points out that directors still assume there are not enough professionally trained disabled actors available. Issues such as these are relevant to the challenges encountered in my own practice. It is perhaps these matters that need investigating in order for inclusive theatre practice to increase significantly. As I consider the groundwork provided through literature in relation to my own practice, these and

other issues impacting directors can be examined further; as Mahamdallie (2011, p.13) believes 'if we can open up these commonly neglected areas of inquiry…proper place can be given to those artists today who are fighting against their work being devalued or being exoticised, and for its true potential to be recognised.'

2. REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

The following section of this thesis examines my experience of directing *Couple*, discoveries made in rehearsal and in witnessing the final performance. It is of course not possible to examine every detail of the process, so the discussion that follows focuses on three key aspects of practice, language, physicality, and acting. It was in these areas that my decisions seemed most significantly impacted by including deaf and disabled actors in the work. The discussion will reflect on challenges faced, and the methods chosen in dealing with:

- Issues of language - communication between deaf and hearing actors on stage, integrating BSL into the script, and conveying meaning to spectators.
- Physicality - the impact of staging and movement on accessibility, inclusion, and representation.
- Problems of acting - the complexity of conveying subtext and nuance, and challenges to normative assumptions of character.

Firstly, however, this section will provide an overview of the conditions of rehearsal, and will reflect on the process of recruiting actors, selecting a script, and casting.

2.1 Recruitment

Aspiring deaf and disabled actors are not accessing the kind of activities which usually engage young performers. As a director it was necessary to find alternative routes for connecting with potential actors to take part in *Couple*. VisAble People, a casting agency, claim to 'get hundreds of emails from disabled people all over the

world each week who want acting work' (Tracey, 2015). However, my attempts to recruit a non-professional disabled actor through contact with theatres, drama departments in universities and colleges, and arts organisations were almost entirely fruitless. My struggle evidenced the invisibility of disabled artists (Bazelgette, 2014), and Hughes' (2013, p.4) observation that, 'colleges are not very open to taking disabled students'. Across Birmingham only one educational establishment had a disabled performing arts student and a casting director at Birmingham Repertory Theatre only knew of one professional disabled actor. This highlights why Graeae (no date) have made 'investment in and nurturing of deaf and disabled artists' a core element of its vision. Also, why ACE's current area plan for the Midlands (2011, p.22) states that 'the development of disability arts is a priority for the area'. The starting point for disabled and deaf actors is not as straightforward as for non-disabled performers, so finding a route for recruiting was problematic. It was evident why some directors assume there are not enough disabled actors available (Tracey 2014). Consequently, my introduction to Simon and Chloe was not through arts-based organisations, which would be expected to have contact with emerging performers. Instead, it was via the National Institute for Conductive Education (2015), a charity that works with adults with neurological movement disorders, and Chloe was recommended through a BSL interpreter.

There are practical and financial issues which impact a director's ability to engage with deaf and disabled actors, and an actor's freedom to develop talent. Although this was not paid work, recruiting non-disabled actors, Sophie, James, and Luke, was straightforward. They were willing to get involved simply to gain performance

experience. Yet, a disabled drama student who wanted to take part, declined due to the arrangement of carers and transport being complex and costly; this was a barrier to her taking up an opportunity to perform. To make rehearsals accessible for a deaf or disabled actor, there are also financial issues to be considered by a director and in my search for actors. Startin (2015) pointed out that a deaf actor may require a BSL interpreter costing £1200 per week, and a disabled actor may need an access worker costing around £400 per week. Without my interpreter's generosity and commitment to the aims of the research, it would not have been possible to work with a deaf actor. The interpreter made it possible for me to convey instructions, and for the whole cast to engage in basic conversation. Accordingly, the additional funds required to engage in diverse practice can be a key barrier to recruitment, limiting opportunities available to actors and preventing directors including deaf and disabled actors in their work.

2.2 Assembly of Script and Casting

In order to explore the idea of 'disability-blind' casting it was essential to assemble a script that consisted of characters readily identified as non-disabled. Kempe (2013, p.62) suggests that 'the task of performing disability would be made simpler if there were more disabled characters written'. However, 'disability-blind' casting delimited the scripts that could be considered for *Couple*; my choice was not restricted to plays with a deaf or disabled character. Thus, it could be argued that increasing opportunities for disabled actors does not require 'more disabled characters written' in plays; it simply requires directors to broaden their perception of the type of scripts that are appropriate for a diverse cast. Some playwrights appreciate this need for

directors to be more open-minded in their approach to casting. In his casting notes, Mee (2103) states 'in my plays, as in life itself, the female romantic lead can be played by a woman in a wheelchair…and that is not the subject of the play. Mee encourages diversity, and also confronts the assumption that a disabled actor might distract from the meaning of a play. Similarly in his play *Attempts on Her Life,* Crimp (2005, p.202) writes, 'this is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre'. These instructions invite a range of actors in the work and challenge the idea that deaf or disabled actors can only perform in plays with a deaf or disabled character. Mee and Crimp's work was relevant in this practice, offering a method of assembling a script for *Couple* and providing a starting block for building the narrative.

Exploring the implications of deaf, disabled, and non-disabled actors working together as equals was integral to my practice. So, in addition to creating a cohesive piece of theatre, the script for *Couple* needed to allow the cast to work as a company and promote equality by providing actors each with substantial roles. Mee's (2013) technique of creating a script by weaving sections of published text around his own writing released me from having to find one single play that met these criteria. My own writing provided the narrative for *Couple,* the story of Mr and Mrs Allen, and three sections of published text unravelled the intricacies of their relationship and how it changed: text from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2000, 1.5:90-107) evoked a scene in which Mrs Allen remembers falling in love with her husband; text from Noel Coward's *Still Life* (1935, 2)*,* also known as the 1945 film *Brief Encounter,* depicted an affair between Mr Allen and another woman*;* text from David Mamet's *Mr*

Happiness (1996*, pp.326-328) presented Mr Allen seeking advice on his marriage from a radio host. In addition, text from Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (2005, pp.197-284) was included at the beginning, middle, and end of the piece. Crimp's dialogue does not specify characters, so, scenes involved the whole cast working together. This helped thread the piece together, using the idea that the actors were stepped in and out of role to create the story. In the actual performance Crimp's text seemed to set the tone for the piece; the opening scene did not focus on the skill of any particular actor, but instead introduced the audience to a company 'whose composition… reflect[ed] the composition of the world beyond the theatre' (2005, p.202). Scenes from *Attempts on Her Life* resonated with our real-life experience as a cast learning to work together, and so, the characters behaved in a 'disability-blind' manner. In some ways, my decision to use such a diverse range of text made the process of rehearsals more complicated. Yet, it also enabled each actor to play a challenging role that opposed stereotypical casting and allowed the methods used in practice to reflect the social model of disability (Miller and Sammons, 2004, p.25).

Avoiding stereotypical casting is complex. Simply casting actors as characters which were not written as deaf or disabled did not guarantee avoiding portraying actors negatively; a disabled actor playing any bitter or pathetic character might still perpetuate prejudice towards the disabled community. Casting decisions in *Couple* were not straightforward; knowledge of issues surrounding disability and how disabled actors have been represented in theatre in the past proved vital in making positive casting choices. So, in addition to avoiding common role types played by disabled actors, I sought to cast actors as 'characters who are multi-dimensional,

have complexity of personality and emotions, and engage in a variety of aspects of life such as, their work, relationships, family and social life' (Barnes, 1992, pp.18-22). Barnes (1992, pp.18-22) recognises these as key attributes lacking in roles played by disabled actors in the past. Moreover, these features seem relevant to 'disability-blind' casting, they focus on the personality of the character rather than the ability/disability of the actor. Chloe was cast as the female lead in scenes using text from *Romeo and Juliet*, and from *Still Life.* The characters she played opposed the unattractive, or asexual roles associated with disabled actors (Barton, 1996, p.199). Instead, they were confident, glamourous, and intelligent. Similarly, Simon was cast as Mr Happiness and Mr Barnes. Neither of these characters are 'pitiable and pathetic' (Barnes, 1997, p.7). Rather, they were experienced in life and love, self-assured, and fearless. These were non-stereotypical roles, not written for deaf or disabled actors. 'Disability-blind' casting had broadened the type of roles available to actors, and knowledge of issues surrounding disability in theatre was intrinsic in challenging stereotypes. Therefore, directors who fear portraying disability negatively may feel better equipped to explore diverse practice and make positive casting choices if they increase their understanding of disability issues (Miller and Sammons, 2004, p.25). *Couple* pushed the boundaries of 'disability-blind' casting; a deaf and hearing actor played the same character at different times in the play. Yet, not only did the actors seem to convince 'spectators to overlook' the gap between the characters they played and themselves (Young, 2013, p.56), it also seemed possible for an audience to overlook the language in which the characters were communicating.

2.3 Conditions of Rehearsal

During rehearsals for *Couple* our vulnerability seemed to go beyond the usual nervousness of meeting, working, and performing with a new group of actors. Exploring inclusivity in practice placed each of us outside of our experience both artistically and socially. None of the actors had ever been part of a cast which included deaf, disabled, and non-disabled actors, yet all were positive about creating a piece of theatre with a range of performers. Sophie had professional acting experience, and Luke and James had performed in local productions. Chloe had experience of performing with deaf theatre companies but had never worked with a hearing director or actors, and Simon had no acting experience. *Couple* was his first experience of rehearsals and performing in front of an audience. All actors were informed of the objectives of this research and their involvement in it and were aware that inclusive practice was completely new territory for me. As a director I was as dependant on the cast to aid my learning in this process as they were on me to guide them, and so working with a diverse cast demanded an extra level of commitment and flexibility from everyone. Trevis (2012, p.54) believes any new group of actors must have 'the ability to work in a way that enables the director to be creative', and 'the ability to form part of the company the director is creating'. These attributes seemed even more necessary in diverse practice; in addition to the usual demands of rehearsals actors had to learn how to work with language and physical differences.

As other practitioners working with deaf and disabled actors for the first time have noted, the individual needs of the actors in *Couple* had to be viewed as 'simply "part

of what we do", rather than as a concession' (Band *et al.*, 2011, p.905). There were obvious requirements like venues needing to be accessible, as Simon is reliant on his wheelchair at all times, but the impact of other needs became apparent during rehearsals; as a company we needed to work collaboratively to find ways to support fine motor needs and energy levels, as well as additional time needed for BSL interpretation. As a director, my attitude had to change in order for access requirements and the individual needs of actors to become part of the rehearsal process. Embracing the needs of actors left less time for developing company relationships, or working collaboratively; my approach was uncharacteristically instructive, and rehearsals were pressured. Nevertheless, accessibility was accepted as part of rehearsals, greater deaf awareness developed, and, rather than creating a sense of discomfort, assisting Simon seemed to accelerate familiarity amongst the actors.

2.4 Issues of Language

With only one deaf actor and hearing actors who did not know BSL, it was not possible for *Couple* to be a fully bilingual performance. The challenge facing me as a director was to discover how to create access for a deaf actor and to facilitate communication between the actors on stage. Graeae's performance of *Blood Wedding* (2015) provided a frame of reference for resolving these issues, which incorporated various techniques to enable a deaf actor to converse with other characters. In a wedding scene, an 'interpreter' is booked to 'help' the character and conversation in BSL and English is interpreted fully (Disability Arts Online, 2015).

This method relied on having a second actor who is fluent in BSL and was not an option with my cast. But *Blood Wedding* also included an actor who had learnt BSL specifically for the role. Scenes with this actor used what Sealey (quoted in Disability Arts Online, 2015) describes as, 'family signing', which is not pure BSL, and lip-reading to facilitate what appeared to be genuine communication on stage. As a director, I applied this method to my practice in order to make it accessible for Chloe, incorporating BSL into the script for the whole cast to learn and use.

In order for this practice to be inclusive, it was not sufficient for BSL to be used only for Chloe's lines. It was necessary for BSL to be woven through the entire script so that she could communicate with other actors on stage. In early rehearsals Chloe was anxious that, if BSL was only included in a few lines, she would end up looking like a token signing deaf person on stage. With no experience of working with a deaf actor, my assumption was that she could sign her lines and others could just speak theirs. However, this was inaccurate; without including BSL in the dialogue of others, it would not have been possible for Chloe to be genuinely involved in the action in a scene or to determine her cues. So, Chloe translated her lines into BSL and we discussed how BSL, English, and lip-reading could be combined to facilitate communication with others. This process was time consuming and complex; it had to consider the requirements of using BSL, ensure that demands placed on actors in terms of learning BSL were realistic, and also re-distribute dialogue so that characters played by Simon and Chloe could interact via lip-reading as it was not possible for Simon to sign. Luke was the only hearing actor whose dialogue, in a short scene with Chloe from *Romeo and Juliet,* was translated purely into BSL. Other

scenes used English, supported by BSL on short phrases and key words which were

identified as being essential for genuine communication to take place. In a similar

way to the method used in *Blood Wedding* (2015), this allowed the actors to sign

whilst also speaking their lines. It placed hearing and deaf actors in a similar position;

neither understood every part of the dialogue. In this section from *Attempts on Her*

Life (Crimp, 2005, p.278) text in red was performed in BSL, text in blue was

performed in BSL and English concurrently, and text in black was in English only:

Chloe	…we can see that something has died.
Luke	something has what?
Sophie	Has died. Something has / died.
James	She feels she's failed
Simon	Exactly, she feels her works failed

Crimp's writing technique was particularly accommodating in terms of clarifying

meaning for the actors; repetition in the text allowed Chloe's lines to be translated

within the dialogue of others. Also, by including BSL on key words Chloe was able to

genuinely follow a basic narrative throughout the performance without requiring an

interpreter on stage. In text from *Still Life* (Coward, 1935, p.172) repetition and

questioning was exploited to clarify communication between the actors and to

provide interpretation for spectators, for example:

James	What's the **matter**?
Chloe	The **matter**? What could be the **matter**?
James	You suddenly went away.
Chloe	[brightly] I thought we were being rather **silly**.
James	Being **silly**? Why?

Couple demonstrated an alternative method of performance with deaf and hearing

actors which did not require an interpreter, or actors who were fluent in BSL. The

distribution of BSL in *Still Life* made it particularly easy to follow as a spectator, as a line in BSL was following by a line in English. Also, communication between the two characters seemed convincing in this scene as the language gap was acknowledged, there was little movement, and the characters were focused on understanding each other clearly. However, witnessing the performance, the distribution of BSL in one section of Crimp's text made communication between actors ambiguous; some lines were performed in English as Chloe simultaneously performed them in BSL. Although this was visually interesting, it made little sense in terms of the actors responding to each, confusing Chloe's role with that of an interpreter. The inference was either that Chloe could hear, or that two actors on stage were instantaneously having exactly the same idea, neither of which had integrity. It seemed that my focus on ensuring Chloe was included had, in some ways, distracted from the intention of this scene. However, despite its flaws, the performance demonstrated that even a company with no experience of diverse practice can find creative ways to include deaf actors. With a short rehearsal schedule, it was possible for the actors to reach a level of BSL that was sufficient for them to genuinely communicate on stage.

Mahamdallie (2011, p.16) notes that diverse practice demonstrates 'a creative dynamic that fuels innovation'. In many ways this observation proved to be true in my practice, as the methods used to incorporate BSL into *Couple* opened an alternative way of conveying meaning to an audience. As the scope of this research did not extend to audience accessibility, *Couple* was not captioned and thus audiences were placed in a similar position to the actors. Spectators were presented with a play which weaved BSL and English through the narrative so that the essential elements

of the dialogue could be followed clearly. Even without direct interpretation, the structure of the text and understanding gleaned through BSL, even when not familiar with the language, combined to convey the meaning of the play. However, with actors who had learnt BSL specifically for their role, I became aware watching the performance that not having an interpreter on stage was also risky. Any mistakes in performance, ad-libbing, repeating or missing lines, would have unfairly risked a deaf actor losing their place in the dialogue. Fortunately, mistakes made in the actual performance did not cause problems with continuity. Nevertheless, it was optimistic to leave no margin for error, thus, it was apparent why Graeae's preference seems to be having another person on stage who is fluent in BSL. Therefore, although not having the option of using an interpreter on stage forced me to be more creative as a director, it had also compromised my sensitivity to the access requirements of my actors, making Chloe more vulnerable on stage. It would seem appropriate in future work to employ a method which left less to chance, giving a deaf actor more control over mistakes which might be made in dialogue.

Through dealing with issues relating to language I discovered the relevance of Allen and Cope's observation (quoted in Band *et al.*, 2011, p.904) that, 'inclusion is not something which is practiced upon individuals, it is a process involving active engagement and control over decisions by the learner'. Despite attempting to minimise the amount of BSL hearing actors would need to learn, working in BSL and English still placed additional pressure on everyone in rehearsals. There were fears raised in regard to using BSL in front of an audience, and frustrations over timing, cues, and inconsistency of signs. Initially it was a struggle for hearing actors to

appreciate the importance of signs being accurate. Also, as a director, the amount of time needed to learn signs placed significant stress on my deadline for the production. On the other hand, the process of working together to learn BSL was also beneficial in terms of relieving some attitudinal barriers to inclusion in rehearsals. The way that Chloe and the interpreter worked with others to teach BSL, encouraging them to draw signs on their scripts and creating video clips to help, demonstrated the type of 'peer to peer learning' that ACE's diversity strategy seeks to encourage (Mahamdallie, 2011, p.16). As the schedule had allowed little time for collaboration in other aspects of the work, learning BSL offered vital opportunities to build relationships and develop awareness of the individual needs within the cast. Moreover, engaging others who are skilled in BSL in decision making was pivotal in developing my skills and knowledge of how to make my practice more inclusive.

2.5 Working with Actors: Physicality in Process and Performance.

Some of my directorial decisions regarding physicality were based on my own ideals for staging *Couple*; on reflection, I considered whether laying down my own preferences and being guided by the individuality of the company might have better served the piece. This tension is evident in issues raised in rehearsal that are discussed in this section. Although these matters had to be resolved due to time constraints, they provide learning points for future work. Original ideas for staging *Couple* assumed that if sufficient manoeuvring space was provided, Simon would be free to move around the space with the other actors. However, in rehearsals he had difficulty navigating and positioning his wheelchair, making it problematic for

movement and dialogue to happen simultaneously. It was necessary to consider

movement in respect to its physical demand and implication in performance. In some

scenes it felt entirely appropriate for Simon not to move; in a scene with Mrs Allen his

character, Mr Barnes, was positioned at her side as she sat on the park bench. Also,

as Mr Happiness, it seemed natural as a radio DJ to be stationary. So, in his two

major roles Simon was able to focus his attention purely on delivering dialogue.

However, despite Simon being keen to keep movement to a minimum and retain

energy for speech, the implication of this in other scenes was less positive, he

seemed excluded. It was necessary to create moments that allowed Simon the time

and space he needed to change position, and to increase his level of engagement

with others on stage.

It was essential to ensure that disability was not a barrier to Simon's inclusion in the

performance as a whole. Yet, despite avoiding stereotypical casting, it seemed that

choices made in relation to physicality might risk furthering negative perceptions of

disability. My ambition for staging *Couple* added to the complexity of making the

performance accessible or inclusive for deaf or disabled actors. With a script

assembled from extracts of text the actors were obliged to step in and out of dramatic

roles, moving set and props in early scenes, and using items of clothing to indicate

which character they were playing. I had hoped this idea might emphasise equality

and assert that deaf and disabled actors can play any role; in practice this added

further complications. Sections which threaded the narrative together using Crimp's

text were particularly problematic; as the actors moved around to create a scene

whilst talking it seemed more necessary for Simon to also move, yet moving set

made navigating the space more challenging. Moreover, he was not able to

physically participate in setting up the stage with the other actors or changing his

costumes. This further implied Simon's character was excluded or patronised by

others trying to include him. In rehearsals we explored ways to resolve this. Simon

was open to being assisted by others to move and we experimented with this, but the

result was no faster or fluid than Simon moving himself. Moreover, this diminished

the independent and confident nature of the characters he played, instead implying

vulnerability and dependence; these were stereotypes my casting had attempted to

avoid.

Time pressures meant it was not possible to change the structure of the play. I

adapted staging and dialogue to prevent Simon's characters from being side-lined,

which was as challenging as integrating BSL into the script. Fortunately, Crimp's text

offered the flexibility to reassign dialogue freely so that Simon had time to move and

could be still when speaking. Lines were distributed to more obviously involve him

when the stage was being set. He was given more attention grabbing lines, such as,

'they are making love in the man's apartment' (Crimp, 2005, p.200), and, 'let's say he

grunts' (Crimp, 2005, p.209), to reduce movement by naturally drawing the action to

him. These changes increased Simon's engagement in scenes and relieved the

physical demands on him; he was able to maintain the energy required for the piece,

and the portrayal of his characters seemed positive. Yet, the implication of him not

being able to participate in moving set, or changing costume was debatable. In a way

it was simply accepted that not all actors could do everything, having positive

implications in terms of acknowledging and accepting difference; but in terms of my

practice being inclusive, my staging method failed to engage the whole cast. Witnessing the performance, I became aware that some of my decisions had been guided by my own perception of what was acceptable in terms of movement on stage. Rather than taking an innovative approach to physicality that was led by the company, my choices had added further limitations to Simon's movement. It seems that if the company had been considered from conception, access and inclusion would have been less complicated. Instead of weakening the narrative, major adjustments in my approach may have strengthened it and pathed the way for future work using the individuality of the cast to form a stylistic approach.

In addition to including Simon, decisions made in relation to movement and space had to consider the requirements of using BSL, making my choices more prescriptive. Movement on stage had allow for BSL signs to be clearly seen by the actors and the audience, and for Chloe to lip-read her cues. In addition, actions such as pouring tea in the scene from *Still Life* had to be arranged around dialogue, so the actors had their hands free to sign. Although, access was a priority, physicality still had to be appropriate to the characters and meaning of a scene. In most scenes this was unproblematic, however, physicality in the flashback scene using text from *Romeo and Juliet* posed a challenge. The text was performed by two couples simultaneously in English and BSL. My aim was to contrast the elderly Mr and Mrs Allen's pensive dialogue in English, with the excited, energetic dialogue of their younger selves in BSL. As this scene conveyed a memory of what life was like when Mr and Mrs Allen first met, it seemed inappropriate for the two sets of actors to look at each other. So, without clear visibility, alternative physical movement was used to

cue dialogue, for example, Luke dropped his bag to indicate the beginning of a line, and Chloe stepped off the church steps to cue the next. This provided an alternative way for the cast to work together even when movement seemed incompatible with BSL. However, in performance, there were moments between scenes that, as a director, I found less effective. At times Chloe was positioned at the back of the stage and lip-reading was impossible, and so the notion that she was an actor observing the scene was unbelievable. Although BSL was visible for actors and spectators in scenes including Chloe's characters, better choices could have been made to ensure her continuous involvement in the performance as a whole.

This practice highlighted that working with both deaf and hearing actors allows less margin for error in terms of physicality. Movements had to be precise, yet it took time for actors to appreciate how this aspect of physicality impacted on accessibility. Initially there were frustrations when an actor started speaking or signing whilst still positioned behind Chloe, or if they turned away midway through a line, and she would lose her place in the scene. Nevertheless, as deaf awareness increased so did the realisation that in diverse practice if someone was in the wrong position cues were missed, continuity lost, and rehearsal time wasted. In relation to blocking movement Mitchell (2009, p.179) writes that the key is 'balancing well focused action for the audience with fluid and unselfconscious movement by the characters in the situation'. In some ways this seemed more difficult for a diverse cast; access requirements largely dictated movement on stage, leaving less room for spontaneity and for actors to decide how to a character might utilise space for themselves.

Instead, actors were required to make prescribed movements, necessary for access, become the life-like, natural movement and behaviour of the characters they played.

2.6 Problems of Acting and Character

Working with a deaf actor and an actor with limited mobility and vocal dexterity, challenged my normative assumptions of how the characters in *Couple* might emerge. Rehearsals tasked the actors with complex roles, requiring a significant level of acting ability to realise their characters and to convey appropriate nuance and subtext in the dialogue. Although my belief was that each of the cast were capable of connecting with the characters they were playing, several issues raised in rehearsal concerned me as a director. Rehearsing a scene with Simon and Sophie, in which Mr Barnes tells Mrs Allen he has fallen in love with her, led me to question how nuance could be conveyed by an actor for whom movement and technical subtlety was difficult. In his role as Mr Barnes, it was not possible for Simon speak softly or to reach out and hold Sophie's hand. Yet alternative suggestions such as, Sophie grabbing his hand, or putting her arm around him, seemed unfitting. These changed the implication of the scene and made Mrs Allen the initiator of the relationship; thus, threatening the autonomy of Mr Barnes as a character, implying he was being cared for, and making Simon's role more stereotypical. I considered Trevis' (2011, p.88) observation that 'a good director has to have her antennae tuned for generalising and clichéd responses and to encourage the actor to find something more personal and particular'; although my casting methods had avoided cliché, working with a disabled actor made me realise that, as a director, much of my theatrical vision was still

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derived from stereotype. It was necessary to put aside probable assumptions of how actors might convey their characters and explore an approach which was less predictable. In the actual performance of this scene there was no physical contact between Mr Barnes and Mrs Allen, yet Simon's loud, forceful declaration of love made his character's feelings unequivocal. The connotation was that Mr Barnes was determined, uninhibited, and passionate enough to broadcast his feelings unashamedly. As one practitioner in educational research with disabled performers (Band *et al.*, 2011, p.906) discovered:

> [acting] isn't about being able to walk, or even, necessarily, speak English for a deaf performer. It is something much bigger than that. It is about having an understanding of character and interrelation. And so, you then, as director, find different ways of storytelling through being faced with people whose abilities are not the same.

So, as a director I also felt that, even with limited movement and vocal dexterity, Simon had been able to offer an interpretation of his character that had renewed my creative response as a director and moved the performance beyond familiar convention.

Although, my practice had demonstrated 'that talented actors can play any role' (Young, 2013, p.56) regardless of ability/disability, rehearsals also revealed that my approach to 'disability-blind' casting had also been inadequate. Playing the character Mr Happiness was particularly problematic for Simon in terms of the physical demands of the dialogue. It seemed unlikely that an audience would be able to overlook the difficultly he had vocalising Mamet's lengthy monologue in order to

concentrate on the character he was playing. Simon was not able to reach his potential as an actor in this role; his ability to give attention to characterisation was impeded by having to focus on maintaining the energy required to get through the dialogue. Even after editing out significant sections of the scene, it was still apparent in the performance that in scenes with short sections of speech Simon was more relaxed, focused on the character he was playing, and vocally clearer. This would not have been a sustainable casting choice for Simon in a longer run of performances. Therefore, although principles associated with colour-blind casting had assisted me in broadening casting opportunities for a disabled actor, it was not necessarily beneficial to the actor for a director to ignore disability; the conviction that disabled actors can play any role needed to be balanced with a clear understanding of what was manageable for the actor.

Whilst exploring subtext in rehearsals it seemed that both deaf and hearing actors were in a similar position, neither could rely merely on what they were saying or signing to communicate meaning to the audience. Still, as a director with no prior knowledge of BSL, it was particularly difficult to ascertain how the subtleties of the language impacted on a deaf actor's ability to convey subtext. As a relatively experienced actor Chloe coped well with the challenging roles she was playing. Working on a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* with Luke, in which subtext was written into the text rather than underneath it, she was able to clearly convey the nuance of the piece using BSL; this demonstrates that even having a deaf actor in the familiar role of Juliet did not detract from, or significantly alter, the character or meaning implied in performance. However, text from *Still Life* was more problematic; Coward

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(quoted in Hoare, 1995, p.361) noted 'that the love scene is played against the words', and so, it was necessary to convey meaning which opposed the dialogue being spoken or signed. Chloe and James had the complex task of reflecting the social etiquette of the 1940s, whilst portraying an intense attraction between their characters, and the acute guilt they feel.

My assumption was that conveying unspoken/unsigned meaning would be easier for a deaf actor, who is skilled in using facial expression and gesture as a means of communication. Yet, as 'facial expression…forms approximately 80% of British Sign Language' (Becoming Visible, 2015), actors' expressions, eye contact, and gestures were largely consumed with the language; giving less scope for using these as a means for conveying subtext. For example, when the woman asks the man what his wife is like it was less feasible to imply her guilt by looking away, or an uneasiness by fumbling with hands. In addition, James' acting was more rigid and self-conscious than usual as he was engrossed in his task of signing correctly. Subtext had to be expressed between lines of dialogue, also through varying the pace and giving emphasise to parts of signed/spoken dialogue. As eye contact was necessary for communication in BSL to take place, withholding this made subtext seem more poignant, implying that Chloe's character had refused to engage in dialogue at all. However, in performance it was evident that this scene had not reached its potential. Additional time would have allowed James to become confident with BSL and to then focus on characterisation, and further exploration into how Coward's clipped, stiff speech could be reflected in BSL may have helped to capture 1940s formality in the scene. It seemed that using BSL limited the actor's ability to characterise the

etiquette and connotation this scene required, and so, more time was needed for the

actors to fully realise characters in performance.

3. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the implications, for the director, of working with a cast which includes deaf and disabled performers. This practice based research has exemplified inclusive working methods that bring together deaf, disabled and non-disabled actors to create a performance. Rather than demonstrate that inclusive practice is straightforward, this research has revealed that the process of working with a diverse cast must be rigorous and is complex. However, throughout this process my inaccurate assumptions of work with a diverse cast have developed into invaluable experience, and greater confidence in my ability to work with deaf and disabled artists. There was a change of attitude and adjustment of methods, as the physical needs of actors became 'simply part of what we do', ingrained in the ethos of rehearsals (Band *et al*, 2011, p.905). The benefits of working with deaf and disabled actors far outweigh the effort involved in making it possible for the cast to work together. As a director, I discovered how diverse practice can rejuvenate creativity and shake systematic habits in my approach. These benefits and learning points extend to everyone involved. Consequently, the cast of *Couple* remain committed to the purposes of this study; they are enthusiastic about the possibilities of future work together and three of us are currently undertaking BSL level one.

It is evident that increasing diversity in relation to disability in theatre demands far more from a director than simply being more open-minded, and willing to cast disabled actors in non-traditional roles. Although a readiness to engage with a diverse cast is the starting point for investigating inclusive practice, there are complex

decisions to be made. Knowledge of the issues surrounding disability, the limitations

placed on disabled actors in the past, and an awareness of good practice, is crucial

in making informed decisions as a director. With an awareness of these issues, it is

possible to consider the rights of actors, challenge prejudiced assumptions regarding

disability, and consider appropriate ways to deal with issues of access raised in

rehearsal. The process is time-consuming; for a director to determine an adequate

schedule for a diverse cast, which allows for collaboration and developing the

company, a clear understanding of the needs of actors is required prior to rehearsals.

A director must be willing to revise and adjust working methods in order to work

inclusively, being willing to lay down their own creative vision in favour of an

innovative approach which embraces the individuality of the company. Learning in

diverse practice is two-way, so the process has to be collaborative, and vulnerability

is inevitable. Diverse practice demands an additional level of professionalism in

terms of accuracy, flexibility, and capacity regarding the acting ability of those

involved. Those participating in inclusive practice require all these skilful attributes

and personal commitment to the work.

With respect to the wider issue of resolving the history of imbalance in relation to the

inclusion of deaf and disabled actors in theatre, this study provides important

pointers. The re-appropriation of the values of 'colour-blind' casting to work with deaf

and disabled actors has made it possible to make theatre with actors as actors, and

not on the basis of ability/disability. It has broadened the range of role types

available, delimited the choice of scripts that can be performed, challenged

stereotypical assumptions, and assisted in positively representing the deaf and

disabled community. Therefore, this practice-based research demonstrates that deaf and disabled actors are capable of realising even the most well-known characters on stage, and that casting a deaf or disabled actor does not make a play about disability (Mee, 2013). 'Disability-blind' casting methods have also shown that it is possible to portray deaf and disabled actors in a positive manner, and that audiences are receptive of diverse casting (Miller and Sammons, 2004, p.25). However, although parallels can be drawn between the inclusion of other minority groups and the inclusion of deaf and disabled actors, my approach to accessibility in this practice was in some ways overly 'disability-blind'. It seems that a policy which only seeks to 'overlook' (Young, 2013, p.56) difference on stage is insufficient for work with deaf and disabled actors. Rather, it is necessary for new policies for casting to acknowledge and accept difference and ensure that the individual needs of actors are adequately met in practice.

There are barriers to inclusive practice that need further investigation in order for these to be dismantled and for opportunities for disabled actors to increase. This research has shed light on some of the reasons many directors are still reluctant to adopt inclusive working methods, highlighting the difficulties faced when recruiting deaf and disabled actors, and the financial barriers which could make inclusive practice impossible. Additionally, it suggests that the complex nature of casting, the necessity to avoid stereotypes, the additional resources, and level of knowledge and commitment required might all be factors preventing directors from including deaf and disabled actors in their work. Therefore, although this research demonstrates the timeliness and necessity for initiatives to increase opportunities for disabled actors, it

also exposes gaps in knowledge that require further investigation. As opposed to this small-scale practice based research, recommendations for directors could be investigated further through comparative studies examining a range methods used by companies experienced in diverse practice. However, although analysing methods used by companies such as Graeae might be beneficial, it is the attitude of adapting, modelled by these companies, that must also be shared more widely. Thus, further research which voices the feelings and concerns of practitioners regarding work with deaf and disabled actors might assist in clearly pinpointing ways that attitudes need to change.

This research offers an insight into issues facing theatre-makers who have yet to include deaf or disabled actors in their work. The findings of this study suggest that meeting the demands of ACE's new diversity strategy (2015, p.4), and increasing opportunities for deaf and disabled artists, may be problematic for some theatre companies and practitioners. In order for ACE to maximise the impact of its strategy, and to facilitate 'sea change' (Startin, 2014a) in the wider theatre community, specific support and resources may be required. Financial planning may need to allow for: longer rehearsal schedules; adaptations to scripts; prolonged hire of venues, set, props and costume; employing access workers and interpreters; training, collaboration, and awareness development; facilities for audience accessibility. Directors and performers alike may require specific training and development to increase their understanding of issues surrounding disability, disability and deaf awareness, equal opportunities, and inclusion. In addition, opportunity to learn BSL within the theatre may also encourage greater collaboration with deaf performers and

companies. ACE might support theatre-makers who are hesitant to engage with a diverse cast by providing peer to peer mentoring, and by increasing opportunities for companies with a range of experience to collaborate. Opportunities for directors to engage in practice with deaf and disabled actors outside the confines of a working production schedule might also be productive; greater confidence and ability to extend professional opportunities to deaf and disabled actors may develop in an environment void of the external pressures of everyday theatre practice. Open discussion between practitioners, raising concerns and questions, might increase awareness of: the type of roles that can be played by a deaf or disabled actor; ways to avoid stereotypes and negative portrayals of disability; and methods common to inclusive casting, rehearsal and performance.

The findings of this research have demonstrated that despite the challenges, there is no justification for the longevity with which theatre has remained inaccessible for deaf and disabled actors. There remains a need to reconceptualise inclusive practice as the norm, a barrier worth breaking down for the unique quality of performance that is created by reflecting diversity on stage, and by disabled and non-disabled actors working collaboratively. There are complex issues of access to be dealt with, yet, if these were manageable within the boundaries of this study, they are not beyond the ability of any director practicing in theatre today. Therefore, although practitioners may benefit from additional support to increase diversity in their work, it is appropriate that all companies and theatre across the United Kingdom are held to account for their role in sharing the responsibility for increasing the visibility of deaf and disabled artists.

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5. APPENDIX: Performance DVD