GUIDING QUESTION:

How can intentional conversations about EMPATHY deepen students' trust and increase their participation in middle and high school theatre- integrated lessons?

SUSIE SPEAR PURCELL, THEATRE, artsNOW

PROCEDURE

Focus Area: Student Empathy & Engagement

Strategies Explored:
- Emotion Check-in
- Opening Call & Response
- Student-Led Warm-Ups
- Empathy Discussion
- Statues
- Tableau
- Tapping
- Lesson-to-Self-Reflection
  - (“My Rights” & “Did I feel empathy?)





Integrated Content:
- Civil Rights
- Sit Ins

Projected Outcomes:
It is expected that discussions and activities about empathy will help students show more empathy toward their peers and engage more deeply with the lesson. As a result, students will participate more, collaborate with others, and feel more invested in their learning.
- Identify and recognize emotions
- Build relationships and be empathetic towards classmates
- Leadership
- Contribute to the good of the group
- Motivated to contribute to the lesson
- Take on the point of view of another person using words and actions.

Performance Indicators:
- Students speak from another’s point of view using character.
- Students show respect for each other, even during conflict.
- Students accept redirection when conflicts arise.
- Number of students who complete the lesson.

Sources of Data/Evidence Collected:
- Teacher Questionnaires (Pre and Post Class)
- Count of girls who started lesson and ended the lesson
- Teaching Artist Journaling Post Class



FINDINGS

Teacher Questionnaire Results:

SUBJECT	QUESTION	PRE QUESTIONNAIRE ANSWER	POST QUESTIONNAIRE ANSWER
EMPATHY	Students show empathy toward one another.	2 - DISAGREE	4 - AGREE
RESPECTFUL LISTENING	Students listen respectfully to peers.	2 - DISAGREE	3 - NEUTRAL/UNSURE
CONSIDER OTHER'S FEELINGS	Students consider others' feelings before responding.	2 - DISAGREE	3 - NEUTRAL/UNSURE
COMFORT SHARING	Students feel comfortable sharing ideas in front of peers.	4 - AGREE	5 - STRONGLY AGREE
COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK	Students work cooperatively during group activities.	4 - AGREE	5 - STRONGLY AGREE
RESOLVING CONFLICT	Students resolve disagreements respectfully.	2 - DISAGREE	3 - NEUTRAL/UNSURE
TEACHER COMMENT	Briefly describe current strengths or challenges in empathy or collaboration:	The students struggle with stopping and thinking before making a statement or reacting to a peer.	The students have improved with stopping and thinking before responding to others.

Performance Indicators:
- Started with ten students and ended with nine (normally 3–4 leave).
- Students were able to vocalize others’ points of view using character voice and body, speaking from the heart.
- The teacher reported that students showed little empathy toward one another before the lesson, but demonstrated empathy afterward.
- The teacher observed improved willingness to listen respectfully and consider others’ perspectives before responding.
- Students appeared more comfortable sharing ideas, suggesting increased emotional safety and trust in the classroom.
- These findings suggest that intentional discussions about empathy may strengthen trust and improve collaborative participation.

Reflections:
- Success was demonstrated as students enacted empathy after it was intentionally discussed and practiced through theatre strategies.
- Students also openly reflected on their understanding and use of empathy before and after the lesson.

Next Steps:
- I would like students to write about empathy and how the lesson impacted their understanding.
- I would extend this lesson over multiple days.
- I encourage other practitioners to trust the process and directly discuss empathy during their lessons.