

Embedding Dyslexic Practices

A CREATIVE EXPLORATION ON
DEVELOPING A WORKING TOOLKIT FOR
DYSLEXIC THEATRE DIRECTORS AND
ACTORS IN REHEARSALS



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ENGLAND**

Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) – Embedding Dyslexic Practices – January 2024

About Project Leader: Matthew Jewson

Matthew (BA hons, MA) is a dyslexic actor, producer and director based in Essex.

With over 10 years of industry experience Matthew has dedicated his work on the belief that creativity & artistic expression is a catalyst for change. He has extensive experience on curating youth projects as previous company director to TWAS Theatre Ltd and producing the creative engagement programme at The Mercury Theatre Colchester. He's directed touring productions, fringe and musical theatre. He loves to collaborate, listen and identify needs that can be harnessed within creative settings, from staged productions to community outreach projects locally and nationally.

Project Brief

The aim of the project is to simulate a series of six individual rehearsals with 4 dyslexic actors and 1 musician. The days will be exploring a variety of acting techniques and simulating a rehearsal room environment that's reflective of a project. We will be exploring but not exclusively – text analysis, movement, musicianship and actor centric approaches.

The premise of each day will be laid out with a daily focus on specific techniques and exercises that were researched by the director. These are targeted techniques and circumstances that neurodiverse actors may have found challenging within a rehearsal room. These will also be suggested activities from dyslexic actors that were interviewed in January of 2024.

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Matthew Jewson ©

The rehearsals will organically be shaped to allow space for reflection and creating strategies to avoid overwhelm.

Three of the six rehearsals will be led by neurodivergent specialist Deborah Groves who will deliver workshops centred around her specialist field and providing intrinsic feedback and guidance during the process of the rehearsals.

During the process of these rehearsals with the company of a scribe Matthew will document the rehearsals with the purpose of creating a reflective journal and resource pack for dyslexic actors and theatre makers to consider for their future practice.

1) Research Phase

The research phase will provide an opportunity to gather relevant information on dyslexic practices and coping skills that are currently in place for dyslexics. The aim is to understand the science behind dyslexia and what the current quantitative and qualitative data is telling us about this learning difference. The project leader will aim to be in an informative space prior to building the rehearsal plan. Below is the current working reading list for reference:

Eide, B.L. and Eide, F. (2011) The dyslexic advantage: unlocking the hidden potential of the dyslexic brain.

Griggs, K. (2021). This is Dyslexia. Random House.

Davis, R.D. and Braun, E.M. (2011). The Gift of Dyslexia. Souvenir Press.

Whitfield, P. (2019). Teaching Strategies for Neurodiversity and Dyslexia in Actor Training.

Onyinye Udokporo (2022). Dyslexia and Me.

Isaacs, C. (2019). Adult dyslexia: unleashing your limitless power. Cheryl Isaacs.

Also, part of the research phase will consist of interviewing 12 dyslexic creatives that are currently practicing in the theatre industry today. These creatives will be playwrights, actors, directors, producers and published authors. This primary research will allow case studies that will attribute to the simulated rehearsals and creation of the toolkit.

2) Simulated Rehearsals

Prior to the simulated rehearsals Matthew will be reflecting on his own practices as a director and actor and target opportunities of development within his own techniques. Explorations will be inspired by techniques of Mike Alfreds from his book *Different Every Night*, Augusto Boal's book from *Games for actors and non-actors*, techniques from Gecko Theatre, Paperbirds Theatre Company and of course Stanislavski.

What's important in the rehearsals is to establish a space of reflection for all participants during the process. Setting up the tasks of the explorations will be the foundational basis of finding neurodiverse techniques that can be useful within creative situations.

The current vision is that once a task is put into place - *for example the scenario of a table read* - we will play it a 'conventional' or 'traditional' way that would be expected in a rehearsal room and reflect on the challenges with then exploring a more neurodiverse route to see what might or may not be benefitted.

3) Reflective Journal & Toolkit

The toolkit will be designed by Matthew Jewson which will be accessible via his website when completed. As we don't know how or what will be included within the resource kit as that'll be fundamentally decided from the rehearsals what's important is that the toolkit is accessible for our neurodiverse creatives. Video recordings of exercises and reflections from the simulated rehearsals will be viewable via the online resource pack, with also downloadable audio files.

4) Legacy

Beyond the project Matthew will be offering dyslexia creative consultancy and support to actors on how they can embed neurodiverse strategies through auditioning, rehearsals and character development. Through his current practices as a lecturer and director he will be looking embed new techniques and to continue to champion dyslexia as a professional theatre maker.

For more information visit:

www.matthewjewson.co.uk