

Creating immersive performances and artistic experiences for children with diverse developmental profiles

Dalija Acin Thelander

Total duration: 5 days, 7 hours per day

The workshop aims to provide practical knowledge on creating performances for children with diverse developmental profiles, rooted in Dalija Acin Thelander's extensive artistic and academic research. Participants will engage in an intense creative process based on the core principles of Dalija's practice, while fostering dialogue, exchange, critical thinking, and experimentation. This workshop encourages practitioners to rethink formats and methods in the field, inspiring and empowering them to create artistic experiences that honor the unique nature of this audience. By the end of the workshop, participants will gain valuable knowledge and practical experience for creating immersive performances, which they can apply in future projects—whether for funding applications, collaborations, or further professional development. Participants will also be provided with additional reading materials to deepen their understanding and continue exploring the concepts introduced.

The workshop consists of four segments:

Day 1: Lecture and Discussion; Practical Insights;

Day 1-5: Creative Devising and Practical Application; Sharing and Reflection.

1. Lecture and Discussion

This segment introduces the key principles shaping Dalija Acin Thelander's artistic practice and performance-making, explored from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The lecture includes visual materials such as slides, photos, videos, and research documentation excerpts.

Key aspects introduced:

- Understanding the Audience: Nature, diversity, and needs
- Political Dimensions of Childhood: Challenging hierarchical and binary distinctions
- Attentional Modalities and Modes of Engagement
- The Role of Immersion in Performance: Impact on experience and perception
- Sensory Immediacy and Multisensory Perception
- Movement as Expression: Its primacy as a communicative tool
- Affective Experience and Kinesthetic Awareness
- Embodied Perception: Prioritizing experience over intellectual processing
- Movement and Performative Practice
- Choreography as Expanded Practice
- Extended Duration and Durational Performance: Their significance in immersive experiences
- Stage and Costume Design: Considerations for immersive performances
- Ecological Ethos and Interrelationality in Performance-Making
- The Underlying Intention: Artistic, social, and political dimensions of the practice

The lecture will conclude with a Q&A session and a discussion tailored to participants' interests.

Duration: 2 hours

2. Practical Insights

This segment provides practical guidance on staging and performing immersive works for this target group and their accompanying adults. It will cover key aspects of audience communication, fundamental engagement principles, and essential performing strategies.

Key topics include:

1. Information provided to the audience by organizers upon receiving show details
2. Pre-performance communication with the audience by ushers
3. Communication during the performance (Performer–Audience; Performer–Performer)
4. Core performance practice principles: Performative interaction and attentional and communicative strategies

A list of these principles and strategies will be presented on slides and discussed in detail based on participants' interests

Duration: 30-40 mins

3. Creative Devising and Practical Application

In this segment, participants will engage in a creative exploration process, experimenting with the concepts in practice. The process involves the following:

- **Exploring the idea and its potential:** Identifying the intention of the performance.
- **Framing the audience group(s):** Considering who the performance is for.
- **Artistic interpretation and methods:** Reflecting on how the idea translates into the structure of the performance (dramaturgy, scenes, content, dynamics, etc.) through various creative methods, including improvisation, physical exploration, and conceptual framing.
- **Defining roles:** Understanding the contribution of each performance element (performers, music, scenography, sound, light, props, etc.).
- **Structuring the scenes:** Envisioning the sequence of scenes, their intention, and content.
- **Scene development:** Creating one or two sample scenes, including performance material, sound, and props (if applicable).
- **Group sharing and reflection:** After each session, participants will share their progress, allowing for insight into other participants' work and fostering discussion, questions, and critical reflection.



Structure:

- **Introducing the structure and aims:** Introducing the structure and aims: Participants will be provided with an overview of the workshop's structure, methods, and goals, including the final sharing and feedback session on the last day of the workshop.
- **Choosing the idea:** Participants are invited to propose topics or ideas they wish to explore artistically. They may then select from the proposed topics or engage in themes suggested by Dalija.
- **Forming working groups:** Once the topics are selected, participants will work individually or in small groups.
- **Process:** The groups/individuals will work in parallel sessions (1-2 hours each). Dalija will oversee the process, providing guidance, feedback, and suggestions. Participants will create "Maps" to visualize their thoughts and ideas, structuring them clearly for others to gain insight. These Maps will evolve throughout the process. In addition to the maps, participants can use digital tools to incorporate visual and auditory references. Participants will also be involved in structuring the day's schedule, determining the length of working sessions, as well as the number and timing of sharing sessions.
- **Sharing:** Between sessions, each group or individual will present their process and Maps to the entire group, followed by a brief reflection and discussion. Participants will be encouraged to articulate their ideas clearly, refine their vocabulary, and practice framing their concepts within a discursive context. This aspect of the workshop focuses on enhancing participants' ability to communicate and reflect on their creative choices, fostering a critical dialogue around language, framing, and conceptualization. Participants will engage in discussing their processes not only through the content but also through the ways they structure, present, and articulate their artistic intentions.



4. Final Sharing/Presentations and Reflection

This segment concerns the last day of the workshop.

- **First Session:**
The participants are asked to finalize their Maps and prepare their verbal presentations, as well as finalize their practical proposals (performing materials). The groups contribute to making the schedule for the rest of the day and the Final Sharing.
- **Second Session:**
Participants present one by one, with each group or individual sharing their Maps (10-15 minutes) and performing materials (15-20 minutes), followed by a quick reflection/Q&A. As the real target audience won't be present, some observing participants may be asked

by the presenting participants to engage as if they were the audience, with assigned roles (e.g., age, developmental profile, etc.). This session will be open to workshop participants, organizers, and special invitees.

Feedback Type:

The reflection will primarily be open-ended, though presenting participants may be asked to prepare specific questions for their "audience" if they desire so.

Audience:

The Final Sharing is primarily for workshop participants, organizers, and special invitees. However, some of the observing participants might be invited to take on roles as the audience, in order to mimic the real target audience's response.

Time Management:

Time slots for presentations will be assigned, although flexibility will be provided if necessary.

Feedback Type:

The reflection after each presentation will be mostly open-ended, allowing for natural discussion. However, presenting participants may be asked to prepare specific questions for their 'audience' to guide the conversation, should they desire to do so.



Final Takeaways:

By the end of the workshop, participants will have:

- Gained practical knowledge and hands-on experience in the process of creating immersive performances for children with diverse developmental profiles. The depth of progress will vary depending on group dynamics, individual capacities, and engagement, with the workshop providing the necessary context, guidance, and inspiration to explore and build upon these concepts.
- Developed an understanding of key artistic principles and strategies for engaging this audience.
- Explored methods of audience communication, performative interaction, and attentional strategies that enhance the immersive experience.
- Acquired insights into the creative process of devising performances, from conceptualization to scene development.
- Gained inspiration and tools for initiating future projects, including funding applications and collaborations.

- Received additional reading materials to deepen their knowledge and continue developing their practice beyond the workshop.

<https://www.dalijaacinthelander.com/teaching>

Dalija Acin Thelander works within the performing arts field as a freelance choreographer, stage designer, and researcher. Her work aspires to contribute to the notion of choreography as an expanded practice and focuses on audience agency, intersensoriality, and emplacement. Since 2008, Dalija has engaged in intensive research on interrelational choreographic practices, particularly creating immersive sensory dance performances for neurotypical babies. In 2022, she began a three-year research project at Stockholm University of Arts, developing transdisciplinary methods that foster sensory immediacy, kinesthetic responses, and intersubjectivity, tailored to the perceptions of children with various developmental profiles. She designs and creates immersive scenographies and costumes for her performances. Her work for the youngest audiences has been presented internationally, including in Japan, Korea, India, China, Singapore, Macao, Hong Kong, Brazil, South Africa, and across Europe. Dalija's performances were also commissioned by the Royal Opera in Stockholm in 2017 and 2022. She teaches and lectures internationally, sharing her knowledge and innovative approaches. Dalija is the recipient of the ASSITEJ International Artistic Excellence Award (2021) and the prestigious Swedish Expressen Culture Award (2023).