

Introduction to Accessibility in Theatre

Isolte Avila and David Bower

Course Description

In this introductory course by Isolte Avila and David Bower, Artistic Directors of Signdance Collective, **that you can take for free and on your own time**, you will learn practical access tools, how to rehearse, inclusive theatre terminology, and an abc in choreography.

With video tutorials and exclusive video footage recorded with Isolte and David you will understand how easy it is to create an accessible inclusive and diverse creative space.

When you take this course you will also get to know Signdance Collective better, one of the most inspiring theatre companies out there.

What Will You Learn?

- Practical access tools
- How to make an accessible casting
- How to rehearse
- Inclusive theatre terminology
- Abc in choreography
- What is Signdance Collective

Material Includes

- Video tutorials
- Video interviews
- Other Resources
- Course Certificate

Audience

- Theatre Professionals from all ages and career paths
- Theatre Students from all ages and career paths

- Theatre Venue Managers
- Theatre Companies
- Artistic Directors
- General Managers

About the instructors

[Isolte Avila](#)

Movement Director / Performer

Isolte was born in Cuba and trained with the Cuban ballet and members of the Alwyn Ailey Dance Company. She has a degree in dance from the California Institute of the Arts. Isolte studied and danced with Ismael Ivo and spent many summers at the wonderful Tanz Impuls Vienna. She also danced with Carlos Ortas's ChoreoArte in Venezuela. She is the founder of the art form 'Signdance Theatre' and original pioneer of signdance™ created in 1987. Since the beginning, Isolte has developed the movement for many of the company's pioneering and award-winning performances. In 2001 Isolte formed Signdance Collective with Welsh actor David Bower. Since then, she has had the privilege of collaborating with Ana Monro Theatre Company, with Kate Lawrence UK and Ornella D'Agostino Carovana SMI. Isolte is an international performer, collaborator, and movement director at the Signdance Collective.

[David Bower](#)

Artistic Director / Actor

Artistic Director/Actor, David Bower is a Welsh/English performer. He studied Theatre of the Deaf at Bulmershe College of Further Education. He joined the Basic Theatre Company, played 'Gary' in Ray Harrison-Graham's award-winning production "Gary", winning an Edinburgh Fringe First. He studied the newly created art form Signdance as an apprentice performer at Common Ground Sign Dance Theatre from 1989. He tours extensively, performing at major street theatre and theatre festivals worldwide. His films have been screened across the globe at festivals and events. 'Rapid Intervention' was shown at Cannes Film Festival. Radio work includes Quasimodo, 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' BBC Radio 4, 'Shall I say a Kiss,' BBC Radio 4, 'Dragonfly,' BBC Radio 4,

'A Small Piece of Silence', 'The Heart is a Lonely Hunter', 2020. In July 2013, he recorded the radio version of Bad Elvis with the BBC and played the lead in the stage production. He is an associate artist at the BBC. He played Hugh Grant's brother in Four Weddings and a Funeral directed by Mike Newell and written by Richard Curtis.

Theatre University

8 months ago

This course is indispensable and imperative. If you make theatre you need to take it. There is no excuse to keep doing things wrong anymore. The accessibility tools and tips are so basic it kinds of puts us all to shame if we don't know and apply them. Thank you so much to the lovely teachers for taking the time to educate us in this matter. I really needed this course.

Course Curriculum

LESSON 1

How to Approach your Artistic Career

David's Calling - 03:02 - <https://youtu.be/cXbIw aPN6w>

In this video David Bower explains how he started his performing career and gives us wonderful advice and insight into how to approach our art and how to find our way in the artistic world.

LESSON 2

Introduction to Signdance Collective

The History of Signdance Collective by Isolte Avila - 15:14 - <https://youtu.be/ 20xB08aGK4>

Isolte Avila, founder and artistic director of Signdance Collective explains how the company came to be, how they have evolved and why are they working internationally.

The History of Signdance Collective by David Bower - 12:58 -
<https://youtu.be/aRhPXMxTKQk>

David Bower, artistic director of Signdance Collective explains how he started in the company, and how they have evolved internationally.

LESSON 3

British Sign Language Basics for Theatre - 03:58 -
<https://youtu.be/hPWtbo6CjsA>

British Sign Language Tutorial for Theatre Practitioners.

The benefit of acquiring some skill or even a rudimentary knowledge of Sign Language is immense. As artists, it is important for us to develop a broad communication skill set. We need to be able to communicate our story by any means necessary. Jim Carrey's character in *The Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* says, "Talking is not Communicating". We know that speech can communicate ideas, yet we can also look at this quote and ask ourselves what is real communication? Part of real communication maybe lies in intention. We can communicate so much in other ways aside from speech, in fact as artists it's often more desirable to be able to do this.

In the early days of cinema, the USA was a country full of people from all over the world and not everybody shared one language. This is one reason that silent films were enjoyed by so many people. The deaf community were often employed on set in Hollywood to advise and help direct.

As a quick thought experiment, memorise a few of the signs from the sign language tutorial and phrase them roughly within a sentence and imagine how you might begin to communicate with a deaf performer in a rehearsal, use your common sense and bring your own natural body language into play and don't exaggerate but enunciate your words clearly and keep it natural, Deaf people are smart too.

Transcript:

0:13.50

Isolte Avila:

"Hi, we've come up with a list of signs that you might use for your rehearsal and in the theatre and when you are working with Deaf performers. Now there are thousands and thousands of signs for the theatre, as you might guess. But this is a nice list that you can start with, enjoy!"

0:40.23

David Bower:

"Theatre".

0:43.00

Isolte Avila:

"Dance".

0:46.76

David Bower:

"Director".

0:49.60

Isolte Avila:

"Movement".

0:53.16

David Bower:

"Blocking".

0:56.73

Isolte Avila:

"Choreography".

0:59.63

David Bower:

"First position, please".

1:06.43

Isolte Avila:

"We can start".

1:11.03

David Bower:

"Actor".

1:14.10

Isolte Avila:

"Faster".

1:17.33

David Bower:

"Good but slow down".

1:27.03

Isolte Avila:

"Lights on. Lights off".

1:32.96

David Bower:

"Rehearsal. Tech rehearsal. Costume rehearsal".

1:47.93

Isolte Avila:

"Clear the space".

1:54.86

David Bower:

"Silence, please".

2:01.30

Isolte Avila:

"Take a break".

2:06.16

David Bower:

"Coffee, Tea, Water?"

2:20.13

Isolte Avila:

"Which?".

2:23.66

David Bower:

"Schedule".

2:27.90

Isolte Avila:

"Everybody, jump!".

2:32.93

David Bower:

"Louder".

2:35.66

Isolte Avila:

"Turn".

2:38.16

David Bower:

"Faster".

2:41.16

Isolte Avila:

"Lie down".

2:42.96

David Bower:

"Stronger".

2:46.03

Isolte Avila:

"Up and down. Up and down".

2:51.10

David Bower:

"More gentle".

2:43.90

Isolte Avila:

"Roll".

2:56.40

David Bower:

"Softer".

2:59.96

Isolte Avila:

"Crawl".

3:03.50

David Bower:

"Pause, first".

3:06.26

Isolte Avila:

"Stand".

3:08.56

David Bower:

"Think".

3:09.53

Isolte Avila:

"Sit".

3:11.66

David Bower:

"And then start your speech".

3:15.80

Isolte Avila:

"Writer".

3:19.20

David Bower:

"Script".

3:21.30

Isolte Avila:

"Designer".

3:26.00

David Bower:

"Centre stage".

3:29.40

Isolte Avila:

"Set".

3:33.80

David Bower:

"Wings".

3:37.36

Isolte Avila:

"Back stage".

3:42.00

David Bower:

"Bravo!".

3:44.63

Isolte Avila:

"Take a bow".

LESSON 4

Practical Access Tools

Practical Access Tools - 03:08 - <https://youtu.be/CrJEbxOsXfE>

This is the transcript for the Practical Access Tools film. All the points raised in the film can be referenced quickly here at your convenience. The points made in the film help to provide a basic picture of how a venue can go about making their space accessible.

Ultimately though, access is often about common sense and forward planning alongside venue users and artists.

Take five minutes for yourself to think about the various sorts of disabilities that people have and imagine what obstacles having that disability might present and then note down each Disability making as many sub categorical bullet points for each as it occurs as to how you could make your space more accessible.

If there is a disability that you don't fully understand, do a little research and then think about how you could improve venue access based on your findings.

A lot of access provision can easily transcend functionality and be aesthetically enhanced.

A basic example might be related to improved and innovative use of lighting for visually impaired users resulting in something that everybody can enjoy.

Transcript as follows:

- Make sure that you have access for the Disabled performers. Lifts and ramps, everything that's needed so that I can get around, thank you.

- Pre-plan with the venues that you are visiting and ask them if they can make sure that the backstage area is clear and well lit.

- Make sure that there is a light on you, So that Deaf people can understand what you are saying with lip reading.
- Work together as a team, in partnership with Disabled people, we've got access tools, and we know what we are talking about.
- Tell the venues to clear the corridors and access routes, organise the wires and just light up the space in general.
- Be concise, clear and to the point. Thank you.
- Make sure that the theatre knows that there are Deaf and Disabled artists on their way.
- When we are in a group conversation, theatre, directors notes or whatever. If people are just anywhere in the space, it's much harder to communicate. But if everyone is in a circle, it means that everyone can see each other, problem solved.
- Maybe organise a tour of the space, backstage areas with the theatre. So that the artists are confident during the day and during the run. Make sure that there are no obstacles or things that people can trip over, you know, stuff like that.
- If Disabled access toilets are used to store things like paint and ladders. Clear it out quickly because people need to use it.

LESSON 5

How to Rehearse

Rehearsal Practical Tools - 08:22 - <https://youtu.be/9mlmRtZVLS0>

- 1- Always learn a bit of sign language before working with Deaf performers.
- 2- Use a theatre friendly sign language interpreter.
- 3- Allow for plenty of time for communication.
- 4- Let the diversity do the talking.
- 5- Open up to new possibilities by working with Deaf & Disabled artists within the cast or in leadership positions there is a wealth of new possibilities and ideas.
- 6- Look for the possibilities, not the barriers, with both language and physical vocabulary for your work.

7-Enjoy the exploration & possibilities of diverse bodies & language. The enjoyment goes in all directions.

8- Take risks, but take everyone with you when you do take physical and risks with soundscapes. Consult the team & keep check on whether things are working okay.

9- Do consistent pre & post debriefs.

LESSON 6

ABC in Choreography

Sign language and Choreography Alphabet - 01:39 -
<https://youtu.be/cXsi4EF4tbY>

LESSON 7

Online Resources

Find below some links that can be useful in different situations:

[Disability Rights UK](#) work to create a society where disabled people have equal power, rights and equality of opportunity. Have a look at what they do here: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/about-us>

The Irish [National Disability Authority](#) has free online resources for helping public sector staff. These include a [library](#), an online [accessibility toolkit](#), an [eLearning](#) module for disability equality training, and [videos](#) of conferences and interviews.

It is also interesting to read and remember:
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act>

Also, if you're facing a problem at college or university, [click here](#). This will take you through to information about the Equality Act and ways you can assert your rights in education.

There are links to template complaint letters and videos illustrating how disabled people have campaigned to improve participation and made changes through other legal processes such as injunctive relief.

Whether you have a disability, long term health condition or learning difficulty, the Education pathways aim to give you enough understanding to take action early, when a problem first arises.