A CELEBRATION
OF THEATRE ARTS, EDUCATION & DEAF STUDIES AND THE THEATRE OF THE DEAF
1986–2018
INTRODUCTION

A CELEBRATION OF THEATRE ARTS, EDUCATION & DEAF STUDIES AND THE THEATRE OF THE DEAF

After a 32-year illustrious career the Theatre Arts, Education & Deaf Studies (TAEDS) programme (originally the Theatre of the Deaf course) at the University of Reading is bowing out. All things have their time - are born, flourish and then transform. Following the decision to close the programme in October 2015, the remaining staff and students made an immediate decision to stage a celebration of its life. We felt it was important to mark this moment with a tribute to 32 years of innovation and excellence rather than to mourn its passing.

This commemorative programme both accompanies the celebratory event and exists as a memory of a truly unique course. You may be reading this from a variety of distinct perspectives: as an alumnus of TAEDS or of the quite different Theatre of the Deaf; as a tutor or professional who has contributed to the delivery of the course; perhaps as a support professional; or even as someone who heard of the programme without knowing too much about it.

You may be reading this programme on the day of the event – 23 June 2018 – or some years later as a memory of having been there, studied on the course or have simply known about it. With this in mind, we present here a brief history of the programme and some memories from some significant professionals who have contributed to it over the years. For later TAEDS alumni, it is important to know where you come from and the history recorded here also suggests where the work is going in the future!

Any event such as this celebration requires input from a vast range of different people and there is a substantial list of thanks and acknowledgements also included. I would like here, however, to thank the contributions of Peter Muschamp, Jenny Sealey, Stephen Lacey and Paula Garfield to the programme – all have a significant link to TAEDS/TOD.

Regrettably, records of the Theatre of the Deaf years were not well kept before the digital era and have therefore not been retained. This makes the contributions on the formation of the course even more significant. You will also read a selection of alumni reflections on the impact of TAEDS on their lives and careers. These make for powerful and emotional reading and provide a snapshot of a much larger experience. With a healthy TAEDS alumni Facebook community growing year by year, the huge number of stories and successes within the TAEDS community will continue to be celebrated.

It has been a personal privilege to witness the successful blossoming of students and to observe the flourishing of these lives and careers beyond the programme. These hundreds of deaf and hearing individuals are the true legacy of this unique programme.

Cheers to all of you!

Simon Floodgate
May 2018

PROGRAMME

Moonbird by Joyce Dunbar
A tale of a family who just don’t know how to communicate with each other; can the Moonbird teach them that listening is not only about hearing? Through puppetry, British Sign Language and physical storytelling a tale of family, acceptance and identity.

Accessible theatre for all the family.

12.30
Arrive at Minghella Studios, Whiteknights Campus

13.00
Performance of Moonbird by Handprint Theatre

14.00-15.00
Refreshments

15.00-15.40
Speeches
Sir David Bell, KCB, Vice Chancellor
Professor Lib Taylor
Steve R Vevers-Webb, 1996-99
Stephanie Back, 2013-16
Simon Floodgate
A Toast to TAEDS/TOD

16.00
Close
The Theatre Arts, Education & Deaf Studies programme has always been unique in combining an education in Theatre Arts and Drama leadership with the special skills and opportunities offered by the language and culture of deaf people. Its origins can be traced back to a small part-time course organised in the early 1980s by Pat Keysell (founder of the British Theatre of the Deaf) and validated by the Royal Society of Arts, whose aim was to train deaf as well as hearing people in drama leadership with an emphasis on working with deaf people in clubs and drama societies. This course was based in Reading at Bulmershe College of Higher Education. Two members of tutorial staff at the Department of Film and Drama had a particular interest in working with deaf students of drama and they became involved in teaching on the part-time RSA leadership course.

The course started as an adjunct to students’ other careers. Its great value was in encouraging an interest in creative drama among the deaf adult community, and of raising standards of drama leadership in deaf clubs. It had the secondary effect of opening the eyes of tutorial staff to the creative talent that existed among deaf people, whose particular visual perception offered a whole new way of looking at drama and theatre. At that time, it was extremely difficult for a deaf person who wished to make a career in the Performing Arts to be accepted for full-time training in any of the established courses. Having been funded by the Carnegie UK Trust until 1984, the course found its next home within the Department of Film and Drama at Bulmershe College, with a view to setting up a special full-time course under the auspices of that department with the needs of deaf students specifically in mind.

The first full-time course, then entitled ‘Theatre of the Deaf’, ran from 1986 to 1990, seeing 34 students successfully passing, 23 of them deaf. Some of those have since become professional performers, and have appeared regularly in theatres, films, and on TV. Others joined children’s theatre companies, or became workshop leaders. A few went on to further, more specialised training: one deaf student went on to qualify as a drama therapist; another made a successful career in Arts administration.

In 1989, Bulmershe merged with the University of Reading, and the newly formed Department of Arts and Humanities in Education extended the course to two years, with its qualification upgraded to a Higher Education Diploma (HED). This gave more time for deeper analysis and exploration of alternative theatre forms and methods, and students benefited considerably. Finally, in 1994 the programme was accepted by the University as leading to a Diploma in Higher Education (DipHE). In 1996, the programme became a three-year full-time course leading to BA degree, entitled Theatre Arts, Education & Deaf Studies (TAEDS).

It had always been assumed that this course was too specialised to appeal to a wide market and would never be able to recruit students more than once every three years. When, in 1997, the programme appeared for the first time in the UCAS prospectus, the department was overwhelmed with applications – and the pressure was on to admit students on an annual basis, which began in 1999.

TAEDS has shaped me into the adult I am today. We are definitely a secret society who are dispersed everywhere. I have used most of the skills I’ve learnt from TAEDS leading drama workshops, teaching BSL at after school clubs and translating songs into sign theatre as part of performances.

Ruth Hands, 2007–2010

TAEDS people turn up everywhere and it is always a delight to meet them and know that you have that shared experience despite maybe having graduated years apart. It is a truly unique course. I am very honoured to call myself a TAEDS graduate.

Ana Becker, 2005–2008

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Theatre Arts, Education & Deaf Studies/Theatre of the Deaf Programme Directors:
1986–2006: Daphne Payne
2006–2012: Simon Floodgate
2012–2015: Dr Cathy Wardale
2015–2018: Simon Floodgate

Eventually, Film, Theatre & Television moved to Whiteknights whilst the Institute of Education re-located to London Road, with TAEDS soon following. Students continued to create innovative sign theatre and work effectively with deaf and hearing children in a range of formal education settings. The programme continued to spawn deaf actors for the professional theatre world as well as generate a raft of qualified sign language interpreters, teachers and specialised SEN support staff, speech therapists and more.

The key thing about TAEDS is the legacy that it leaves behind. The impact of TOD/TAEDS on the professional theatre world is unquestionable and it is to be remembered that the programme led to the birth of Co-Sign Theatre, Deafinitely Theatre, Handprint Theatre and D-Roots. Deaf and hearing alumni have also performed or been centrally involved with Graeae Theatre, Sign Dance Collective, The Fingersmiths, and The Deaf-Hearing Ensemble as well as the hugely significant Ramps to the Moon project currently in the third of its six-year tenure.

As we celebrate the 32 years of Theatre Arts, Education and Deaf Studies and the Theatre of the Deaf, it is also hugely significant that the majority of alumni are working within education or as sign language interpreters. The programme’s central aim was always concerned with the use of theatre to support and develop young deaf people as well as to promote actor training. This tradition has never waned and, in spite, of the closure of the vast majority of dedicated specialist deaf schools, the programme alumni continue to educate and support deaf people of all ages throughout the UK and beyond.
RECOLLECTIONS

Growing up, I struggled through school where communication was oral and we were punished for using sign language. Communication was a big barrier in the work place and the situation left me feeling depressed.

When I heard of this groundbreaking course, a one-year pilot, something never before taught in the UK, I jumped at the chance and got a place. I sent out a brand new path.

I remember my tutors Daphne Payne and Judith Jackson, telling me that contrary to what I thought was going to happen, I was able to bring the beauty of it in to an area that being in this course helped me to understand and find my Deaf Identity.

I hope all those that have been involved in the TDI/TADES course feel pride in all that they have achieved and the fantastic work that has grown from the seeds that this course has sown. I know I will always treasure the memories of being a part of it at all very thing.

Paula Garfield
Artistic Director Deafinitely Theatre

I recall a motorway trip with Dr Julia Boorman and a 6” cardboard Roman soldier, I also recall, courtesy of the unique and brilliant physical theatre lecturer Shane Irwin, “The floor is your friend!”

Jane Boyd, 1999–2002

It is impossible to overstate just how unique the first year of the Certificate was not only in its subject matter but also in the way it was funded, which was by a society of bodies that had never been co-partners in Higher Education before, notably the National Deaf Children’s Society and the European Economic Community (EEC), as the EU was known at the time. The other key ingredient, of course, was Daphne Payne, who threw her entire portfolio to develop the course and bring it to life. Daphne’s energy and single-minded focus were vital, not just by former students but, also, those who were privileged to teach them.

Peter Muschamp
Lecturer, Film & Drama 1973–85

I loved TADES and the varied programme... I learnt my craft from Simon Floodgate who was possibly the most patient lecturer ever. Julia was a beautiful soul who helped me shape an exciting dissertation. However the best thing was definitely the group - my best friends in the world came from this course.

Jane Boyd, 1999–2002

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Jane Boyd, 1999–2002

Since I left in 1989, I’ve been an actor for 12 years, and Artistic Director of Deafinitely Theatre for 16 years. I am a proud member of the Deaf community and know that being in this course helped me to start it all and to Simon Floodgate for having the wisdom to start it all and to Simon Floodgate for having the wisdom to start it all.

Daphne Payne
CEO/ Artistic Director, Graeae Theatre

Had it not been for the enthousiasm and dogged commitment of a small group of visionary people, TADES would have never happened. Reading would not have happened at all.

Peter Muschamp should take the credit for creating the conditions for the first manifestation of the course, but it would not have taken off without the support of Harriet Silver, the Principal of Bulmershe College of Higher Education, as it then was, and, even more importantly – his successor, Brian Reiner, who was steaming in his support for the course.

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It is impossible to overstate just how important the Theatre of the Deaf courses, to the deaf community. And it had a profound impact on the existing student population at Bulmershe, especially drama students, many of whom formed close ties with the course and its students and were directly influenced by Theatre of the Deaf approaches to theatre.

I came back to the Theatre of the Deaf twenty years later, in 2006, as an external examiner for TADES. Now a three-year degree, TADES was clearly very different to the Certificate yet there was clear lines of connection between the two.

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Jane Boyd, 1999–2002
Handprint Theatre
Handprint Theatre creates theatre for and with young people. Using storytelling, physical theatre, British Sign Language and a combination of anything they can get their hands on, the company strives to empower young audiences and celebrate Deaf accessible theatre.

Founded in 2009 by Laura Goulden, Marian Hoddy and Jacob Casselden (Deaf and hearing BA graduates from Theatre Arts, Education & Deaf Studies, University of Reading), Handprint have since toured across the UK and Channel Islands inspiring accessible arts practice. They received British Council funding to visit Los Angeles, for a cultural exchange with Deaf West Theatre, and led a youth participation project collaborating with local Deaf schools. Notably our work has included working with The Battersea Arts Centre, artsdepot, Liberty Festival at The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Discover Story Centre, Mousetrap Projects in the West End and with thousands of young people across the world.

Joyce Dunbar
Author of the text
Joyce Dunbar has written over 80 books for children, mostly picture books, including Tell Me Something Happy Before I Go To Sleep (Random House Children’s Books), Oddly (Walker Books) and I Want A Mini Tiger (Macmillan). Her picture book Snow Baby (Illustrated by Polly Dunbar) was adapted into a stage play by Long Nose Puppets. Shoe Baby (illustrated by Polly Dunbar) has been adapted into a stage play by Long Nose Puppets. (Long Nose Puppets). Shoe Baby has been performed as a play in five countries overseas as well as in the UK. Joyce has two titles being published this year: Grumpy Duck illustrated by Petr Horacek (Walker Books) in September and It’s Really Nearly Christmas illustrated by Victoria Turnbull in October 2018.

Jane Ray
Illustrator of the text
Jane Ray is an illustrator and author who has worked with a variety of publishers, but is best known for her distinctive children’s book illustrations. As well as writing and illustrating her own stories, she has worked with authors including Michael Rosen, Vivian french, Carol Ann Duffy and Jeanette Winterson. Her most recent publications are The Elephant’s Garden (written by Jane Ray) for Boxer Books in January 2017 and The Glassmaker’s Daughter (written by Dianne Hofmeyr) for Frances Lincoln in October 2017. She was the IBBY UK Illustrator Nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2018.

Planning Group:
Simon Floodgate
Ilan Dwek
Lucy O’Keeffe, 2007-10
Nadia Bernardes, 2014-17
Lucy Brown, 2015-18
Alexander Scott, 2015-18
Ben Watts, 2015-18
Becca Keys, 2015-18
Eloise Roseby, 2015-18
Tom Hepworth, 2015-18
Emily Stern, 2015-16
Eleanor, 2015-16

Speakern:
Sir David Bell, KCB Vice Chancellor
Professor Libby Taylor
Steve Revers Webb, 1996-99
Stephanie Back, 2013-16
Simon Floodgate

Time:
Sir David Bell, KCB Vice Chancellor
Professor Libby Taylor
Steve Revers Webb, 1996-99
Stephanie Back, 2013-16
Simon Floodgate

Sign Language Interpreters
Sheila Chakravarty (KCI Vice Chancellor’s Interpreters)
Professor Libby Taylor
Sarah Turner-White, 1994-96
Sian Moir, 2015-16
Simon Floodgate

Referees:
Helen Brown, 2015-18
Tony Oliver, 2015-18

Biographies
‘He doesn’t listen for his name’ said a father (who happened to be a King).

Moonbird by Joyce Dunbar

He will never forget his TAEDS years and all the wonderful memories and friendships I found there. The course was incredible, as were the students and lecturers. I am forever grateful to have experienced my Uni years with such vibrant and creative people. TAEDS family I will always love you!

Ebonny Lay, 2009-2014

For ‘Moonbird’

For a Celebration of TAEDS’
Decibels is very pleased to be sponsoring the production of this TAEDS (Theatre Arts Education and Deaf Studies) Celebratory Alumni Event Programme.

Decibels, founded in 2005, has established an Inclusive Learning Unit on the London Road Campus of the Institute of Education, University of Reading for the development and use of Sound, Music, the Arts, Drama, Film through ICT (Information & Communications Technology).

Decibels believes in a world where all people including people with deafness and other disabilities have opportunities to develop their creativity and discover their talents. We know how important the BA (Hons) TAEDS course has been to so many students from its early beginning as a Theatre of the Deaf Enterprise some 30 years ago.

For more information about Decibels, please do go to our website www.decibels.org.uk or contact Debbie Flory d.flory@decibels.org.uk Ken Carter ken.carter@decibels.org.uk