DEAF LIKE me

ENGAGING ‘HARD-TO-REACH’ DEAF AUDIENCES THROUGH THEATRE

A Report by Adam Wilmington
There is a wealth of information in this report that we shall continue to digest for some time to come. If communication access is on a continuum - ranging from an interpreter at the side of the stage to theatre performed in British Sign Language (BSL) by D/deaf and hearing actors (with voice-over) - then Red Earth’s work is at the further end of that spectrum. We integrate D/deaf and hearing actors, speaking and signing, and incorporate creative captioning, for mixed audiences. In such work, English tends to be the dominant language (but not always). We also work on the very edge of the spectrum, co-producing and directing theatre in BSL with D/deaf community groups for mainly D/deaf audiences. In this case, English translation is given live by an off-stage interpreter and amplified.

We have long understood that genuinely inclusive theatre cannot simply be rolled out across the theatre sector. Rather, it is a matter of encouraging change one company at a time, one venue at a time. Not everyone in the theatre community will be interested to work at the farthest reaches of the spectrum, but we can all advance our access offer. We hope the evidence presented here will encourage other companies to consider exploring access in radical new ways and to work to the learning edge of their practice. Certainly the evidence is clear that there is universal dislike among D/deaf audiences of the method of placing an interpreter at the side of the stage. The example of inclusive practice discussed here is not proposed as the model to follow. Instead, it is offered in a spirit of openness and curiosity: Here is what we’re doing, we’re constantly learning, we hope it is of use to others. We make the path by walking it.

How to talk to D/deaf audiences? Show up, pay attention and listen. Provide audiences with the access to tell you what they think and they will respond with honesty, grace and generosity. In our experience, D/deaf audiences value such opportunities because few people in the majority hearing world seek out their opinions, and rarely ask about arts and culture. Keep your audiences close, but keep your D/deaf and disabled audiences closer (especially children). Both of us went out with the show to every performance, and together with company members, enjoyed lengthy informal conversations with audience members and promoters before and after each event.
Relevance to hearing audiences? This report provides powerful evidence of the positive impact of integrated theatre on hearing audiences as well as D/deaf. Research by the National Deaf Children’s Society has revealed that according to D/deaf children, greater awareness of D/deafness by the hearing community would most likely make the single biggest difference to their lives. The role of integrated theatre in raising awareness and promoting community cohesion, as well as entertaining diverse audiences with markedly different communication needs, should not be overlooked.

It has been salutary to reflect on how much Year 6 hearing pupils, like Deeshaan and Hussein, loved the use of ‘English and sign language at the same time’ - they thought it was ‘amazing communication’; and on the experiences of D/deaf 16 year olds like Rabiya and Sundeeeep who hadn’t known ‘speech and signing was possible’ and who were thrilled to see actors signing for the first time. ‘It was beautiful to watch,’ they said; and especially to note the response of Norah age 66, who was moved to see on stage someone, ‘D/deaf like me.’ We all have an insatiable appetite to understand our relevance in the context of our human relationships and our place in the world. To see ourselves, and our lives reflected on stage is so important, at the very least in order to affirm we are more alike than we are different.

There is one test of inclusive theatre, and to borrow David Edgar’s metaphor, it is a litmus test. When the access is sorted, what remains? What traces of the most ephemeral and immediate of art forms are left behind? This is the real flesh and blood stuff of art. We will know we have succeeded when access is commonly both an aesthetic choice, and a universal communication standard in contemporary theatre practice.

We are grateful to the University of Nottingham for their continuing support of Red Earth Theatre’s work across mixed communities and audiences of D/deaf and disabled, hearing and non-disabled children and adults. The Midlands3Cities initiative has provided an invaluable opportunity for Red Earth to further its conversation with audiences, particularly with D/deaf people, across the Midlands and South Yorkshire. Our student placement from the University of Nottingham and author of this report, Adam Wilmington, was a sensitive, intelligent and deeply humane presence throughout the rehearsal process and on tour. Adam has worked tirelessly to gather, process and present the information reported here, and we are indebted to him. A special thank you too, to Dr. Jo Robinson, University of Nottingham, for keeping us all on track.

Wendy Rouse and Amanda Wilde
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines research that investigated Red Earth Theatre’s integrative creative process and its impact on D/deaf and hearing audiences in the light of Arts Council England’s Creative Case for Diversity.

Funded by support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the University of Nottingham, via the Midlands3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership Student Development Fund, the research was conducted by Adam Wilmington (University of Nottingham Ph.D student) in conjunction with Red Earth Theatre.

The research investigated Red Earth Theatre’s production of a new play, Mirror Mirror, and analysed the quality of access and communication for D/deaf and hearing audiences on a short tour to Deaf clubs and primary schools, prior to a national tour of theatre venues and rural touring schemes later in the year.

Through in-depth group interviews and questionnaires, the research engaged with over 100 D/deaf and deaf people, ranging in age from 7 to 71 years, all of whom had watched a performance of Mirror Mirror in a school or Deaf club, in Nottingham, Sheffield, Doncaster, Derby, Birmingham or Leicester.

KEY QUESTION: How to involve more D/deaf people of all ages in the arts?

SOME ISSUES:

• Many D/deaf people face multiple barriers to access – including informational, economic, geographic, social and psychological.

• A major stumbling block to participation may not be lack of interest, wherewithal or ability, but lack of communication access.

• D/deaf people have to know that what Red Earth is offering exists, to see it as important to them and be willing to engage with it.

• How to reduce barriers and maximize opportunities?

• Access choices we make for audiences rather than with them.

• How to develop communities, not just audiences?

• A perceived reluctance on the part of many D/deaf people to attend theatres/arts centres, apparently based on a belief that the programme is not for them/not in their language.

MAIN FINDINGS

The Creative Case for Diversity

Red Earth exemplified Arts Council England’s Creative Case for Diversity via a model of advanced integrative practice. The company’s collaborative, transparent and open approach to theatre-making encouraged a context of equality and mutual respect for D/deaf and hearing company members. Within a framework that promoted diversity in terms of an
artistic- (in contrast to a deficit-) model, there was high recognition of D/deaf artists and audiences as central to the work.

**Audience Language Preferences**

Although D/deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users said they could access Sign Supported English (SSE) in *Mirror Mirror*, they expressed a strong language preference for BSL. This, respondents explained, was because BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar and syntax. Thus, it was argued, BSL gave a much fuller, more rounded and complete communication experience, especially for those whose first language is BSL. In contrast, many younger (age 26 and below) D/deaf respondents expressed appreciation of a mixture of voice and sign, BSL and SSE.

A key recommendation of this report is that Red Earth continue to cultivate its Total Communication techniques, including visual theatre and visual vernacular, which were seen to have universal appeal for D/deaf and hearing audiences. Whilst visual theatre was acknowledged to be one of the company’s great strengths, it is also important to note Red Earth’s commitment to spoken and signed language. Words - oral and physical – were considered a primary element of Total Communication.

Whilst recognizing the challenge of holding in balance the different communication needs of its audiences, it is suggested that the company maximize its use of BSL in productions. Such a change, it is anticipated, would offer greater quality and depth of experience for D/deaf people whose first language is BSL.

**Modifying Informational Barriers**

It was noteworthy how many D/deaf respondents had neither heard of nor seen integrated theatre. It was experienced as radical and revelatory, and warmly embraced. Although Red Earth widely distributed 2 promotional videos in BSL by D/deaf company members, there was still some uncertainty at some venues about what to expect. It is recommended that information be given to those who need it via multiple channels and in an accessible form: the right language and the right medium.

**Not for Me**

There was a distinct concern among D/deaf respondents that theatre venues did not cater for D/deaf people, and if they did, the level of access was often seen as unsatisfactory. There was widespread dislike of the method of placing an interpreter at the side of the stage. The infrequency of accessible productions also received much criticism. It is recommended that Red Earth work directly with the communities it wishes to serve, bringing local venues into the relationship subsequently, once groups are established and active.

**Decline of Deaf Clubs**

Concern was expressed by D/deaf respondents about the declining number of Deaf clubs in England, owing to lack of funds, and also about the declining numbers of people attending Deaf clubs. *Mirror Mirror* sold out at 2 venues and numbers were buoyant everywhere else. Members of Deaf Clubs in Coventry and Hull travelled to other parts of the country to see the
show. It is recommended that Red Earth maintain and extend its connections with Deaf clubs and look to support and collaborate with arts events if it proved to be something the D/deaf community wanted.

Resources
This report raises questions about the impact of limited resources in small-scale theatre on reaching the people who need access most. There was also discussion by the company and audiences on whether additional performers in Mirror Mirror might enhance and extend access, and advance integrated storytelling techniques. It is recommended that Red Earth continue to fundraise in support of the company’s ambition to establish a full-time D/deaf Producer post. In addition, it was suggested the company fundraise to support more time and resources to enable them to achieve full communication potential for each production.

For more, see page 51: Recommendations

“Before I watched that, I expected quite a lot of actors, but there were only two actors and there were a lot of character changes.

Very, very clever.
Very clever.”

Jennifer, Deaf, 48, Derby
1. Introduction
1. Introduction

Overview of this report:

This report is the product of a three-month research placement funded by the Midland3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership and on behalf of Red Earth Theatre in the context of Arts Council England’s Creative Case for Diversity initiative. The research consists of an ethnographic study of Red Earth Theatre’s creative process as well as a qualitative analysis of responses taken from audiences attending the sign-integrated theatre production Mirror Mirror as it commenced a short tour of Deaf Clubs and communities as well as primary schools in the Midlands and north of England in advance of a national tour to mainstream venues and rural touring schemes. The timeframe of the research period spanned from 30th January to 28th April 2017.

The purpose of this research was to explore the extent to which the methods of Red Earth’s theatre-making communicate effectively across their audience base of: children and families, D/deaf audiences, hearing audiences, and those with a broad range of communication needs. The research focused on enabling a greater understanding of the impact of Red Earth’s theatre-making process has on these audiences, with particular focus on the use of sign-integration within their work.

The ultimate aim of this report is to provide information concerning, and analysis of, the production and performance of Mirror Mirror by Red Earth Theatre, identifying barriers to access and communication for D/deaf and hearing audiences, culminating in future recommendations drawn from the careful study of the research’s overall findings. These recommendations and findings are informed by analysis of feedback taken from audience members as well as the members and employees of Red Earth.

How this report is structured:

Research was carried out through three methods: an ethnography of Red Earth’s practices and performances; a process of group interviews, and questionnaires completed by the audience. Due to the scope of this research and its multi-method approach, this report will differ slightly in its format to others with the inclusion of a Fieldwork section to supplement understanding of the overall Findings.

In what follows of this introductory section, there is a general overview of the D/deaf community as well as the definition of important terms and phrases used throughout the report.

The next section, Methodology, outlines the research questions, methods of qualitative research and analysis used, and ethical considerations.

Fieldwork, the third section, outlines key observations from the ethnographic study of Red Earth’s devising, rehearsal and performance.

The penultimate section, Findings, collects the key findings throughout the research process, both in terms of Red Earth and their audiences.

Finally, Conclusions and Recommendations summarises the findings from the research and suggests solutions to any barriers to access or inclusion found within the scope of the project.
Terms and Phrases Used:

British Sign Language (BSL): is the sign language predominantly used by people in D/deaf communities and cultures in England and Britain. It was recognised as an official minority language in 2003 with the 2011 Census representing the first time it was offered as an option for an individual’s language. It is independent of other nations’ sign-languages and includes regional variations of signs within the United Kingdom. Unlike other signing systems such as Sign Supported English (SSE) or Signed English (SE), BSL is a language, which is neither dependent on nor strongly related to written or spoken English, using a distinct grammatical system.

It is estimated that approximately 87,000 D/deaf people in the UK use British Sign Language as their first or preferred language. Many others know and use BSL, but not as their first language. (British Deaf Association.)

D/deaf: This research uses the term ‘D/deaf’ to refer to the numerous identities and cultures, which exist within D/deaf communities. People who are D/deaf may be Deaf, deafened, deaf or hard-of-hearing. Deaf - with a capital ‘D’ - indicates those who identify themselves in terms of a specific Deaf culture and community, preserving a deep sense of Deaf identity. The majority of D/deaf people who volunteered to participate in the research were Deaf, used BSL and identified themselves in terms of their relation to Deaf culture and community. For titles and attributing highlighted quotations, I have used capital ‘D’ Deaf. Otherwise, the term ‘D/deaf’ is used throughout.

D/deafness is not typically perceived as a disability, but rather as a way of interacting with and understanding the world along different cultural norms and priorities. Not all D/deaf people consider themselves to be part of a D/deaf community however, with Deaf people mainly comprising these communities.

"I like a bit of both – signing and speaking at the same time and having one person speak and the other person sign. I like both."

Aisha, Deaf, Year 6, Leicester
Sign-integrated theatre: Theatre which uses sign-language (for the purposes of this report - BSL) as a component part of the performance, with actors integrating signing into the on-stage action. This is a separate method from many other forms of 'D/deaf accessible' theatre, which commonly consist of captions or Interpreter support set apart from the performance.

Sign Supported English (SSE) is a form of sign language that uses BSL signs as a supplement to spoken English, using the grammatical structure of the spoken language. SSE is often employed in educational settings and by those who have BSL but mix mainly with hearing people. 1.

Total Communication: refers to a model of education and communication, which emphasises the use of multiple modes of communication. In relation to D/deaf culture and BSL, it consists of utilising a combination of methods flexibly – sign, speech and hearing, fingerspelling, gesture, facial expression and lipreading. 2 In terms of performance, Red Earth see it as the ‘use of a number of modes of communication in theatre including metaphor, symbol, costume, set, lighting, auditory, signed, oral and written.’ 3.

Visual Vernacular (VV): A recent innovation in dramatic expression based on physical expression. VV is theatrical storytelling without words and with a strong sense of body movements, iconic signs, gestures and facial expressions. It has elements of mime but utilises mainly the top half of the body as the storyteller’s palette and confines the playing area to a tight circle of space. 4 VV utilises universal physical and gestural signing but does not incorporate BSL. Red Earth see VV as a ‘theatrical and physical form of storytelling with strong body movements, signs, gestures and facial expressions. VV draws on cinematic ideas like close-ups, images dissolving into new images and so forth.’ 5.

Background:

Red Earth Theatre

Founded in 1999, Red Earth is a small-scale touring theatre company based in the East Midlands with a reputation for producing accessible theatre for hearing and D/deaf audiences. They pursue the development of drama projects for children, young people and communities with an audience base consisting of: children and families, D/deaf audiences, hearing audiences and those with a broad range of communication needs.

Red Earth is a Company Limited by Guarantee which in 2010 became a Registered Charity and, in April 2012, a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) with a remit for touring diverse work (disability), focused on children and young people. Heading the company are Wendy Rouse and Amanda Wilde as joint directors. Red Earth maintains deep and long-standing (15 years) ties to the D/deaf community in the East Midlands area - particularly Derby - and strives to include the opinions and thoughts of D/deaf people in their creative work. Additionally, Red Earth is a Regional Rep company for ITC (Independent Theatre Council).

“This [Mirror, Mirror] was very interesting, it was beautiful to watch.”

Sundeep, Deaf, Year 12, Ellesmere College, Leicester
Creative Case for Diversity

The Creative Case for Diversity was formulated in 2011 as Arts Council England’s commitment to an arts-centred approach to embracing diversity. This approach recognises diversity (in relation to this research, a diversity of communication needs) as being central to the production and appreciation of art in 21st century Britain, with a recognition that ‘art placed in the margins through structural barriers and antiquated and exclusive approaches has to be brought to the centre of our culture and valued accordingly.’ This vision directly challenges incrementalist conceptions of a medical model of disability, which assumes that a deficit exists within the individual, representing something to ‘fix, cure, accommodate, or endure.’

Through their official publications, the Arts Council have described the Creative Case approach in terms of ‘three interlocking progressions’:

1. Equality - There has to be a continued drive for equality to remove barriers in the arts world, releasing and realising potential and helping to transform the arts so that they truly reflect the reality of the diverse country that we have become but still do not fully recognise.

2. Recognition - There has to be a new conversation that attempts through various means to restate diverse artists, both historically and theoretically, at the centre of British art – whether that is the performing arts, the visual arts, combined arts, music, literature or film.

3. A new vision - We need a new framework for viewing diversity, one that takes it out of a negative or ‘deficit’ model and places it in an artistic context. Diversity becomes not an optional extra but part of the fabric of our discussions and decisions about how we encourage an energetic, relevant, fearless and challenging artistic culture in England and the wider world.


D/deaf People in England

There is little information or analysis regarding theatre-going patterns or engagement across D/deaf communities and D/deaf people in England or the United Kingdom. Moreover, there is little demographic data on D/deaf people and their communities in general – especially with regard to their language preferences and communication needs. Estimates for the amount of D/deaf people in England and the UK vary quite significantly \(^{10}\) and their reliability is often questioned. \(^{11}\)

The following information on D/deaf people in England is taken from OPM’s (Office for Public Management) comprehensive review of research literature and data concerning this topic:

- In 2010 there were 56,400 people registered as being deaf in England.

- The 2011 Census indicates that there are 15,482 people in England and Wales whose main language is BSL.

- On the other hand, prevalence data from the GP Patient Survey implies that around 188,000 people (0.44% of the adult population in England) are D/deaf and use sign language.

- Other sources estimate that BSL is the first or preferred language for 87,000 people.

- According to the 2011 Census for England and Wales, 65% of BSL users cannot speak English or cannot speak English well.

There are many misconceptions about D/deafness and D/deaf culture within the majority hearing society. The foremost of these being that D/deafness is a disability whereby D/deaf people are defined by their lack of ability in terms of hearing, a perception along the lines of the ‘deficit’ model which the Creative Case seeks to challenge and overturn. Rather, D/deaf people commonly enjoy their own sense of community and culture, cultivating a distinct D/deaf identity, which repudiates the notion of a ‘deficit’ on behalf of the individuals within the community.

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Schedule of Placement

Rehearsal Period:
Shakespeare House, Derby – Monday 30 January to Wednesday 15 February.

Performances:
Nottingham Deaf Club – Friday 17 February.
Sheffield Deaf Club – Saturday 18 February.

Re-rehearsal:
Shakespeare House, Derby – Monday 20 February to Wednesday 22 February.

Performances:
Doncaster Deaf Club at Doncaster Deaf Community Centre – Friday 24 February.
Derby Deaf Club at Rycote Centre – Saturday 25 February.
Birmingham Deaf Club at Ladywood Social Club – Sunday 26 February.
Reigate School, Derby – Monday 28 February.
Spinney Hill School, Leicester, Wednesday 1 March (two performances).
2. Methodology
2. Methodology

Research Aims:

The two main research aims were as follows:

1. To gain a fuller understanding of Red Earth’s artistic process and its relationship to Arts Council England’s Creative Case for Diversity.

2. To identify key outcomes for the future development of relations between venues and Red Earth’s audiences, particularly those characterised as ‘hard to reach’.

Research Questions:

- What is Red Earth’s artistic/creative process?
- What is its relationship to the Creative Case for Diversity approach?
- Does Red Earth’s theatre communicate effectively across its audience base of children and families, D/deaf audiences, hearing audiences and those with a broad range of communication needs?
- What can be done to improve Red Earth’s approach?
- How do ‘hard to reach’ D/deaf audience members feel about their relationship to theatre?
- How could access to theatre for these audiences be improved?

Research Design:

The qualitative research was designed with a multi-method approach: an organisational ethnography of Red Earth’s creative process, and thematic data analysis derived from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from audience members at each showing of Mirror, Mirror.  

“It was very good, because you did both English and sign language at the same time”

Hussein, Year 6, Leicester

**Ethnography Design:** In order to address the first research aim outlined above, an organisational ethnography was undertaken by the researcher throughout the devising, rehearsal, re-rehearsal and touring periods of the project. During the span of this ethnography from 30th January to 1st March 2017, the researcher acted as an observer participant. This aspect of the research was a multi-method approach consisting of observation, interviews (structured and semi-structured), document analysis, examination of key artefacts and forging relationships with the company members in order to achieve a closer view of the inclusivity of Red Earth’s practices across hearing and D/deaf people. The products of this ethnography are detailed in the **Fieldwork** section of this report, with summarised findings in the **Findings** section.

**Interview Design:** Interviews were semi-structured and facilitated by an interpreter in all cases to ensure access to D/deaf audience members. Originally, the interviews were designed to be structured and held on an individual basis; however, after intensive discussions with Red Earth’s interpreters and many members of the D/deaf community, it was strongly recommended that group interviews take place instead. One exchange after the first performance of *Mirror Mirror* at Nottingham Deaf Club is particularly illustrative of this:

“**Clarissa [D/deaf, 48]:** I like to give feedback, but some D/deaf people don’t have the confidence to give feedback.

**Carol [D/deaf, 71]:** Well, you have to be honest.

**Clarissa:** Yeah I know. I have the confidence to be honest. But I question if deaf people in general have the courage to do it. In fact, you could ask lots and lots of questions and people go ‘yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s fine’, and then I go ‘oh no, I’m finding it difficult’, and then suddenly loads of people who said ‘yeah’ beforehand agree with me! So sometimes you need to lead.

**Interviewer:** What is the best way for me to get answers out of those people who aren’t confident?

**Carol:** It is hard, it is hard. Maybe at the beginning, ask for a small group of D/deaf people. Like us, we have more confidence together. If you’re filmed on your own it doesn’t feel comfortable, but having this group means you have more confidence and you feel more comfortable. So 3-4 people together would get more out of them.”

This recommendation allowed for a greater variety of response and provoked enthusiasm from participants. Due to the nature of this research, focused upon the attitudes of audiences at Red Earth’s productions, an approach of maximum variation sampling was adopted to ensure that as many perspectives and opinions were recorded as possible.

Analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken through applied thematic qualitative analysis, with key themes identified from the transcripts in relation to the project’s research aims and questions.
Questionnaire Design:

Due to the limitations placed on the number of people who were able to be interviewed at each location (for reasons of time, space and the voluntary nature of participation), it was decided that a supplemental, semi-structured questionnaire (with a majority of open questions and some closed) should be offered to audience members as well. D/deaf people made up the majority of volunteers for the interview process (representing 24 out of 37 focus group participants) and so the questionnaire allowed a greater proportion of hearing audience members to be represented than would otherwise have occurred (36 out of 63 questionnaire responses were from hearing audience members), allowing for a fuller interpretation of audience response to Mirror Mirror.

The questionnaire was designed to explore the research questions of this project whilst utilising clear and simple English in order to increase access to those audience members for whom English was not their first language. For those wishing to give feedback but with a preference for communicating in sign language (universally BSL in the process of this research), group interviews were provided as an option with full access.

Participants:

The participants referred to in this section relate to those audience members who provided feedback through the interview process or by completing questionnaires.

Sample: The sample used was one of maximum variation, where all participation in the research process was voluntary and open to anyone who wished to comment. In relation to the school audience who saw the production, volunteers were found and determined by faculty staff of their respective institutions in the interview process a total of 37 participants volunteered to take part: 23 of whom were Deaf; 1 being hard of hearing; and 13 hearing people.

Age: A broad spectrum of ages participated in the research process, with a range from 7 years old to 71-years old.

Location: The interviews and questionnaires were carried out at the sites of each performance as it toured through the Midlands:

Nottingham Deaf Club – Friday 17 February, 6 p.m.
Sheffield Deaf Club – Saturday 18 February, 3 p.m.
Doncaster Deaf Club at Doncaster Deaf Community Centre – Friday 24 February, 7.30 p.m.
Derby Deaf Club at the Rycote Centre – Saturday 25 February, 7 p.m.
Birmingham Deaf Club at Ladywood Social Club – Sunday 26 February, 6 p.m.
Reigate School, Derby – Monday 28 February, 10.20 a.m.
Spinney Hill School, Leicester, Wednesday 1 March, 10.20 a.m. and 1.30 p.m.
Ethics:

Consent: At the beginning and end of each show, audience members were informed of the nature of the research by Amanda Wilde and volunteers were asked to participate in the interview process or to fill in a questionnaire. This introduction included a full brief concerning the project, the researcher and how participants’ information would be secured and used.

This information was re-iterated by the researcher at the commencement of each interview and all participants were invited to share any concerns or questions.

Consent was formally requested through participants verbally stating their consent to the terms and conditions of the research. In terms of the interviews conducted with children and young people within school settings, parental consent was sought and acquired by the staff of the participant’s respective institutions.

Participants (and in the case of schools, teachers) were told how to contact the researcher in the case of any further queries or to discuss their part in the research.

“"It was great communication – with the sign language. It’s amazing.""  
Deeshaan, Year 6, Leicester

Child Protection: The researcher secured a DBS certificate for those performances which took place in school settings.

Access for D/deaf people: A sign language interpreter was present at all times to provide access to D/deaf people wishing to communicate with the researcher or take a part in the interview process. Multiple avenues of participation were offered to further access to the research process for ‘hard to reach’ audiences.

Data Protection: At all times, the protection of participants’ data and identities was an utmost priority. Only the researcher had access to participants’ personal information in carrying out the research. This information was only used for the purposes of this report with all personal information and materials securely stored on a password-protected computer and e-mail account only accessible by the researcher.

Audio recordings and videos of participants were taken throughout the process of the project and were stored securely on a password-protected computer to which only the researcher had access. These recordings were used for the sole purpose of transcription and were deleted on completion of this report.

All participants in the research were granted anonymity and assigned pseudonyms to protect identities and the integrity of the data.
Limitations:

Sites of interview: Of the eight venues used to perform Mirror Mirror, only two were in traditionally configured spaces (in community centres) with a raised stage and a clearly demarcated seating area. Others varied in size and the ability to accommodate an interviewing process, meaning that interviews in some venues had to be conducted in busy rooms with the audience still milling around and with the set being dismantled and packed away. This meant that interviews normally had to be limited to between 30-45 minutes; however, they usually reached a natural conclusion before that time. During the primary school interviews, specifically Spinney Hill, the time allowed for interviews was restricted due to timetabling concerns. As such, these interviews were cut short.

Another limitation of these interview spaces was the presence of unavoidable background noise and its effect on the quality of recording. All interviews were ultimately fully recorded and transcribed.

Access to English online: Many D/deaf people do not speak English as their first language and as a general rule are disinclined to respond to e-mail surveys. As such, initial considerations of online or e-mail surveys was, after consultation with D/deaf community members, considered to be a potentially unfruitful means of holding conversations with the D/deaf community. This limited the scope of the research to interviews and questionnaires conducted on the day of the event, with little opportunity for follow-up aside from a handful of cases where participants were willing to be contacted for follow-up questions. The strength of response to the interview process exceeded expectations, delivering a rich store of in-depth information, opinion and suggestions for both Red Earth and sign-integrated theatre in the future.

Resources: This research was carried out by one researcher contracted within a three month time span, with two months for organising, transcribing and analysing responses from two qualitative approaches, as well as writing the report. Although the researcher worked past the initial deadline, any time-limited research tied to funding will understandably encounter limitations to scope.
3. Fieldwork
3. Fieldwork

Unlike the rest of this report, this section will be told from the perspective of the researcher to reflect the participant observation approach to the ethnographic process.

Design Meeting

My time with Red Earth began with a design meeting held at the company’s headquarters in Belper, towards the end of 2016 and ahead of the official start date of my placement. Here I met some of the central organising forces behind the creative process, which would lead to the production of Mirror Mirror – Red Earth’s Co-Artistic Directors, Amanda Wilde and Wendy Rouse and Associate Director/Designer, Laura McEwan.

Mirror Mirror was to be a theatrical adaptation of Snow White, created through a process of ‘devising’ - a collaborative approach to theatre-making which relies upon the opinions and suggestions of all those involved in the rehearsal process.

The session was planned in order to solidify some of the ideas already discussed between Amanda, Wendy and Laura – with Laura exhibiting her concept work and designs for the puppets in the show (for the seven dwarfs and Snow White), the stage furniture and the set – and to iron out whatever unresolved issues were apparent before the devising and rehearsal period began in earnest. It was immediately clear how much consideration had already been taken for the upcoming production, with an abundance of in-depth design documents, already established creative ideas and suggestions being enthusiastically shared among the three.

Indeed, many of the key aspects of Red Earth’s creative process (Total Communication, access for a range of hearing and D/deaf audiences, a ‘storytelling’ approach to theatrical presentation and an emphasis on collaboration) were apparent from this early stage, with discussions revealing the conviction that all aspects of their theatre-making – whether aesthetic, semiotic or dramaturgical – be equally significant as methods of communication. For instance, it was decided to have as much of a complete set, backdrop and collection of props as possible ready for when rehearsals were due to start. The implication of this was that it would aid with the devising of a narrative by allowing the set’s visual design to act as a foundation to build upon.
It was also clear that all subjects of discussion were seen through the lens of their potential accessibility across Red Earth’s audience base. For example, an emphasis was put on the use of puppets and multi-purpose props (e.g., a tiered ‘wedding cake’ which separated into three containers) in order to communicate in visually striking and engaging ways. Notably, these aesthetic and semiotic entities were not embedded in written or spoken language – a reflection of Red Earth’s Total Communication approach to theatre-making. For instance, Laura shared a design for a series of stools, which could be rearranged and positioned to represent trees for what a sequence in which Snow White is pursued by the Huntsman.

Another suggestion was to use balloons as props in the ‘Wedding Scenes’ which bookended the show. These would then also double up as interactive elements for children. The rationale for this was that, drawing upon Red Earth’s previous experience working with the D/deaf community, D/deaf children are able to especially enjoy balloons in a performance setting as it gives them the means to physically experience music through the vibrations transferred through the skin of a balloon.

However, this emphasis on interactivity – one of the main focuses of the meeting, with other ideas floated such as giving children ‘finger lights’ to help illuminate the stage at certain points – was not able to be fully incorporated into the final show. The reason for this was ultimately due to economic concerns relating to the available budget, leading to necessary compromises throughout the devising and rehearsal period – an issue recognised and considered pressing even at this early stage.

The first mention of this was in relation to hiring actors for the production. Due to the budget only two actors could be employed, making the show a ‘two-hander’ in theatre parlance. This restriction was met with further difficulty in terms of what Wendy described as a ‘small pool’ of D/deaf actors available. I was informed that Red Earth includes D/deaf actors in the majority of their productions and that their commitment to this inclusivity for D/deaf people within the theatre world is vital to their creative process. However, with Mirror Mirror being a two-hander, it was already being considered how best to use sign-integration within the show in light of this, with Amanda suggesting initially that both actors would sign, with only one speaking. It was noted in connection to this that an extra actor would have been useful in order to immediately resolve these initial concerns of sign-integration.

Other than this, however, a great deal of what was discussed in this meeting ended up being implemented in the finished performance, such as: the use of puppets, the ‘gentle-beautiful’ (as Laura termed it) set design, the commitment to sign-integration, the use of multi-purpose props and an emphasis on visual storytelling through a Total Communication approach.

The strength of the design concept, paired with the commitment and expertise necessary to create such a distinct vision, inarguably helped Red Earth’s rehearsal process – ensuring that an aesthetic and semiotic framework was already in place through which the narrative of the show could be collaboratively shaped (under the dramaturgical eye of Wendy and Amanda) in the two-week devising and rehearsal period.
Rehearsals (30 January – 15 February)

Rehearsals were held at Shakespeare House in Derby, a small performance space shared with Derby Shakespeare Theatre Company. These sessions would run from 10 a.m. through to 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. on alternating days.

The first day began with introductions among the company members and myself with much of the stage furniture (stools, tables, the ‘wedding cake’, etc.) and the undecorated set being delivered later that afternoon, accompanied by Laura. At this first rehearsal I met the other core company members who would be instrumental in the theatre-making process: Alex Stafford-Marshall (Lighting Designer and Stage Manager); Rachael Merry (Actor), and Lara Steward (Actor). Lara is a Deaf actor who had previously performed for television and in advertising, whereas Rachael is a hearing actor who was very familiar with sign language, having been involved in sign-integrated and D/deaf accessible theatre before.

I would meet the Sound Technician, Simon Birchall on the second day, with other collaborators – Joanne Bernard (Choreographer) and Sean Myatt (Puppetry) – visiting for day sessions as the rehearsal process progressed.

After these introductions a lengthy group discussion was held in which the priorities and general shape of the project were outlined. During this, emphasis was placed by the directors on the importance of feedback (from the audience and creative team) for the refinement and improvement of Red Earth’s creative process. Equally, the inclusion of D/deaf audiences in the event, and their access to it, was repeatedly underlined during this discussion and throughout the entire devising and rehearsal process.
Amanda and Wendy made sure to ask Lara (a D/deaf actor) what her access needs were, as well as opening this inquiry to other members of the company (to which the most frequent response was ‘a dodgy knee’ – myself included). Lara has a strong command of English, both spoken and written. To allow Lara’s access to the devising and rehearsal process, sign language interpreters interpreted for her at all times and at every event. Seven interpreters were scheduled on a rota system to ensure that Lara’s communication needs were catered for at all times: Elvire, Karen, Rebekah, Helen, Isobel, Rowena and Lucy. These interpreters were invaluable to the development of sign-integration in the production (as detailed later on in this section) and were a valued and important part of the creative process.

My contact with D/deaf people had been very limited before the commencement of this placement. As such, the inclusion of sign language interpreters during all aspects of the process (including lunch) was a great help in terms of access for both hearing and D/deaf members of the company. When I spoke to Lara about her ability to get involved in Red Earth’s creative process and her ability to communicate ideas to the rest of the team, she told me that she had encountered no problems during her time with Mirror Mirror, stating that she felt that she had enough support and that ‘it was lovely working with a team that were very much deaf aware and were able to adapt to working with a deaf actor.’

She expanded on this point in a retrospective interview held after the tour of Mirror Mirror, enthusing ‘yes and beyond!’ when asked whether she had felt included in the devising of the show. ‘The directors were just lovely’ she added, ‘Amanda and Wendy were very open and approachable.’ And, when I inquired whether anything further could be done to improve access for future productions, she simply stated: ‘No, they seem to be doing really well’

During this initial session, and reiterated throughout subsequent rehearsals, Amanda and Wendy drove home their belief that ‘integrated theatre comes out of a collaborative process’ for Red Earth. Amanda expressed that she and Wendy, ‘want actors to be confident through the ownership of their roles and the narrative due to this collaborative process’, to which Wendy added - addressing Rachael and Lara – ‘you make the piece, you own it. We [Wendy and Amanda] are the outside eye’. To clarify this point and put it in context, Wendy told me later that the work is jointly ‘owned’ as it’s devised by the whole company, including creatives and technical crew. The copyright ultimately is the company’s, since the creative concepts are initiated by the company and its creatives, and the final script is written by Wendy and Amanda.

The first step in this process of devising was evident throughout the formative first two days, where Rachael and Lara were prompted to engage in the adaptation of the Snow White fairy-tale through a variety of different creative exercises. Firstly, they were tasked with reading the original version of the story from Grimm’s Fairy Tales before being asked to relay the narrative from memory in an effort to determine which plot points and characters most immediately captured their imaginations. By this time, the set and available props had been arranged in the rehearsal space and both actors were encouraged to envision and explore how they could use these materials to convey the essence of the story, and the characters, they had read. Having these materials as a source of inspiration from the first day aided the creative process by exhibiting the aesthetic and semiotic priorities of the design, informing the devising of narrative and drama.
After enthusiasm for their role(s) in the tale was piqued through this method of engagement, Wendy tasked everyone in the group (including herself, Amanda and I) with writing a list of twelve words which we thought ‘encapsulate[d] the story’. Speaking privately to me, Wendy commented that not only were these exercises a useful tool in terms of devising a direction for the narrative and characterisation in the play, it also encouraged the formation of a partnership between the two actors, whose on-stage relationship would be vital due to the ‘two-handed’ nature of the production.

Rachael and Lara struck up an excellent rapport from the beginning, which was no surprise considering their mutual passion for performance, BSL, and their amiable personalities. To my mind however, the first few days of rehearsal were also instrumental in this development, as there was a noticeably high mood brought about through the use of these devising exercises set out by Wendy and Amanda. Asked about her feelings on the collaborative process, Rachael responded: ‘It was really humbling to have their trust in me from the very first day, it was a team rather than a hierarchy; also stating: ‘I think as the work meant so much to me, and the team were so incredibly lovely and supportive, it was occasionally difficult to voice a concern as I didn’t want to offend or upset anybody! However as we relaxed into the way of working, it became easier and even welcome to raise these questions, which is why the work became such a group collaboration.’

At the end of the first day, both actors were asked to produce a poster representing their idea for the plot of the show – allowing for interpretations which did not hinge upon written English (another element of access to D/deaf actors). This was in addition to being asked to write a fictional diary entry for their respective characters (with Lara as Snow White and Rachael as the Evil Queen). These development exercises worked well and helped create a basic template of each actor’s subsequent role in Mirror, Mirror. With actors less confident with written English, the directors would provide alternative approaches, they explained later.

After this initial period, the rehearsals fell into somewhat more of a rhythm in terms of performing, improvising and devising, with a shared lunch and dinner break (when applicable) - useful for the strengthening of bonds among members of cast and crew and the provocation of new ideas to be fed back into the construction of Mirror, Mirror.

Each subsequent rehearsal began with a warm-up either led by Amanda or sometimes self-led in the later stages of the rehearsal period, when the actors would occasionally prefer to discuss their roles and signing whilst exercising. Initially, before the ‘Scenario’ (a script with no dialogue, only describing the basic action in each ‘episode’ of Mirror, Mirror) was written and shared by Wendy - as influenced by the ideas and improvisations so far - various ‘images’ were rehearsed under the direction of Amanda. This focus on ‘images’ and visual communication was apparent throughout the devising process, with both Amanda and Wendy reiterating to me how there were many ‘beautiful images in what we want to achieve,’ a technique that ‘[they] have learned from storytellers’.

These ‘images’ were moments of characterisation performed by Rachael and Lara, out of which structured dialogue (in BSL and English) and ideas for stage choreography would arise – guided in parts by Amanda’s direction, and with a great degree of improvisation and creative input from both actors. These ‘images’ initially focused intensely on the characterisation of the
different characters Lara and Rachael would play, with Lara acting as Snow White and Rachael as the Evil Queen (although she would, by the end of the devising process, also play the part of the Cook, the Huntsman, Eric the Dwarf, Little Red Riding Hood, the Footman and the Old Lady). At first this consisted of Rachael and Lara improvising key tenets of each character’s personality, but progressed to reflecting the ‘episodes’ from the ‘Scenario’ ultimately written by Wendy, such as a scene where the Huntsman chases Snow White through the forest. Each of these exercises fed back into the devising of a narrative and dialogue for the show, anchoring the actors into their characters with appropriate direction from Amanda in terms of their acting technique, physicality and delivery (of dialogue and sign). Amanda recognised this function, telling me that ‘everything we try to set up, we establish a context within which they can explore their characters.’ These exercises helped determine which character pairings worked best and how Rachael and Lara’s on-stage dynamic could communicate essential plot details to the audience through visual cues.

This emphasis on visual communication through acting dynamics, was increasingly stressed by the directors, throughout the rehearsal period. Rachael had an extensive theatre background before taking part in *Mirror Mirror*, yet this was her first professional role. On the other hand, Lara had very little stage experience beforehand, and thus a great deal of Amanda’s directorial focus was spent on honing both actors’ techniques to be in line with Red Earth’s priorities for performance. This centred around an impulse to, in Amanda’s words, ‘never ignore the audience, [they] are complicit in the story.’

Exercises used later on in the rehearsal period reflected this focus, such as the practice of ‘Commedia dell’arte’ techniques - a mode of improvised performance from 16th-century Italy with a focus on pantomime and audience interaction. Other exercises included expressing each actor’s character through different styles and approaches, such as ‘how would the Evil Queen act if she was a cat?’ Performing these short, improvised pieces allowed Amanda to stress the ‘conspiratorial’ style of acting she required as part of the performance, where the audience’s attention is captured primarily through the visual aspect of the actors’ on-stage presence. Wendy added to this point, addressing Rachael and Lara with the sentiment that ‘what we would encourage you to do is to never ignore the audience, you have to acknowledge that they’re there.’ Notably, as the devising process progressed, directorial intervention increased, with the directors building upon the work produced by collaboration through their experience as dramaturgs.

Throughout this devising of a narrative - structured by Wendy’s ‘Scenario’ - it was made clear by both directors that any method of communication could be used, at the performer’s discretion, before a script was finalised. In order to free up the actors physically, Wendy encouraged the actors not to worry about dialogue at this point, with Amanda saying that ‘the more we can do it in images, the better,’ prompting Lara and Rachael to use sign, English or mime: whatever they felt most comfortable with at this stage. As a structure began to form and scenes began to take on a more solid shape, iterations of a script were drafted by Wendy in English, with Rachael and Lara supported by the interpreters constructing a BSL/sign language interpretation of this dialogue. By the end of the first week of rehearsals, a ‘stagger-through’ (i.e. an unpolished ‘run-through’) of the work so far was undertaken.
During the final seven days of rehearsal, a distinct pattern emerged: an initial warm-up; occasional character exercises; the honing of different scenes; the development of scene transitions, and finally performing a run-through of the show to that point. In the final few days this focus became more heavily weighted on run-throughs, transitions (aided by a day session with Joanne) and the correct usage of props (including the puppets of Snow White, Eric the Dwarf and the other dwarfs, with direction from Sean). Crucially however, a large proportion of time was also set aside for finding the correct signs and variations of sign language to use.

With just twelve days to devise, rehearse and hone the production, issues of how best to communicate the dialogue using sign-integration became apparent. Ideally, Rachael and Lara would have preferred to sign or speak individually, without delivering both modes of communication at the same time. However as the rehearsals progressed and the script took shape, it became obvious that they would necessarily have to do this, causing Wendy to observe that ‘we are under-resourced by one actor at least. It means we have to invent new ways of going around this.’ Although the intention by the halfway point of the process was still to have one actor sign and the other one speak, during the latter half of the rehearsals this was eventually acknowledged as being an impossibility, with only two actors and within the time-frame provided. Rachael explained to me, after the show had toured, what she considered the final form of this to be:
‘So, there were parts when it was BSL, like when Lara signed without speaking (do you remember the ‘Hunter’ bit where I was her voice?). There were times when it’s unsure, as in we were signing BSL but also speaking, which is probably why the audience got confused as the BSL lip pattern was replaced for an English one. 13 And there were times, usually in conversation, when it was Sign Supported English; so every word we signed we spoke the equal.’

Following on from this, she recognised that creating a more uniform method of communication focused around BSL would ‘require more cast members’ and that ‘with a longer rehearsal period, this could be improved and re-worked to be much more effective.’ This sentiment tallies with my own opinion of the issue, and was also shared by all other cast and crew. Notably, however, Lara was somewhat more tempered in her perspective on this, stating during one discussion about the use of sign and speech simultaneously: ‘deaf audiences are more clever than you would think,’ with the implication being that they would be able to navigate this approach. After the production was complete, she commented that the biggest unexpected challenge she had faced was ‘using two languages at once,’ adding that ‘sometimes it was resolved with the two of us, me doing full BSL while Rachael spoke - the ‘Huntsman’ scene was one of my favourites’ (in reference to the scene Rachael had mentioned earlier). Similarly to Rachael, Lara also believed that ‘we simply just did not have enough time to explore all avenues’, reiterating her belief that ‘the directors did so well with the time scale they had and they put together a wonderful show that I was/am proud to be part of.’

Another reason for this perceived issue was the length of the show (ideally 60 minutes) with respect to its prospective audience of children and families. Within this short performance time (the final show ran at 75 minutes) it was imperative to preserve a balance between a fast-paced, energetic and dramatically satisfying theatre event, and the accessibility required to provide full communication across a range of D/deaf and hearing audiences. It was posited by both Lara and the interpreter that this problem was already resolved in the show, by the wealth of semiotic and aesthetic information offered to the audience as a point of access into the narrative. After asking the interpreter on the penultimate days of rehearsal if the signing was understandable, she responded affirmatively, noting that ‘there’s enough visual information to make sense of everything,’ with implied reference to Red Earth’s Total Communication approach. Moreover, Lara reflected that in performance ‘there will always be some information lost - even with a hearing audience - so as long as they get the story and are able to follow it then that’s brilliant.’ This tied into the sentiments of Wendy, who explicitly mentioned ‘[the] universality’ of fairy-tales in Western culture and their recent popularity in film, allowing a bedrock of understanding for the visual and sign-integrated aspects of the play to build upon – ‘every plot piece we need is here.’

It was evident that Red Earth went to great lengths in order to resolve this perceived issue of signing and speaking at the same time across their creative process. Several lengthy sessions were co-ordinated in most rehearsals in the second week between Rachael, Lara and an Interpreter. The purpose of these intensive discussions was to determine which signs to use for clarity and theatricality, and how these ideas should be implemented into the on-stage action. This approach was focused on providing as clear a method of communication as possible, even to the point of considering regional accents in BSL and how these would relate to the venues at which Mirror, Mirror was booked.

13. Please see the “Findings” section of this report for more information concerning audience response to Mirror, Mirror.
Another example of this commitment was the presence of Janeene Streather (actor and former director of 3D Derby Deaf Drama theatre group) during the penultimate day of rehearsal, after being invited to give feedback on the show’s sign-integration. A Deaf person herself, Janeene reported that the signing was clear but needed ‘a few tweaks’, which she shared with the group after a run-through of the complete performance.

Amanda and Wendy had directed key parts of some scenes throughout the play with a Visual Vernacular acting style in mind – such as a moment when Rachael, performing her ‘Cook’ character, sings a rendition of ‘Run rabbit’ before being startled by the appearance of Lara as Snow White. Here, the direction was to emphasise the existing expressiveness of the BSL being used in the scene using a more stylised version of BSL whilst leaping about the stage to semiotically express the movement of the titular rabbit. This was a technique which Janeene also utilised, telling Lara to be demonstrative with her signing when considering a prop broom during a scene in which she is performing chores at the house of the seven dwarfs.

As the narrative, sign-integration and performance aspects of the show were being constructed, the rest of the production team continued to collaborate in order to add to the experience of the existing performance. Alex took on a number of duties throughout this period, covering Simon’s Sound Tech duties when he was not available, whilst also acting as Stage Manager. Laura worked busily away to complete the set and order in the last of the props. I was asked to record a voice-over to be used as the voice of the Mirror in certain scenes, with Rachael (as the Evil Queen) interpreting my lines in BSL. This sharing of duties and responsibilities was evident throughout the process and it was clear that all involved were resolved to draw upon every resource available to produce as entertaining and successful a show as possible.

Toward the end of this devising and rehearsal process, the cast and crew were still tweaking aspects of the production, adding and editing out certain movements and lines of dialogue and signing. After the devising and rehearsal process were completed, most of the initial audience interactivity proposed in the design meeting and the early stages of devising had to be abandoned due to the time needed to implement and rehearse them appropriately. It was resolved that these elements be revisited with a view to bringing them into the production for the full national tour, to be launched later on in the year.

By the final day of rehearsal Mirror Mirror was ready to be performed before an audience, with the recognition that any feedback from the initial two performances could be absorbed into the re-rehearsal process.
Re-rehearsal (26 February – 28 February)

After performing *Mirror Mirror* at Nottingham Deaf Club and Sheffield Deaf Club, re-rehearsals commenced at Shakespeare House. Amanda noted how useful this period could potentially be, as Red Earth ‘never really have this’ opportunity to refine and hone their work mid-tour.

The first event to take place was a group meeting, were the core touring cast and crew (myself, Amanda, Wendy, Rachael, Lara and Alex) gathered to share our observations on audience responses, any comments relayed to us, and whether we had any concerns of our own regarding the production. After we had all expressed our opinions, it was decided that the transitions between scenes and also the structure of the ending could usefully be revisited and refined, as Amanda and Wendy were ‘keen on not losing the pace of [their] theatricality, or the characterisation through that.’

Rachael, Lara and myself commented on the reaction of some audience members who had commented on the clarity of the signing, both in terms of speaking and signing at the same time (which necessitated the use of non-BSL systems), and the positioning of speaking characters on the stage relative to their signing counter-part. It was also decided that they would, as Amanda put it, ‘make a judgement together whether there’s anything we can do to make the signing clearer without taking away from the dramatic drive.’ Continuing, she added that ‘the signing has to be clear here and we’ve got time to scrutinise it, to really, really look at it, balancing the pace and theatricality with the clarity. I think that’s what we’ll start on this afternoon.’
As such, a large proportion of the re-rehearsal time was dedicated to clarifying the signing in the play, as well as 'tidying up' the transitions and attempting to further develop some of the characterisation through intensive direction and an additional injection of Visual Vernacular techniques. This aspect of enhanced characterisation was, as Amanda commented, part of 'the detail we have not had time to do.' As such, during certain parts of the sign-integration, she directed a 'more flowing feel' to the signing, redolent of cinematic effects and intended to engage the audience in the actions of the character through the aesthetic aspect of sign-integration.

An example of this was during the opening scenes, where Lara plays as Snow White's Mother, pricking her finger and letting three drops of blood fall to the floor. Lara had suggested that this scene might actually be confusing for deaf people, and so Rachael was positioned next to her on stage. Rachael then dropped three red petals (signifying the drops of blood) as Lara signed (with a 'more flowing feel' than before) the words – creating what was hoped to be a cinematic visual experience, narrated by Rachael in spoken English.

This attention to the clarity of signing continued throughout the re-rehearsals, with the scenes containing Eric (the puppet, manipulated by Rachael) and Lara (as Snow White) being re-staged so that they would always be close together when communicating. This allowed Rachael's speaking part and Lara's signing analogue to occupy the same visual space as a means to enhance accessibility for D/deaf audiences.

Whilst implementing and rehearsing these changes, photographs and video were taken in order to create promotional material for the full tour of the show scheduled for later in the year.

These three days of re-rehearsal granted the team valuable extra time to concentrate on developing the existing play in terms of both its theatrical cogency (in terms of its aesthetic and semiotic priorities) and its accessibility across Red Earth's audiences.

Relation to Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity

As explained in the Introduction of this report, the Creative Case is based upon three interlocking progressions: equality, recognition and 'a new vision.' Here I will summarise the observations taken from the ethnographic process, as reported here, and evaluate Red's Earth's devising and rehearsing process with respect to the priorities as set out by the Creative Case.

1. Equality

The focus on collaboration throughout the devising and rehearsal process encouraged a context of equality and mutual respect for each member of the production, regardless of their communication needs. Furthermore, interpreters facilitated communication across D/deaf and hearing members of the production, buttressing and enhancing this sense of equality through seamless access to the creative process for all of the cast and crew.

2. Recognition

Red Earth include D/deaf actors in the majority of their creative endeavours, with Mirror Mirror being no exception. Lara was an instrumental member of the team and the input from
Janeene and the Interpreters throughout the process was an obvious boon to the show’s focus on D/deaf accessibility, recognising the importance of D/deaf people and their cultural perspectives to the theatre-making process. Furthermore, Rachel’s background in sign-integrated theatre and her BSL skills – as well as the wealth of experience accrued by Red Earth since 1999 – helped engender a context of inclusivity and D/deaf awareness.

3. A New Vision

Mirror Mirror was designed and devised from the ground up with a consideration for audiences with a range of communication needs. Red Earth’s emphasis on Total Communication and their collaborative approach – drawing upon hearing and D/deaf perspectives, as well as their existing experience in the field – typify this commitment to equality of access. There was a focus at all times on how the narrative and themes of Mirror Mirror could be transmitted across an audience of hearing and D/deaf people utilising aesthetic and semiotic choices (of set design and visual storytelling) to communicate as effectively as possible within a performance context.

This commitment extended to dramaturgical decisions, exemplified by the great care and attention evident in the sign-integration aspect of the show, including the emphasis on the clarity of signing and Visual Vernacular techniques of performance. Consequently, D/deaf audiences were considered a key factor from the very start, putting the diversity of Mirror Mirror’s potential audiences at the very heart of the creative process and at the centre of Red Earth’s artistic vision.

As outlined within the ethnography, there were issues with signing and speaking in the context of a two-hander theatre production. This was also recognised in some of the feedback from audiences, as detailed in the following Findings section. Rachael retrospectively suggested a way in which to combat this, saying that ‘I would be very welcoming of a professional sign theatre BSL coach/advisor; separate to the interpreter.’ After relaying this point to the directors, I was made aware that this avenue had been previously explored on several occasions, but had not been repeated. This was, in Amanda’s words, because

‘without the financial resources to have a full time BSL advisor throughout the rehearsals period, intermittent interventions can lead to confusion and frustration on the part of the performers. When asked to make BSL changes and additions to signs they have already learnt/agreed upon as a company these intermittent interventions have sometimes proved counterproductive.’

Amanda also noted that the ideal solution to this ‘would be to have a BSL director throughout the rehearsal period who becomes part of the company and process. This is a consideration which Red Earth may wish to revisit and implement in future productions, but I cannot speak to the effectiveness of this method within the scope of this ethnography.

Indeed, from my observations, it was apparent that the team behind Mirror Mirror went to great lengths to resolve this issue of signing and speaking at the same time within the timeframe and budget available.

Ultimately, my time with Red Earth convinced me that they are a strong model and proponent
of the attitudes exemplified by the Creative Case for Diversity, embracing its ethos and positioning its principles at the very centre of their approach to theatre-making.
4. Findings
4. Findings

During the course of the research process, several distinct themes were identifiable – in line with the research aims and questions guiding the report – across the range of responses taken from interviews and through the questionnaire. This section will present and explore these findings in relation to Red Earth’s theatre-making and the wider context of D/deaf attitudes and access to theatre, before recommendations are offered in the next section.

Firstly however, it must be stated that the audience response to Mirror Mirror was highly positive – almost universally so - with ninety-eight out of one hundred respondents saying that they would recommend the show. It is also notable that the level of response was much greater than anticipated, implying a high level of engagement with the performance and the research process.

Sign-INTEGRATION

Sign-integration is one of the key tenets of Red Earth’s theatre-making process and, as detailed in the Fieldwork section of this report, Mirror Mirror was devised with sign-integration as one of many modes of access intended for an audience with a range of communication needs. This aspect of the production was the most discussed topic during both interview and questionnaire exercises.

The reception of sign-integration in Mirror Mirror was nuanced and mixed, with many audience members expressing their enjoyment at the use of sign-integration as a mode of access and commending its execution in the play. Others suggested methods for enhancement, namely more extensive use of BSL.

Of the positive responses, there were two main factors reported. They indicate that Mirror Mirror’s sign-integration was:

- An accessible form of communication for D/deaf people;
- A preferable form of communication for D/deaf people compared to their previous theatre experiences.

Conversely, audience reservations centred upon:

- Signing and speaking at the same time and by the same actor (SSE);
- The clarity of the signing.

Notably however, the use of sign-integration as a tool was universally well-received, with reservations focused on augmenting and refining the process, rather than arguing for wholesale changes or a different approach.

98% of respondents said they would recommend Mirror Mirror.
An Accessible Form of Communication:

During the performances at Spinney Hill School (at which some D/deaf students from Ellesmere college were in attendance), interview responses from the pupils were highly positive with regard to this aspect the production. One Year 12 D/deaf student from Ellesmere College, Rabiya, commented that ‘I liked that they were signing, that the girls [Rachael and Lara] were signing,’ expanding on this point by emphasising that ‘it was really clear signing’ and that she would be keen to see similar sign-integrated productions in the future. When asked how Mirror Mirror compared with other theatre that she had seen, Rabiya replied:

‘I’ve been to see a performance before but it was boring. There was no signing, it was all just speech. I didn’t like it. Today I really liked it because of the signing, it was really interesting […] I didn’t know signing and speech was possible. This is the first time I’ve seen actors signing.’

Similarly, Rabiya’s Year 12 D/deaf class-mate, Sundeep, said that he thought that the show ‘was brilliant, I liked it. I had a good time.’ He had stated that he had not seen a play before because:

‘[I]t’s hearing and — the acting, they’re all speaking and I never know what’s happening. This [Mirror Mirror] was very interesting, it was beautiful to watch.’

The implication here being that the implementation of sign-integration was a key factor in Sundeep’s enjoyment of the show through access to communication.

These sentiments extended beyond the D/deaf students present and were commented upon by some of the Year 6 pupils also interviewed, with Hussein [hearing] noting that ‘it was very good, because you did both English and sign language at the same time,’ and when asked if he was able to understand them when performed at the same time, he responded: ‘Yes, I could.’ At this point, another Year 6 hearing pupil, Deeshaan, expanded on this by saying: ‘It was great communication — with the sign language. It’s amazing.’

These responses - demonstrating a high level of engagement through Mirror Mirror’s sign-integration leading to an increased enjoyment of the event - were typical of many comments recorded throughout the research, as shown by Norah’s [D/deaf, 66] testimony in Doncaster, reporting that:

‘[I] like something like this. I want more of this type of performance. Without an interpreter, so you can see it all right through, it’s acted in BSL all the way through. And I could just feel it coming into my head, I was there with it. Fantastic.’

This positive reaction was also evident in many of the questionnaire responses, with one response from a D/deaf audience member at Birmingham Deaf Club stating ‘yes I understand [the] sign language,’ whereas another D/deaf participant stated that the show worked well because it ‘[p]rovided access to BSL users.’ Moreover, a deafened participant noted that they would recommend the show to others as it was a ‘wonderful integrated experience.’

Hearing audiences also commended the use of sign-integration, with many responses
indicating that it had given them access to D/deaf culture in a way they had not been able to achieve before. These responses were typical across audiences during the tour, with even those who held a more reserved view of the use of Sign Supported English (explored below) recognising the validity of this mode of theatrical communication.

A Preferable Form of Access:

Many responses, which commended the use of sign-integration drew upon the participants’ previous experience of theatre and the D/deaf access provided at those times (if any). In light of this, sign-integration was overwhelmingly viewed positively in comparison with more traditional or mainstream modes of access (such as interpreters or stage-text).

An example of this sentiment can be found within the group interview held at Doncaster Deaf Club where the participants were particularly enthused by the use of sign-integration, especially when compared with their previous theatre experiences. One exchange was particularly illustrative of this:

Laura [D/deaf, 66]: Tonight’s was good. I’ve really enjoyed it because the signing was in the play. You’ve got sign and voice in the whole play. It makes a big difference from a show with an interpreter just stuck on the side. It’s great to have sign language actually in the play. And this is something very different, I really enjoyed it.

Norah [D/deaf, 66]: I’ve never been to the theatre, no. So this is the first time for me, and wow! Seeing it tonight, having it all in one, not needing an interpreter on the side, I think it’s brilliant to have it all in one all the way through. And not having to move my head to the side, I can just watch the performance. It was amazing.

James [D/deaf, 67]: It’s the first time for me that I’ve seen a show like this. It was brilliant. 100%. Really, the same as what Laura said - we went to see Jack and the Beanstalk together at CAST theatre and it was fantastic, seeing this interpreter right in the middle of all the actors. She was in the play, moving about in the whole production. And tonight, to be perfectly honest, it was fantastic.’

Having an interpreter ‘just stuck on the side’ was a common complaint amongst D/deaf participants, with very few comments indicating that this was a desirable form of access.

In fact, only two audience members explicitly suggested the use of Interpreter Support as a way to increase access for D/deaf people. From the questionnaires, only one respondent – a hard-of-hearing adult – requested an Interpreter as a way to improve accessibility. Crucially, in those responses this was proposed as an addition to the existing sign-integration rather than as an alternative. Moreover, the interview responses which suggested this were in connection to issues of lighting at the first performance at Nottingham Deaf Club.

It was stressed repeatedly, and on several occasions - especially in interviews held with adult audiences - that an Interpreter Support method of access was seen as being obstructive to the enjoyment and understanding of the theatrical event. For example, after the performance at Sheffield Deaf Club, one participant said that she had been to performances with Interpreter Support before:
Marie [D/deaf, 61]: ‘Yes I have, a play. Tommy Steele was in it. There was an Interpreter there. It was good, but it's difficult actually because I was trying to watch the Interpreter whilst there was a performance, so there was a problem.’

Marie returned to this point later in the interview when discussing how to achieve higher attendance for D/deaf people at sign-integrated theatre events, saying ‘maybe D/deaf people think, “it's going to be a story with an Interpreter at the side”. D/deaf people don't want that.’ Simon [D/deaf, 46] agreed with this assessment, adding that ‘of course I've got full accessibility to this, because it's in my language.’ Their preference, mirroring the consensus of responses, was to have sign-integration.

Issues of Signing and Speaking Concurrently:

Whilst sign-integration was well-received as a mode of communication and point of access in Mirror, Mirror, there were reservations about the way in which Rachael or Lara spoke in English and used sign-language at the same time in some instances – an issue which was recognised to an extent during the rehearsal and devising process (please see Fieldwork section for more information regarding this).

A clear example of this can be seen from the responses collected from participants interviewed at Reigate Park Primary School. One D/deaf Year 6 student, Wendy, suggested after being asked what could be done to improve the show that:

‘They could use their voices a bit more as well as signing. They could use more voice in their signing or use their voice when somebody else is signing.’

This notion was immediately supported by Wendy’s D/deaf Year 6 class-mate Aisha, who said: ‘Yeah, I like that: somebody speaking and somebody signing. Because some of my friends couldn’t understand what it means.’
Aisha, when asked whether she would prefer to not have signing and speaking at the same time, responded:

‘I like a bit of both – signing and speaking at the same time and having one person speak and the other person sign. I like both.’

This point was buttressed by her hard-of-hearing classmate, Emma, and was representative of this key comment as it emerged across other interviews and questionnaire responses.

At Nottingham Deaf Club, Clarissa [D/deaf, 48] offered her opinion on the sign-integration, which was particularly representative of comments pertaining to this issue throughout the process. She stated that although Rachael and Lara’s ‘signing skills were incredibly clear,’ she ‘liked it best when they were separate, when you separated out the speech and the signing rather than trying to speak and sign at the same time.

Two participants interviewed after the performance in Derby at the Rycote Centre, D/deaf theatre practitioners formally involved with local drama groups, noted a similar observation. As such, out of this conversation emerged the most in-depth discussion and critique of this issue:

Natasha [D/deaf, 43]: I’ve watched Red Earth’s performances for the last fourteen-fifteen years now and I prefer Red Earth [compared to Deafinitely Theatre]. [...] But, but, it’s the language. I think it’s what they’re struggling with. How can I explain? I mean the actors tonight, I was looking at them and I’m sure they’re brilliant actors, but they lose the quality of that when they speak and sign at the same time. They kind of lose it – I don’t know. When one is speaking and one is signing – you know translating what that other actor is saying or speaking or whatever – it’s perfect. It’s perfect, that was good. Yeah I enjoyed that. And the puppetry was really good. You know, the signing of the puppets as well, you know, the ‘hungry’ sign, that was really good.

Jennifer [D/deaf, 48]: A lot of miming - that’s good, to have a lot of signing. But I agree with Natasha actually, when you’ve got one talking and the other one signing that is perfect, it works well. When one person is talking and signing at the same time I have noticed - I can lip-read - I have noticed, for example, when they were saying ‘oh my life’ there was no signing. There was speaking, but where was the signing for that, the signing was lost. They didn’t sign it. It’s almost like tapping your head and rubbing your tummy, being coordinated, there was none of that.

Natasha: With signing and speaking at the same time, it’s similar to speaking Italian or French at the same time. You can’t do it as well as doing another language. Yeah, it’s the same with sign. Pure BSL, you can’t do that - you have to sign word for word while you’re speaking. It’s just that bit.

Throughout the rest of the interview when this topic was discussed, Natasha and Jennifer went to great lengths to emphasise the overall success of the show and how many instances of sign-integration in Mirror, Mirror did work well. They concluded the interview with the following sentiments:
Natasha: It’s only just the speaking and the signing. It’s only that part that need to be adapted.

Jennifer: And that’s it, that’s all. I mean, 90% of it was absolutely fantastic, it was just 10% of the signing and the speaking together. It just didn’t flow right. So if you get rid of that, you’ll be fine.

This interpretation of signing and speaking concurrently leading to a confusion of communication at points was also apparent in some questionnaire responses. For example, one hearing adult at the show in Birmingham responded to a question asking ‘What do you think didn’t work that well?’ with the answer: ‘Sign and speech at the same time [was] not always clear’.

Another questionnaire response from a D/deaf adult at Birmingham revealed the mixed reception the implementation of sign-integration received by some. In response to ‘What do you think worked well tonight?’ the participant responded by saying ‘Providing access to BSL users’. However, when asked ‘What do you think didn’t work that well’ (as above), the participant indicated that the ‘expressiveness of BSL and speech [was] lost’, reporting that ‘[it] was nice to see switching with speech as dominant but I think in places it lost the expressiveness of BSL.’

It is notable, however, that this was mentioned much less as an issue in this form of audience response when compared to the longer-form, probing interview process. This would seem to support the assessment of Jennifer in that ‘it was just 10% of the signing and the speaking together’ which was the problem, not necessarily threatening the integrity of the performance. These considered views were more likely to emerge naturally from nuanced debate rather than constituting an immediately glaring issue.
Issues of Clarity:

Some comments focused upon the perceived clarity of the signing – with a few participants questioning the use of signing systems other than BSL (such as SSE).

Whilst the signing of both Rachael and Lara prompted much praise among participants, there were instances where the use of SSE as an alternative to the predominant mode of BSL was considered the second best option for some respondents in Doncaster and Birmingham.

Although the participants interviewed at Doncaster were mostly effusive in their praise for the production, toward the end of the interview, when asked for suggestions on how to improve the show, James and Laura reported:

James [D/deaf, 67]: I understood her, I understood it clearly. But for the benefit of other D/deaf people, it needs to be in BSL.

Laura [D/deaf, 66]: Really, I agree with what they’re saying, to have BSL. Because, I’m just thinking, for someone from the D/deaf community who is just struggling in terms of their language, SSE isn’t okay for them. So sign a bit bigger, and to use BSL would be better. And more gesture, more gesture mixed with that. I mean, we’re good lip-readers, so we can pick up on the English and some D/deaf people don’t lip read very well. So, for everyone to understand - more action, more gesture.

Questionnaire Responses

This point was also hinted at in Birmingham by Erika, a D/deaf participant addressing the same question:

Cindy [Hearing, 26]: The signs were done well, they signed slowly. It made it clear for me to follow.
Erika [D/deaf, 57]: For a D/deaf audience, you’d probably need a bit more BSL, I would say. I did notice that there was quite a lot of speech there, but the sign language that we were seeing didn’t really represent the amount of spoken word. So, for me, that was something I noticed. Maybe for a D/deaf audience, you’d need BSL.

Erika’s observation was interrupted by Holly and Cindy, two hearing people proficient in BSL (this section of the interview was conducted in BSL by all participants):

Holly [Hearing, 42]: Not really, you didn’t miss anything.

Cindy: She’s right, they were the same.

Holly: You didn’t miss anything, you didn’t miss anything.

Erika: Well, with the ‘mirror’ scenes, and you see her talking...
I feel like I did miss a little bit.

Holly: You didn’t actually, there was nothing to miss.

Erika: Well, with some of the Sign Supported English [SSE]. I mean, for me, I do rely on lip-reading as well as my sign language. So maybe there you could have had a bit more BSL.

Although Erika maintained that her access to the production had been impacted by the presence of SSE, it is interesting to note that those who had access to both forms of communication (spoken English and sign language) were quite adamant that no information had been lost – ‘You didn’t miss anything’. This suggests that attitudes toward SSE in *Mirror Mirror* may have been slightly misrepresented by some, as indicated by the lack of discussion in any of the questionnaires or other interviews.

However, it is clear that among a few audience members, the inclusion of SSE in some instances, rather than BSL, caused them to question whether they were missing out.

**Number of Actors**

Another theme recurrent across audience responses was the number of actors involved in the production.

Again, this theme revealed a somewhat mixed response, with some audience members valorising the creativity and visual aspect of having two actors – indeed, considering it to be innovative, engaging and an aid to communicating plot – whereas others saw the ‘two-hander’ nature of the show as inhibiting full comprehension.

During interviews, the consensus was that the ‘two-hander’ nature of the show was a good thing, which helped people engage with the drama due to the creativity required to switch roles quickly. It was notable how enthused some participants were about this aspect of the production, prompting effusive responses such as the following exchange at the Rycote Centre in Derby:
Jennifer [D/deaf, 48]: Before I watched that, I expected quite a lot of actors, but there were only two actors and there were a lot of character changes. Very, very clever. Very clever.

Natasha [D/deaf, 43]: Yes, that's why I love Red Earth. Very clever, absolutely brilliant.

And this contribution from Doncaster:

James [D/deaf, 67]: [...] tonight, to be perfectly honest, it was fantastic. It was brilliant. I have never seen it done - just two people doing the whole production! I've never seen that done before! And I was just wondering how they would manage, I could see them taking on their different characters. It was fantastic - and I really liked the puppets. The way they became Snow White and the Dwarf, just brilliant. Yeah, wow, wow! Really amazing, really amazing. I really enjoyed it, every moment.

These sentiments were supported by some questionnaire responses, with one teacher from Reigate Park Primary School reporting, on behalf of their pupils, that showing 'that actors can represent more than one character in a play [...] Really stretches their imagination.'

Some questionnaire responses, however, identified a preference for extra actors – especially with regard to the feedback from teachers and education professionals at Spinney Hill, typifying the mixed opinions on this matter. Although responses from Spinney Hill questionnaires were highly complementary of the play, one concern that did emerge was the desire for an extra actor, often to provide 'additional narration' (a recurrent phrase from feedback in this venue), due to some children not following all of the events in the play. This tallied with one of the sentiments offered by two Year 6 hearing pupils, who expressed a desire for 'more actors' when asked how the show could be improved in the future. It was noted by one teacher, however, that this could also have been due to the different language requirements evident among the audience and a mix of cultural backgrounds.
Although this comment concerning the amount of actors was not a prominent theme in most of the interviews, where it was suggested it was often linked to a desire for ‘additional narration’ through using extra actors as suggested in some of the questionnaires. A key example of this is found in the interview held at Sheffield Deaf Club:

Marie [D/deaf, 61]: Is it always going to be two actors?

Interviewer: At the moment yes, due to the level of funding.

Marie: I have noticed that when they're standing together, one woman is saying whatever she's saying, and the other one is signing, so -- I’m not sure... I’m trying to think what I’m trying to say. She’s doing three different characters, she’s changing the role. Yeah, one of them tends to stay as the same character and the other one changes. I mean, I’m not very experienced with theatre so I don’t know the different roles or the different characters, so I don’t understand what it is. Maybe they could do with maybe one or two more actors. So then it would be more clear with each of the characters to be honest.

Barbara [D/deaf, 57]: Yeah, it’s clearer if they have more actors rather than changing the roles.

Simon [D/deaf, 46]: I see it and understand it, but I don’t know about anybody else. With how the characters keep changing, maybe an extra person or whatever would help.

Marie: I didn’t realise there were three stories: Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Snow White. I didn’t think that you could actually do that within one performance and I actually picked that up. It was good. Maybe it needs, I don’t know, four or five actors to stop other people getting confused over which character is which.

Here, each participant recognises that they were able to comprehend the narrative but would still suggest an extra actor (or actors) for additional clarity. However, what is striking here is that this group of respondents are articulating their new learning about theatre and its conventions: coming to an understanding during the performance of ‘intertextuality’, or incorporating several stories into a main holding form story which previously was not thought possible; getting to grips with the concept of an anchor role and multiple roles in the performance. As cited above, respondents at Rycote positively embraced these conventions.

Jennifer [D/deaf, 48]: Before I watched that, I expected quite a lot of actors, but there were only two actors and there were a lot of character changes. Very, very clever. Very clever.

Natasha [D/deaf, 43]: Yes, that's why I love Red Earth. Very clever, absolutely brilliant.
Total Communication

Another important facet of Red Earth’s strategy for communicating across their base audience is their commitment to Total Communication. The recognition of this was referenced several times throughout the research, with participants universally complimenting the use of visual story-telling mechanisms not reliant on dialogue – spoken or signed.

Total Communication in Mirror Mirror emphasised telling the narrative of the play through what were often described by participants as ‘visual’ methods. A consistent theme throughout the research was that adopting this approach greatly facilitated the comprehension of the drama and great emphasis was put on the way in which Mirror Mirror used effective ‘visual storytelling’ as a successful method of communication across audiences. The positive reception and explicit mention of these techniques was prevalent throughout responses by adults and children of all communication needs.

The foremost phrase employed by participants when communicating their ideas around this theme was of ‘visual storytelling’, indicating their recognition of this approach in Red Earth’s theatre-making.

In terms of questionnaires, responses to the question ‘What worked well in the play?’ were typified by comments such as the following: ‘I’d recommend for parents of both D/deaf and hearing children as the show is accessible for all, utilising visual communication understandable by all’, reported one teacher from Reigate Park Primary School. Similarly, a hearing person at Nottingham Deaf Club reported that ‘the set was very clever’ and commended the ‘use of visual stage tools’. As another example, a D/deaf participant at the Birmingham showing stated that Mirror, Mirror was ‘very visual – easy to understand’.

This focus on the visual aspects of the production as a means of communication, in turn facilitating understanding, was also evident in many interview responses. An example of this was found in Birmingham, where one participant stressed this point, saying:

Fiona [hard-of-hearing, 53]: I thought it was really, really visual. I thought it was really good because of how visual it was. You didn’t have to hear what they were saying, because you could see the story coming alive.

The two participants interviewed in Derby took this notion even further, arguing that the visual communication (as representative of Red Earth’s Total Communication approach) was so strong that the entire show could be based around it:

Natasha [D/deaf, 43]: Yes, that’s why I love Red Earth. Very clever, absolutely brilliant. The silhouettes, the shadow puppetry, with Snow White and the apple, that is very visual, wow! So I do feel that, going through this performance, the actions of both of them, with the facial expressions if they don’t use their voice at all or anything – I do feel that they can accomplish the show with mime. Solely mime. Because the show is so visual, and the props that they use as well.
Jennifer: [noding] The stools, where you turn them upside down and they became trees - that was brilliant. I absolutely loved that. The different props as well, the tables, the chairs, and everything you have is very visual. You know, the small doll which becomes Snow White, that is very clever. I love that, very clever.

These references to the multi-use props employed in the play, the lighting techniques leading to silhouettes and the expressive Visual Vernacular performance techniques ('the actions of both of them, with the facial expressions'), as well as the puppetry used throughout the show were commonly identified as a source of communication. In this instance, both participants indicated that this 'visual' aspect of the production constituted a cohesive form of communication in itself – independent of signing or speech, a testament to the effectiveness of Red Earth's Total Communication approach. This was evidenced by the audiences. The positive reception and explicit mention of these techniques was prevalent throughout way in which many responses which indicated an appreciation for this Total Communication approach were written in the context of clarity of understanding and access, such as one educational professional from Spinney Hill who reported in a questionnaire: 'I thought the props were excellent, the sign-integration was excellent as all children were able to access the performance and the staging was good.'

Although the sound design and lighting were well-received across a range of responses, it was the inclusion of puppets and the playful nature of the multi-use set and props which prompted the most discussion. The puppets – their design, use and implementation in the drama – were favourably remarked upon, with an overwhelming response among children and young people in particular. This led to one teacher from Ellesmere College (whose D/deaf students attended the Spinney Hill performance) to remark on their communicative potential within a questionnaire. When asked 'What worked well in the show tonight,' she answered: 'The puppets told [the] story really well and made it accessible for all.' Later on in the questionnaire, in response to whether she would recommend the show (she would), she said: 'It was brilliant and our deaf students were more engaged than I have ever seen them watching theatre.'

Only one comment during the process of the research was less than effusive with regard to the puppets and 'visual storytelling' of the Total Communication approach. This was from the performance at Nottingham, and the adult participant in question indicated that this was due to issues of lighting (related to technical issues on the day), which affected her ability to observe the action.

D/deaf access and attitudes to theatre

Wider concerns and opinions regarding D/deaf people's feelings of access and inclusion in theatre were explored throughout the research. Members of the Deaf Community and D/deaf people in general were noticeably enthused to be able to share their opinions and appreciated the opportunity to feedback their ideas and experiences of theatre in general and D/deaf accessible theatre specifically. As the research aim pertaining to this theme is a consideration of relations between venues and Red Earth's audiences, particularly those characterised as 'hard to reach', the focus on this theme is analysed through the prism of mainly D/deaf responses – often seen as comprising the 'hard to reach' segment of theatre-goers in Red Earth's audience base. Key factors identified in these responses were:
• Attitudes toward theatre venues;

• Anxieties concerning funding and access for D/deaf people going forward;

• Reaching the ‘hard-to-reach’;

• D/deaf representation and awareness in theatre.

**Attitudes toward theatre venues:**

A broad range of theatre literacy and engagement was evident across responses, both in terms of interviews and questionnaires. A few participants were highly engaged in theatre, going several times a year and attending D/deaf and disability theatre regularly – such as Graeae Theatre and Deafinitely Theatre.
However, the majority of responses indicated that participants had not generally been involved in drama before and many held an ambivalent attitude toward theatre-going in general due to the lack of accessibility they had experienced on previous occasions.

One common view has been outlined in the above analysis of the findings relating to sign-integration – i.e., the perception amongst a large majority of D/deaf participants that access through Interpreter Support was undesirable and antithetical to enjoying the theatrical event.

Expanding upon this point, many D/deaf people reported going to the theatre only once a year – with some others reporting no engagement with theatre outside of Mirror Mirror at all, demonstrating a low level of theatre-going activity. These respondents regularly did not intimate an awareness of other, larger-scale D/deaf theatre companies and their productions. It was often stated that the only access D/deaf people felt they had to theatre was solely during the Christmas season and in the form of a pantomime, typically only with Interpreter Support as a method of access. All the children involved in the research also reported that pantomimes and Christmas and School productions were their only previous experience with theatre, with most saying that they were unaware of the option of sign-integration as a means of communication in performance.

This led to visible frustration within some participants, with the following discussion taken from the interview in Doncaster being typical of these sentiments:

Norah [D/deaf, 66]: But really, we need more performances for D/deaf people, for us to go to. Because what we have is one at Christmas and then another one at Christmas. So we need much more during the year.
James [D/deaf, 67]: Once a year. Once a year is not enough. It's not fair. Hearing people get their pleasure and D/deaf people, only once a year.

Norah: There's a show with an Interpreter at Rotherham. But I'd like something like this [Mirror, Mirror]. I want more of this type of performance. Without an interpreter, so you can see it all right through, it's acted in BSL all the way through. And I could just feel it coming into my head, I was there with it. Fantastic.

Overall, there was a distinct concern that theatre venues did not cater for D/deaf people, and if they did, the level of access was seen as unsatisfactory and the infrequency of these accessible productions received much criticism.

There was a subsequent indication during these discussions, which showed that if D/deaf people were given the option of a D/deaf accessible production along the lines of Mirror Mirror, they would be willing to engage with theatre venues and would be interested in similar events. Some respondents suggested that they would prefer to see theatre in Deaf Clubs and communities around the country, but many were keen to see the show in a theatre as well, as indicated by this conversation in Sheffield when asked about potential venues:

Simon [D/deaf, 46]: I do think, for a start, in a Deaf club: okay. And if it's successful, popular, then of course set it up in a large theatre. But I think it's best if you're in the middle [of the country], in Nottingham. The Midlands, basically. I mean, if it's in London-we can't access London. I think it's better in the Midlands actually.

Barbara [D/deaf, 57]: Yeah, yeah. I do agree. Obviously, Doncaster have got the new theatre, haven't they? The problem is though that, holding it here, it's free - at a theatre we do have to pay.

Marie [D/deaf, 61]: But I think they should be paying, because obviously they've worked really hard with what they've put on today. I mean, I don't mind paying 5 or 6 pound, something like that. If you have to go to a mainstream theatre you have to pay, you know what I mean?

As well as exposing the desire to have this sort of performance both in Deaf Clubs and in mainstream theatres, this exchange also serves to highlight another key consideration in D/deaf people's attitudes to theatre as highlighted by the report, i.e. – the location and availability of these shows. This was a consideration apparent through these interview dialogues and was expanded upon by a participant in the Birmingham session, reflecting upon the D/deaf Community and its present-day relationship to theatre:

Andrew [D/deaf, adult with age withheld]: The community itself, that we knew, has now gone. So where is your access to the Deaf Community? You don't have it any more, it's not there. To be honest with you, I'd say don't forget Birmingham is very good, Coventry is very good. But in London we had eight different Deaf Clubs, different communities in London and now we don't even have that. We have just one left now. Within the population of London, how many people [are D/deaf]? A million, half a million people? D/deaf people now, they've gone. Theatres in London, there were a lot there but in terms of the Deaf Community it's all gone.
This response highlights the perception of a splintering D/deaf Community, without universal provision and access to theatre across the country other than in certain localised circumstances.

**Anxieties for the future:**

These discussions concerning the Deaf Community revealing many anxieties relating to the future of D/deaf culture, with many respondents considering theatre to be a good way of combatting this uncertainty and perceived marginalisation.

Of those interviewed, a few participants had been involved in D/deaf accessible theatre themselves. These included the aforementioned participants in the Rycote Centre in Derby, a 15 year old participant in Birmingham who had been involved in D/deaf youth theatre, a 57 year old D/deaf person from Birmingham who had started her own ‘drama group not only for D/deaf people [...] open to hearing people who sign as well, or who want to learn BSL,’ and the participants at Doncaster Deaf Club, who performed their own community D/deaf productions with the Deaf Club. Of these, only the 57 year old D/deaf person’s drama group was a still active, with the other participants regretting the closure or defunct nature of the groups they had previously been engaged in. There was a clear anxiety amongst many of these participants that more must be done to encourage and support community-led and professional small-scale D/deaf accessible theatre, joined by a worry concerning the future of this form of theatre.

One participant at Birmingham discussed her previous experience and thoughts in the context of this discussion of available D/deaf theatre:

**Holly [Hearing, 42]:** Okay. So, I think it’s really important. Both my two [children] went to the drama group for D/deaf and hearing, and thought nothing of it. My [hearing] son asked if one of the boys could come back to ours to play, a D/deaf boy. I said ‘yeah, of course he can, no problem: Then another adult said, ‘well how are they going to communicate?’ My son just said, ‘well, we’ll just play.’ So it didn’t even enter his head, the communication, it was just friendship – which I think is really important. And through drama-- it’s about acting, you can show emotions, show them and learn them. Children should be mixing together, D/deaf or hearing. It’s a world where we all live, and everyone should be involved together.

The notion of ‘mixing together, D/deaf or hearing’ was identified throughout the interview process as a key outcome for generating interest in theatre through the reconfiguring of D/deaf access and representation within the world of performance. Many D/deaf participants saw the role of the Deaf Community and Deaf Clubs as prospectively playing a vital role in this process – indicating that theatre companies and houses would benefit from initiating and strengthening these ties.

This was demonstrated in the interview held in Nottingham, where the participants were eager to convey their experience with the local Playhouse Theatre, and its engagement with Nottingham Deaf Club and the D/deaf Community in the area:
Toby [D/deaf, 62]: I think the Playhouse at Nottingham have a couple of people who are responsible for working with disabled people and D/deaf people and that kind of audience. I’m part of that voluntary group and we’ve talked about how to improve services for D/deaf and disabled people, like where interpreters should stand, what kind of info should be provided, organising pre-show talks. Once I’ve been to those forums, I come back to the D/deaf Community and feed it back. So, having a D/deaf person involved is good.

Although not a part of this voluntary group herself, another participant made sure to emphasise the attraction this form of relationship projects to D/deaf people:

Carol [D/deaf, 71]: I don’t know if you’ll agree with me or not. The Playhouse — I like the Playhouse performances better than the Royal Centre because there’s a nicer atmosphere and you feel there’s more connection with D/deaf people. The Theatre Royal is a bit stiff compared to the Playhouse.

Notably, the Playhouse does not regularly employ sign-integration in its productions, preferring the method of Interpreter Support. However, the company’s involvement in Arts Council England funded Ramps on the Moon - a 3 year collaboration between 7 producing theatres to produce D/deaf and disability integrated large scale productions - indicated a trajectory toward D/deaf recognition and further access. These forms of relationships between theatre venues, companies and Deaf Clubs were seen as being a vital component of future attendance and enjoyment of accessible theatre within ‘hard-to-reach’ D/deaf audiences.

Reaching the ‘hard-to-reach’:

As previously stated, many D/deaf people feel excluded from theatre venues due to issues of access, the frequency of accessible productions, and the geographical implications involved. One of the ways to resolve this is through theatre companies and venues pro-actively seeking relationships with members of the D/deaf Community, using Deaf Clubs as a locus - as detailed above.

However, Red Earth and other similar companies have been in existence for some time and, although they may not have the resources to compete with mainstream theatre venues and large production houses, they have been consistently producing well-received D/deaf accessible theatre in the Midlands area since 1999. As such, this indicates that the awareness of touring companies is not prevalent among D/deaf communities – evidenced by the great interest in Red Earth’s upcoming performances and productions across audiences attending Mirror Mirror, and the lack of awareness – relative to this – of Red Earth as a sign-integrated theatre company. This extended to some audience members and research participants watching the show on more than one occasion, travelling to different venues to enjoy it again. Members of Deaf clubs elsewhere in the country, such as Hull and Coventry, also travelled to see the production and were extremely keen to book the show for their clubs and to establish a relationship with Red Earth for future projects.
Aside from working with the D/deaf Community through Deaf Clubs, the principle way in which participants suggested that this issue be resolved was through social media – mainly through Facebook, although one 15 year old participant at Birmingham reported that her generation were more likely to use Instagram as a means of social media. In every interview, every response to the question of how a theatre company could best work with the D/deaf community was centred on a need to increase awareness through these technological avenues. This was consistent across all age ranges and communication needs. One participant in Sheffield laid out in-depth what she thought would be the most beneficial way to go about this:

Marie [D/deaf, 61]: There's a D/deaf group, yeah. I think 'Theatre for the Deaf' or something like that. You could set something like that up. You know, it's sort of like a group, a 'link' if you like. I think that would obviously expand the numbers, something like that. Similar to how you have medical, health groups. That kind of thing. We have [groups for] Deafland, DLA PIP [Disability Living Allowance - Personal Independence Payments], and then we could have another one for theatre.
As part of this social media outreach, it was stressed that visual forms of communication be used to engage D/deaf people in the event and raise awareness of the sign-integration aspect of Red Earth’s theatre. During the same interview, the following exchange was had:

Barbara [D/deaf, 57]: You could do a small video, if you like, and put a small video of the show on Facebook and then people can have a taster of it. You know, little clips on Facebook or Twitter, or whatever. So then people have a visual recommendation of what they’re going to watch. It’s like an advert isn’t it. One woman [Lara] has been on Facebook, hasn’t she, just explaining what it’s going to be, but I think you need more visual stuff, just a little clip, a snippet of what the shows actually about - with BSL signing as well. It’s good for D/deaf awareness to actually look at that and know what you’re going to actually watch.

Marie: D/deaf people, when they see it, they can see that it’s got sign in, integrated, and then they’ll be more accepting of going and watching it. But maybe D/deaf people think, 'it’s going to be a story with an Interpreter at the side'. D/deaf people don’t want that.

These views – in terms of providing purely visual information regarding the performance, focusing on the sign-integrated nature of it - were echoed throughout the research process, and implementing a co-ordinated social media approach within D/deaf Communities and through Deaf Clubs may well prove to prompt higher engagement and attendance.

**D/deaf awareness and representation**

Another key outcome relating to engaging D/deaf audiences in theatre was the inclusion of D/deaf actors and relevant cultural themes within the performance. The lack of awareness in the majority hearing world of D/deaf people and their culture was a consistent theme throughout the research and was a source of angst for many respondents.

A strong example of this was evident in a response taken from the interview at Derby, where an extended conversation on the creation of theatre by D/deaf and hearing children raised an interesting perspective:

Natasha [D/deaf, 43]: What I would like to see actually is them creating their own stories. For example— what’s popular? Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, all these references. I’d like to see the group, the young D/deaf group, create their own stories from their own imaginations. Not taken from books, not taken from films. Just improvising, creating their own stories. That’s the kind of thing that I would like to see.

Jennifer [D/deaf, 48]: Yes. Imaginative, oh fab!

Natasha: Just have a look, see what’s there. See if you can get into their heads and pull out what they’re actually thinking and make that into a story, that’d be fab.
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Natasha: Just have a look, see what's there. See if you can get into their heads and pull out what they're actually thinking and make that into a story, that'd be fab.

**Respondents' Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Deaf %</th>
<th>Hearing %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>60+ years</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This focus on drawing inspiration from D/deaf people's culture as a way to produce more accessible and engaging theatre was shared by some other participants, such as those in Doncaster. During this interview, the participants drew upon their own work in community theatre to emphasise the importance of having references to D/deaf culture form the basis of engagement in the play, lending an additional level of access. Unlike those interviewed at Derby, these participants worked within the confines of pre-determined stories (fairy-tales), but built them with D/deaf cultural sensibilities in mind – comparing Red Earth's approach favourably in the process:

James [D/deaf, 67]: To have elements of D/deaf culture in a play is brilliant. Instead of having a glass slipper, we had a glass hearing aid - that was Cinderella.

Laura [D/deaf, 66]: I directed a show, I don't know, about five years ago. I directed Cinderella. Instead of having glass slippers, we had a glass hearing aid. Then, in the Land of Oz, there was a hearing dog for the D/deaf being carried as Dorothy's dog. So we had D/deaf things in that. And in Cinderella, the prince was D/deaf. Prince Charming was D/deaf and the prince's friend was an interpreter who interpreted on-stage. The ugly sisters couldn't sign, so the prince wasn't interested in them because they couldn't sign.
So you had a kind of cultural translation in it. The iPad was in the play with flashing lights, like how D/deaf people have flashing lights to get attention.

**Norah [D/deaf, 66]:** I agree with what they’re saying, to have D/deaf culture, something about D/deaf people in it. It gives you a laugh. So, like the puppets [in Mirror, Mirror], the puppets are a laugh, aren’t they? They’re something different. Something different like that.

Tied to this sentiment of D/deaf cultural recognition and awareness was the notion of including D/deaf actors on the stage and in the production of the performance as a way to reach out to ‘hard-to-reach’ D/deaf audiences and encourage their engagement with theatre.

Lara’s inclusion as a D/deaf actress, coupled with her strong performance in the eyes of many respondents, was a contributing factor to many D/deaf people’s enjoyment of the play according to the research conducted. This even prompted one teacher at Spinney Hill to declare in a questionnaire response that ‘our deaf students were more engaged than I have ever seen them watching theatre,’ whereas another teacher commented that it was ‘fantastic for our deaf pupils to have accessible theatre – and what a role model for them!’

This emphasis on roles for D/deaf actors was also common amongst the perception of adult participants. During the Doncaster interview, an interviewee put this view with great passion – echoing the opinions and piqued emotions of others when discussing this issue. Her sentiments here encapsulate the response of other participants, tying together many of the factors identified in this overall theme:
Norah [D/deaf, 66]: I feel quite emotional to be honest. I feel like, there's someone there who's the same as me [referring to Lara]. Who's D/deaf like me, and I'm completely into it. [...] I felt really emotional, it's just how I felt. I felt that that's me there. It was really true, it was really emotional. We need more like this, travelling through the country for D/deaf people and to have D/deaf culture on stage. Things really need improving for D/deaf people.
5. Recommendations
5. Concluding Remarks

Over the course of this project, it was evident that Red Earth create well-received, D/deaf accessible theatre using a variety of differing approaches to theatre-making – semiological, aesthetic and dramaturgical – in order to communicate effectively across their audience base.

From observation of the devising and rehearsal process, it is apparent that Red Earth exemplify the ethos behind the Creative Case for Diversity. They design and conceive their performances with an audience with a broad range of communication needs at the forefront of their thinking during the creative process and in accordance with the ‘three interlinking progressions’ central to the Creative Case. Crucially, they produce theatre, which recognises and reflects D/deaf people and culture, placing them at the centre of theatre-making considerations and with a particular focus on engaging children and families in the worlds of their productions.

Mirror Mirror itself was well-received and highly regarded by participants in the production – across a range of ages and communication needs. It can be judged as an overall success in terms of its ability to communicate across these audiences, although there are areas for further improvement and refinement.

Drawn from the analysis of interviews and questionnaires during the research as detailed in the Findings, as well as the observations taken from the Fieldwork conducted, below are listed a selection of recommendations.

“I’ve never been to the theatre, no. So this is the first time for me, and wow! Seeing it tonight, having it all in one, not needing an interpreter on the side, I think it’s brilliant to have it all in one all the way through. And not having to move my head to the side. It was amazing!”

Norah, Deaf, 66, Doncaster
1. Creative Process: a collaborative approach to devising performance (as outlined in the Fieldwork section) is highly useful in the creation of sign-integrated theatre with the perspectives of a range of audiences, hearing and D/deaf, in mind. Red Earth should continue with this approach and other companies may benefit from considering more genuinely collaborative approaches to the process of theatre-making in their future productions.

2. Sign-integration: although sign-integration was roundly recognised as being an effective form of communication across D/deaf and hearing audiences, it was felt that less reliance on SSE (an actor signing and speaking concurrently) would be of benefit to people whose preferred language is BSL.

3. Since there appears to be a correlation between number of performers, the scope and ambition of integrated theatre for a broad range of audiences and reliance on SSE, an additional actor (or more) would help address this issue.

4. As a principle, for BSL as first language audiences, signing and speaking at the same time are best minimised in order to enhance communication.

5. The employment of a BSL director throughout the rehearsal and devising process with a view to becoming a constitutive member of the company and Red Earth’s process is recommended.

6. A post of a full-time Creative Producer (specifically a D/deaf person) to initiate and direct projects and productions, in line with Red Earth’s key business plan objectives is seen as desirable.
7. **Total Communication:** this approach to cultivating avenues of communication (both semiotic and aesthetic) was received very positively. Red Earth would do well to continue cultivating these techniques, including new art forms such as Visual Vernacular and other similar projects are advised to consider this approach as a means to enhance the effectiveness of communication in their work.

8. **Diversity Confidence:** It is recommended that Red Earth work directly with the communities it wishes to serve, bringing local venues into the relationship subsequently, once groups are established and active.

Several of the above issues were recognised during the rehearsal period and Red Earth did attempt to address them within the time and resources available to them.

Given that these issues were unable to be fully resolved, a further recommendation is offered in light of this:

9. **Future funding for similar projects and productions should be reviewed** in terms of the time and resources required to achieve the full communicative potential required to provide access across all members of a D/deaf and hearing audience. Access to additional resources – in terms of time and finance – would allow the above recommendations to be put into practice resolving the issues relating to Mirror Mirror as identified in this report.

"I’ve been to see a performance before but it was boring. There was no signing, it was all just speech. I didn’t like it. Today I really liked it because of the signing, **it was really interesting** [...] I didn’t know signing and speech was possible. **This is the first time I’ve seen actors**"

Rabiya, Deaf, Year 12 student, Ellesmere College, Leicester
10. ‘Hard-to-reach’ Audiences: in order to engage ‘hard-to-reach’ D/deaf audiences, the following general recommendations are offered:

“Tonight’s [show] was good. I’ve really enjoyed it because the signing was in the play. You’ve got **sign and voice** in the whole play. It makes a big difference from a show with an interpreter just stuck on the side. It’s great to have sign language actually in the play. And this is something very different, really enjoyed it.”

Norah, Deaf, 66, Doncaster

A. Methods of access other than Interpreter Support should be explored and offered to D/deaf audiences. The consensus from the research is that this method - of an Interpreter being placed on the side of the stage - is very negatively viewed within the D/deaf Community and by D/deaf theatre-goers and seen as an obstacle to their enjoyment and comprehension of a performance.

B. Sign-integration is seen as a preferable form of access to Interpreter Support and should be considered as a method of access by companies and venues who wish to produce or book theatre which will engage ‘hard-to-reach’ D/deaf audiences.

C. The D/deaf accessible nature of shows should be reinforced and visually prominent in all advertising materials, as D/deaf awareness in theatre is considered an attractive proposition which would encourage attendance.

D. Facebook - and social media in general - is the most recommended way of reaching out to the D/deaf community in terms of marketing events and generating awareness. A social media drive which targets specifically D/deaf Groups on Facebook and other forms of social media would thus be a desirable outcome.

E. Utilise primarily visual communication in terms of marketing, with a focus on BSL communication and video recordings of how access is provided in the event.

F. Instigate and strengthen links to Deaf Clubs and the D/deaf Community. This was reported to increase engagement and interest in theatre, and venues which pursue these.
6. Acknowledgements

7. Mirror Mirror
   Production Credits

8. Red Earth Theatre
   Board of Trustees

9. References
6. Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to give acknowledgement and great thanks to the following organisations and individuals who have been instrumental in the construction of this report and the process of the overall project:

**Funding Bodies:**


**Red Earth:**

Amanda Wilde, Wendy Rouse, Alex Stafford-Marshall, Rachael Merry, Lara Steward, Laura McEwan, Simon Birchall, Joanne Bernard and Sean Myatt.

**The Participants:**

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**Other individuals:**

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Also, the researcher’s supervisory team at the University of Nottingham – Gordon Ramsay, Peter Rumney, and with special mention reserved for Jo Robinson who was instrumental in the setting up of the placement leading to this report.

“...I like something like this. I want more of this type of performance. Without an interpreter, so you can see it all right through, it’s acted in BSL all the way through. And I could just feel it coming into my head, I was there with it. Fantastic.”

Norah, Deaf, 66, Doncaster
7. Mirror Mirror Production Credits

Written and Directed by Wendy Rouse & Amanda Wilde

Devised by the company

Performer Rachael Merry

Performer Lara Steward

Designed by Laura McEwen

Lighting design & Production Management Alexandra Stafford

Puppetry Director Sean Myatt

Choreography Joanne Bernard

Sound Design Amanda Wilde & Simon Birchall

Graphic Design Dominic Mallin

Community Liaison Janeene Streather

Set Construction Tim Brierley

Puppet Maker Nick Ashe

BSL Interpreters Elvire Roberts, Karen Perry, Rowena Gordon, Lucy Smart, Rebekah Cuppitt, Emma Dunleavy, Helen Jackson, Isobel Higgins-Burke.

Production Photography Robert Day

Production Video Swainson Productions.

Special thanks to Threaded folk band, Derby Shakespeare Company, Dr Jo Robinson, University of Nottingham.

“Today I really liked it because of the signing; it was really interesting. I didn’t know signing and speech was possible. This is the first time I’ve seen actors signing.”

Rabiya, Deaf, Year 12 student, Ellesmere College, Leicester
8. Red Earth Theatre Board of Trustees

Kirsty Blyth
Andrew Breakwell
Angela Carey
Jo Robinson
Michele Taylor
Martha Toogood Callow (Chair)
Nicola Wheldrake
Thomas Wildish
9. References


