

Dyslexia-friendly Transcript for Discover Central Series 2, Episode 3:

Ayse Tashkiran and Christina Fulcher



Host: Scott Bellamy

Guest 1: Ayse Tashkiran

Guest 2: Christina Fulcher

Guest 3: Daniella Faircloth

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[theme tune plays. SCOTT starts speaking]

HOST - SCOTT BELLAMY:

Welcome to Discover Central, the podcast that gives you a behind the scenes look at the life of students, staff and alumni at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

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SCOTT

I'm your host, Scott, and welcome to the third episode of our second series. On today's episode, we'll be speaking with Ayse Tashkiran, a senior lecturer at Central and the Co-Course Leader for the MA/ MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching course. Joining Ayse will be alumna Christina Fulcher, who graduated from the MFA course in 2019. We'll also be speaking with Central's Student's Union Disability and Dyslexia officer Daniella Faircloth. First up I would like to introduce Ayse Tashkiran, who is a movement director,

teacher and researcher in the field of movement in theatre. Her movement work aims to free and empower the actor through motion, imagination and emotion. Through her work and research, she acts as an advocate for the field of movement direction, and creates links between directors, actors, and movement directors. Ayse is the co-founder of the first professional network for movement directors in the UK, a fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and an Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Christina Fulcher graduated from the MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching course in 2019. She is a movement director, choreographer, and teacher from California based in London, where she works across theatre, dance, musical theatre and opera. Having trained as a dancer, Christina has performed with the American Ballet Theatre and the Joffrey Ballet. Her current research is on actor embodiment and inclusive movement direction. Hi Ayse and Christina, welcome and thanks for speaking with us.

GUEST 1 – AYSE TASHKIRAN

Hi, Scott. Hi, Christina.

GUEST 2- CHRISTINA FULCHER

Hi, hello, hello.

SCOTT

It's lovely to see you both. Ayse, just quickly starting with yourself. You joined Central in 2003, and shortly after you became the joint course leader for Movement Studies, now the MA/ MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching. Why don't you just tell us a little bit about the course to get us started?

AYSE

Yeah, great, Scott. So what was wonderful about joining Central in 2003, is that when I arrived, Debbie Green, and Vanessa Ewan, they had already created a course called the MA Movement Studies. And I arrived as

a movement teacher and as a movement director. So it felt really organic that I would collaborate with them and start getting this course from an idea into reality. And since about 2004, I've collaborated very happily with both of them, but especially with Vanessa Ewan, to run the course. And I can't remember exactly when we changed the name. But we felt at one point that while study was an important part of what we do, we're actually essentially a practical course. So it felt good to sort of shift the title of the course towards doing words like teaching and directing. And that's that's what we've been doing ever since. The course is for people who have a commitment to movement for actors and movement in creative production settings. And I guess what is amazing is that over the progression of the course, that has really opened up in terms of what that is, so our graduates work on musical theatre, they work on opera, they work in theatre, they also work across visual and virtual mediums as well. So contributing to animation and to VR work. So that has been one of the most expansive parts of what's happened actually, is that we're really focused on movement for actors. But how you apply that becomes a much broader terrain. I guess part of the really important part of the course is community, so that practitioners who come with, you know, a fair amount of experience, also get to build a new community and that community of peers will go through with them beyond the end of the course. And I guess the other thing is that they get to work with a variety of movement practitioners, so movement teachers and movement directors who all contribute to the life of the teaching.

SCOTT

Thanks for that, Ayse. The MFA option for the degree, that was added a few years ago. Can you tell us a little bit about why you developed this and actually a bit about what the difference is between the MA and the MFA?

AYSE

Yes, of course. Well, the difference, the main difference is that the MFA is a two year programme. The MA can be done as a one year programme, or it can be done part time as two years but the MFA is definitely two years. And the second year, I suppose, is a really exciting year. And it was born out of a desire to accompany that first professional year out of the shifts and changes that might have happened in the first year. So we as, as a team had been noticing that our students were getting really interesting work. They were being heads of movement in conservatoires, they were being employed at universities, they were working on productions. And we were kind of maintaining that dialogue with them and almost accompanying them through their year out. So we decided that as we were growing, that we would formalise that. So I suppose what it is, it's a way of really accompanying someone on their journey in their second year. And it allows for time, it allows for ideas that might be seeded in the first year to mature in the second year. I think it is a different timeframe which, inherently is more inclusive, because I think some learners just do need more time, and more time not to be doing things as well as doing things. So I think the format had an inclusive potential. And then I guess the other thing is that it was an opportunity to really deepen and provoke new learning, and accompany that through the second year. And a feature of the MFA second year is that you get one on one tutorials all the way through to accompany the practical work that you might be doing and the intellectual work that you're doing. So that one on one relationship where you're working in a really bespoke way with somebody, I think, again, has inbuilt potential for inclusivity. Because what you're doing is you're going on this quiet journey, which is based around this person's capacities, their aptitudes and their needs. So again, you know, the MFA felt like a real development of something that is embedded in the MA as well, of course, we're not going to change ourselves between the two programmes, but that you could really go somewhere, I suppose, with a second year.

SCOTT

So Christina, you graduated from the MFA course in 2019. Firstly, if you just tell us a little bit about why you chose Central, and how did you find your time with us?

CHRISTINA

So I came on holiday to London in summer of 2015 and fell in love with the city and the whole theatrical landscape of London, and how you can go from West London to East London to North to South and every bit of it just has a little bit different of a flavour, different fashion, different vibes. And in returning home to California, I began my research on MFA programmes and knew I wanted to explore an MFA programme wasn't quite sure whether it was London or within the US, but I knew I wanted to come back to London, and made another adventure over the summer the following summer, and really like solidified, this is London. This is like home and alive here. And in 2016, I applied for Central's movement course, I began my journey of applying, I went to New York City, and did an audition there. And just it became all of my plan, and moving my whole life from San Diego to London. Yeah, my plan was London, there was no plan B. And I loved the idea of the movement course, of movement and direction and seeing their diverse alumni and what they were doing. And plus I loved the fact that practitioners were also academics, as well as working in the field as a movement director. That's why I chose Central and why I came.

SCOTT

And when you with us, you had a wonderful time on the course, by virtue of us talking to you today, but also clearly the wonderful relationship you still have with Ayse.

CHRISTINA

Yeah, so I loved my experience and the support I felt on the course throughout my journey and really felt a valued part of the cohort. And also our movement cohort was super supportive and constantly learning from each other. We still have a whatsapp group. And also a big shout out to my buddy Ruth Phillips who provided a great exchange and collaboration throughout the experience to bounce ideas that still continues to this day. I think the movement course, it really like broke me open as well as fostered and developed and uncracked and pushed me to a further understanding of my movement practice, and looking back at all of my previous experience and my own experience as a dancer and an actor, as well as a teacher. I realised that I was always movement directing, but didn't know what it was until I came to the course. And also through the Learning Centre at Central was really supportive, and during my second year of my MFA in October of 2018, I was tested and diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. And they were really supportive. I had tutorials throughout my second MFA year with the brilliant and supportive Sherry Stone. Through this process, I'm still unlearning and relearning how my brain and my body are connected and constantly surprised and excited by my own neurodiversity, which helps me think outside the box and big picture thinking and big empathy for others. Also, that the library's gold at Central, and I miss it, and just all of the wonderful, fabulous movement books and getting lost in massive stacks of books. And also finding all of the journal articles and a way in with that; journal articles I think, as a dyslexic person, kind of like zoom in on something and give you loads of detail, and I print them and put notes all over them and highlight them. And now I have my own little library of journal articles that I use now constantly in my teaching practice. And then I'd just say that at Central Ayse and Vanessa and their encouragement and championing us movement practitioners, and all of our guest practitioners coming in and inspiring us and helping shift and evolve and move our practice... And that this is my third career, so doing now my passion and finding my gift of sharing

movement with the world is just, I'm forever grateful to the experience I had at Central and on the course.

SCOTT

That's so lovely to hear. And you actually you mentioned your second year, the MFA year, and I know that within that you focused quite heavily on inclusivity in movement direction. Can you tell us a little bit more about that work?

CHRISTINA

Yes! I'm really very passionate about inclusive practice and the inclusion of disabled and non disabled actors, singers, performing, working together on a project. And building on everyone's lived experience and their own embodiment makes for a richer, vibrant, sparkly, collaborative process to develop characters within a diverse world. Also telling and sharing stories that look like our world. More than one in five people in the UK are disabled and our theatrical and performance landscape, I believe wholeheartedly, must reflect this. And in my second year on the MFA course, my research question was a bit all over the place. But I kept coming back to inclusion. And this research, its always been, I guess, a part of my practice. But I hadn't really like unpicked it. I'd started the research originally as a group project on the Performing Research Unit, but there was still so much more to discover. And on this journey of the second year, I had a brilliant attachment as assistant choreographer to Anna Morrissey on the West End transfer of Emilia. I really, within that process, began to discover and find my way with inclusive movement direction and how important, challenging, difficult and rewarding that is. And also as a part of this research within my second year, I completed a series of workshops at Central with Central students looking at actor movement, and then also abroad I facilitated some workshops in Athens as well as in Singapore. And within this research, I discovered and formulated a model I call PIT which stands for planning, improvisation and

time as defined by Laban in Sudden and Sustained, and through this research and unpacking I found that inclusive movement direction ebbs and flows through what Central tutor Deirdre McLaughlin calls, and she defines as, embodiment cycles. So, as a movement person, you go through this embodiment, embodying and embodiment, and you're constantly on this loop as a movement director in relation to your actors, in relation to your creative team, where you need all of these elements that are always happening simultaneously. And so this model, I still use in my practice and am continuing to kind of unpick that.

SCOTT

What do you think that this work that you focused on that MFA year, what has that meant for you and your work since graduating?

CHRISTINA

So, I continue to use this PIT model in my practice as a movement director and educator working with actors, dancers and performers. And now I find it even more challenging and evolving with COVID, isolation, distancing, and we need to embrace this model more and find new models. Also, Ruth Phillips and I co-founded along with Sam Hind, who was on the movement course too, and Milly Rolle who's a freelance practitioner and theatre collaborator, we started Inclusion Collective at the beginning of 2020, where we delivered an in person workshop and then due to everything going on in the world, shifted it to online and did through this time, we've done some Instagram Live conversations about topics around inclusion. And recently, Ruth Phillips and I won a grant by Society of Dance Research to continue drawing on my research of disability and neurodiversity, and finding where that intersection - her research is more on body acceptance and fat phobia - and how do these move and evolve within, and how there's lots of different parts within inclusive practice, within the actor movement training, and how we can evolve rehearsal spaces to create new narratives and

research possibilities. And we're hoping, fingers crossed, to share this research, possibly at a postponed movement symposium about why movement matters. Ruth and I co-teach together in trainings, and we check in weekly, if not daily, about practice. Keeping the conversation really alive, I think, in inclusion, and if we encourage each other and accept that there's enough for all of us to go around, and so why not champion each other and shout out about inclusion and movement practice to kind of evolve and move and empower each other.

SCOTT

Absolutely. And congratulations on the research grant, and we look forward to hearing much more about the research in due course. But thank you ever so much for that. Ayse, back to yourself. One of the movement course team's priorities, has been working closely with students to innovate teaching styles, and ensure that they're inclusive for dyslexic and dyspraxic learners. Could you tell us a little bit more about this work?

AYSE

Yeah, of course. So movement people, on the whole, understand through the act of moving. And that's just a really fundamental thing. And they know that processing things through the body, feeling through the body, and the benefits of time and the benefits of repetition, and the benefits of approaching learning in a multimodal way, is kind of, again, inherent. It's embedded in what movement people know. So we're really lucky in that every movement student who comes on the course starts with that base. And we all share that. I guess what is potentially different is that there are going to be other kinds of learning challenges on the MA or the MFA. And I think lots of our students come on, because they want to reach out towards those other types of learning. So that might include things that feel more distant, like writing or articulating something which is embodied into words or into a format for other people to understand. So I see our work very much as

bridging that deep movement knowledge and finding access points into other ways of learning. It's a bridge from embodied knowing into organising, writing, thinking, and I hope that we do that creatively. And we do that in collaboration with the students. So, you know, it's such a gift to have 12 or 14 pedagogues in the room, because you can ask a question. And that question just spins out into reality, really. So one of the wonderful things is that when you've got diverse learners, if you ask a question about diversity, or if you ask a question about widening participation, or if you ask a question about inclusion, that gets picked up, and that becomes the subject matter for investigation. I think one of the things that we've been quite careful to do, and this really emerged out of the MFA the year before Christina did it, which is that we do go on learning journeys with our students. So once you get to know somebody's learning style, and you really get to sort of see what their aptitudes are and where their creative strengths are, you can then start tailoring what you ask of them to meet that. And I think that is an absolutely essential component. And what's really clever about that is if you can do that in a teaching environment, it's really easy to do that in a movement direction environment. So you're kind of practising the same thing in two different environments. So the year before Christina, we had an MFA student who'd had, I can safely say, quite negative previous learning experiences. That's like a rag to a bull to me, really, which is, okay, we're going to turn that negativity around, and we're going to really listen to your aptitudes. And we devised all sorts of ways of working: short tutorials that happened weekly, we created a sort of movement tutorial as well. So instead of sitting and talking, the student would lay out their images and their working journal in the space so that you could walk around the space with them. And they could articulate their thinking, because they were looking at their own drawings, or they're looking at something spatially. And of course, the moment that you're standing up means that you can also be moving. So if there's a moment that you need to galvanise your body to understand, you can then use your body rather than feeling constrained to be sitting in a seat. So this sort of quasi-

studio based tutorial was something that we invented with the student, and it was, it was a real discovery. And then out of that, I realised that one of the things that we hadn't done on the MFA is that we hadn't put this more kind of plural multimodal aspect into the assessment. So I got very busy that year and started rewriting how you can submit the MFA platform. It used to be a written artefact and Christina, you know, really did such an amazing job at moulding her practice and her thinking into the written artefact. We've now opened that up, so you are also able to submit your MFA as a portfolio. Multimodality has always been part of the MA, but we hadn't quite applied it to the MFA. And now we've applied it to the MFA. So this year's group are going to do this amazing kind of pioneering thing with us, which is they will be the first group to do this multimodal portfolio option. And again, that allows people to put their practice at the centre of the way that they explore and expose ideas about practice. We use notebooks quite a lot, we use mind maps, we use recordings, we use video extracts. So all of that has become part of the toolkit of how we're working as Movers. So to embed that in the actual assessment points, I think, has been really great. I guess the other thing I'd like to say as well is that as a team, we are only as good as the people we collaborate with. And our collaboration with our students, and our guidance of our students, is also us developing. And our collaboration with our our colleagues who support dyslexic and dyspraxic learners at Central is absolutely fundamental to what we do. So we're always in this kind of relationship, I suppose, this triangular relationship where we're all working to the same end but with slightly different focuses. I think we are definitely developing really great practices around dyslexic and dyspraxic learners. And each year, as we encounter different students with different needs, and different articulations, I think we're getting really good at being able to have those conversations earlier, to really put the student at the centre of that conversation so that they are able to express the things that are trickier for them and the things that are really creative, because I guess there's something that Christina just said, which is so important that neurodiversity if

you flip it around and don't see it as problematic, and see it as enormously creative, and an almost like a privileged position in a way, to be able to be an artist in movement, then you start to really see how you can work with it creatively. And I think that is part of our future development, I think, is to put in place strategies, which really enable learning and creativity.

SCOTT

I've read a statistic that there is a very large percentage of learners, especially in the creative arts, who are neurodiverse, who do have dyslexia or dyspraxia, but also a number of our staff at Central, as well. And I was going to ask, do you think that this has had an impact on the way in which we work with dyslexic and dyspraxic students at Central?

AYSE

Yeah, I'm sure it does. I'd love to see the statistics for the whole of the theatre industry, really, I think we're probably in the majority. I joined Central as somebody who had, you know, always done quite well at school. And I've always really benefited from learning environments. I also saw myself as very hard working, as well. And I guess when I got to Central, I discovered that I was slightly slower at certain tasks that my peers seemed to be able to do really fast. And I asked myself a question, why might that be? So I tested for dyslexia. And it wasn't completely obvious that I was dyslexic straightaway, because I speak several languages, and that can often mask dyslexia. But yeah, I did the whole sort of test and found out I was dyslexic, so high functioning in certain areas and then very low functioning in certain areas. And it's a discrepancy between those areas which gives you a diagnosis. And it was a relief to me really, to kind of find out that kind of scheduling and my short term memory weren't as effective as they might be. Because the moment you can articulate that, you can then kind of go, Okay, this is how I am, I've lived up until the age of 40 quite effectively with all of the strategies that I've got in place, how might I just understand my strategies more clearly,

so I'm not sort of fighting myself in relationship to tasks. I don't know that I really talked about my own dyslexia with students very often because, really, I'm there for them, not for myself. But more recently, I've decided to actually talk about being a dyslexic tutor very early in the process, because I think that allows people to potentially just accept that they are dyslexic as well. So if your tutor is kind of calm with her own diagnosis, maybe that calm can permeate into the culture of a course, you know. I think the disadvantage of being a dyslexic tutor I think, is sometimes that I have to really willfully understand that other dyslexics are different to me, as well, because you have to really make the inclusive triangle work constantly, rather than thinking: 'Well, I can do that, so so should that person be able to do that'. And actually go on this other journey, really, which is to keep asking this question is like: 'What's really working for you? How can we enable that better? Why does that format not work for you? Let me understand more deeply. Let us change this. Oh, would that work if we did this?' So yeah, we're really, we're really in constant dialogue, I suppose, around what people's needs are. And the moment that students start to really own their own process, then you can start to sort of back off. And I think the other thing is, I think we work with lots of adult learners. And sometimes those adult learners may have lost confidence. I have this sort of enormous privilege that I haven't lost confidence in my learning journeys, but I really recognise it in other people when they have, and I think it is so important to be building confidence, just quietly, and really consolidating every like micro-step taken, every realisation made, every epiphany internalised. And, you know, with some confidence, whether that is around dyslexia or any other aspect of somebody's practice, it's such an important thing. And I think it's something that we undervalue in adult learners. So I would hope that just quite quietly in gently that we build confidence in relationship to a learning style.

SCOTT

You mentioned there about how dyslexia impacted on your approach to teaching and training. How has your dyslexia influenced your own work as a practitioner?

AYSE

Yeah, I didn't think about I mean, it's like my gender, I don't really think about being a woman all the time. I don't really think about being a dyslexic all the time. But I recognise that as a movement director, I prepare a lot. Preparation for me, it's a massively creative place to be. And I know that that equips me to act fast when I need to. So kind of resting with material, really embodying something, so I know it, I could do it in my sleep. When I get to that state with material and my own sense of what we're going to do, then I know I can be really fast in the room. I also have working journals, I have my own journal, it's not at all like the student's one because it's much messier. I sort of lay things out, I document conversations, I map out storyboards so that I have some like, memory triggers, ready to go in the room. So that, again, I don't have to struggle with my own short term memory. And, but I have kind of visual aids. And then I suppose in a really geeky way, I practice things. I come from a background as a performer. So if there's a word I really want to use, because I know it's going to really activate something in a rehearsal situation, I practice that word, and I put it into my body. And so, you know, I will literally practice things before I do them. So those are my sort of strategies at the moment. And you know, I'm sure that some of my collaborators find me infuriating, because I'll go 'Oh, yeah, let me just check my notebook', or 'let me post it that and post it that so I can like, know what that is'. But, you know, nobody's ever really complained to me about that part of what I do. And until they do, you know, I think I'm just going to, yeah, enjoy my strategies as creative parts of the room, really.

SCOTT

Thank you so much for that very personal insight into your practice and your training approach, as well. And bringing Christina back in, what's next for you both?

CHRISTINA

Well, currently, I'm teaching across various drama conservatoires, finishing a project at London College of Music as the assistant choreographer to Move Space co founder, Ingrid MacKinnon. So that's been a real joy and a real joy yesterday to be in the theatre with the Disenchanted cast, as well as in the rehearsal studio with the Bonnie and Clyde cast, and to be making live theatre in time like right now, it's just, it's like so refreshing. And also just, I'd love to continue writing and sharing movement practice, big dreams of TED Talks, and hopefully one day travelling again, but also some rest and recover, and hopefully get to see some friends and family soon, back in America, and around the world that now live all over. So, yeah, that's me.

AYSE

So we're just at the end of the autumn term now, so my focus is very much on the kind of granular planning for next term. I've got the scheme but it's now putting in the detail. And I suppose in terms of creative projects, both of the lockdowns interrupted rehearsal processes for me, so both projects are postponed rather than cancelled. So there's a sense of maintaining those as projects that will get me back into a rehearsal room with actors and working again. And I suppose, looking forward to my first Christmas without a writing project. And so over the last six, seven years, I've always taken the winter vacation period to really get some writing done. And this year, quite a big project came to fruition. So the publication happened in July. And it means that I actually will take a little bit of time off over the winter period. Having said that, in the summer, Diane Allison Mitchell and I have been working together on an Association, the first professional body for movement

directors. So the MDA is definitely going to have some projects developing through the wintertime. So I'm looking forward to collaborating with her. We have some days that we've been calling 'Super Saturdays', which means that we spend the whole day together and do our long term planning, so we'll have another one of those during the winter break.

SCOTT

That all sounds fantastic and so, so exciting. Ayse and Christina, thank you both so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your time. During our conversations, we discussed work being undertaken to support dyslexic and dyspraxic learners on the MA/ MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching course. I'm now very pleased to introduce you to the Student's Union Disability and dyslexia officer Daniella Faircloth, who has more information on the support available to all of our Central students, and why she's so passionate about her role with the SU.

GUEST 3 – DANIELLA FAIRCLOTH

Hello, my name is Daniella Faircloth, my pronouns are She/ Her, and I'm the Disability and Dyslexia officer on the Central Student Union. I'm really passionate about this role as I went through most of my life unaware that I was dyslexic. And I spent a lot of time thinking that I was stupid, I was aware that I had to do so much more work than other students in my year group, a lot more reading, it took longer for me to understand things. And I was one of those students that fell through the net. So it wasn't until I got to Central and Tanya that runs the Disability and Dyslexia Service, handed me a quiz and said, 'If you think you could be dyslexic or dyspraxic, fill out this quiz'. And it was through this non-intrusive method of the quiz, that I realised I was dyslexic. And everything sort of fell into place in my head, I became so much kinder to myself and found methods around my study that I would never have found had I not got my diagnosis and my report. So the main passion and drive around me becoming officer is around supporting students that either

have their diagnosis and want more accessible documents, or support through their studies, but more importantly, the students that are yet to get their diagnosis. I want to improve the access of the building, there's more updates that will come on this. I'm working with the senior management at the moment to make emails, documents, that little bit more friendly across the board and to work with students to help them get their diagnosis get their diagnostic. And if they can't afford it, how can we work with the Central system so that students aren't falling through the net? That's essentially my work in the Student Union, at the moment. When you care so deeply about something, it's hard to not let it get the better of you, sometimes, so I'm really lucky that I've got Parker, who is always always open to talking, and Tanya and the DDS team that are there for me, and whatever idea I throw at them, they back. We're all incredibly supportive of one another. So I'm just I'm really honoured and super happy to be in the role. If any students want to get in touch with me, my email is su-disabilities@cssd.ac.uk. And if you want an informal mode of contact, my Instagram handle is [@CSSD_disabilitydyslexiaofficer](https://www.instagram.com/CSSD_disabilitydyslexiaofficer). And my inbox is literally always, always open. Not all disabilities are visible, so even if it's anxiety around learning, the mental health side of things, because there are, you know, we all get anxieties around around certain things, especially neurodiversities and disabilities, then absolutely come to me speak to me. We can go for a socially distant cup of tea. Absolutely. Any any of that is good for me. So thank you.

SCOTT:

Thank you, Daniella.

[theme tune starts, crescendo as Scott continues talking]

SCOTT:

And thank you for joining us for this episode of Discover Central. We hope you'll join us for our next episode. But for now, from all of us at Central, take care and we'll see you next time.

[theme tune ends, diminuendo]