

How can developing Kinaesthetic Empathy enable a sustainable collaborative approach for new groups working together in Theatre Making?

This is a small action research project that I am doing as part of my final Unit for the PG Cert in Academic Practice at UAL.

I have been using Kinesthetic Empathy in my practice as a lecturer in subjects around “the physical in theatre”, as well as in my practice as a dance movement psychotherapist for more than 15 years.

Kinesthetic empathy is the experience of “placing... ..ourselves ‘inside’ another’s kinesthetic experience” (pg 1, Arpradid, V. 2023), and when related to Theatre Making and performance cultures it is the process where performers and audiences physically and emotionally resonate with movement, creating a shared embodied experience , and thus a non-verbal level from communication (Reynolds & Reason 2012).

Kinesthetic empathy is used in practices such as theatre making, movement direction, Intimacy and consent training, as well as creative arts therapies (Reynolds & Reason 2012) . It is core and inherent to our human experience as living beings who relate emotionally and cognitively to one another and our surroundings and is indeed what young babies and toddlers rely on to find their needs met, before the notion of a verbal language exists (Fischmann D.2009).

I am asking the question; *How can developing Kinaesthetic Empathy create a sustainable collaborative approach to Theatre Making?* I will be researching this question by using practices such as Viewpoints Suzuki, as well as well know “classic” exercises used in physical theatre, dance, as well as dance movement therapy, such as mirroring and movement improvisation.

Through a series of 3 workshops that will have a structure of:

- Check in
- Physical warm up
- Process
- Check out / reflection.

Within in the workshop I will include a series of activities that work with the following concepts that I consider to be fundamental to an effective collaborative way of working:

- Non verbal communication (movement based)
- Mirroring (activating mirror neurons, and building up the kinesthetic awareness)
- Trust

- Nonhierarchical approach to creating: within the exercises there is no established leader or follower but a way of working that requires participants to be in the here and now and to listen (with their body) and attune to the other, and move with. Thus creating together.
- Attunement: attuning to the other and entering into a playful synchrony which allows for action and reaction to happen fluidly, as well as allowing for an inclusion of different physical states.

All of these concepts I consider to be fundamental to an effective collaborative way of working.

The project is experiential, and as a participant in the project (student) I will rely on your embodied experience to reflect upon the concepts mentioned above to provide me with feedback and “data” to my research question.

Your Data and how it will be used:

The data collected from your reflections will be used only for this project and will be anonymised, as well as the full name of the course and the college that I work in. You will be able to opt in and opt out at any time, meaning any reflections, images collected from you will not be used as part of the project. Any Images collected that are not used for the purpose of the project will be erased, and any images used will not show your faces. Similarly, verbal or written reflections will not be linked directly to a photograph that you appear in. Data collected abide by data protection and GDPR and will be stored on a UAL password protected device, and will be kept in a password protected folder on the device and in the cloud.

The data collected will be used to support (or not) the notion that Kinaesthetic empathy can support a sustainable collaborative approach to performance and theatre making.

References:

Artpradid, V. (2023). Kinesthetic empathic witnessing in relation to embodied and extended cognition in inclusive dance audiences. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1).
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Fischmann D (2009). Therapeutic Relationships and Kinesthetic Empathy in Chaiklin, S., & Wengrower, H. (Eds.). . *The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy: Life Is Dance* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Leroy C (2025). Kinesthetic Empathy, Ethics and Care: A Phenomenology of Dance

Reynolds D & Reason M (2012). *Kinaesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices.*
Bristol, UK: Intellect Ltd.