

Brain to Body Connection: The Observation and Experience of Movement in Theatre for the Very Young

In my research, I explore the interconnected brain and body development of very young children (0-5 years old) and how this development is supported by Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) performances that emphasize movement. The development of very young children hinges upon their individual kinesthetic exploration and their observation of other bodies moving through space. Both of these experiences are also critical to TVY performances in captivating a young audience. While TVY practices and performance styles vary widely around the world, they continuously access the visual language of moving bodies as communication and invite their young audiences to move and explore. In doing so, TVY performances use movement to engage the very young in two worlds: biological/physiological and emotional/social.

In my research, I explore these two worlds by deconstructing the mirror neuron system, neuromuscular activation and the emotional feedback system. I then highlight examples of how these growing systems in very young children are activated by examining four TVY performances that use movement as a form of communication and as a catalyst for interaction with their audiences: *Baby Drum* by Oily Cart, *The Story of the Little Gentleman* by ungaRiksteatern, *Baby Garden* by Metro Theater Company and *Marmalade* by Claire Parsons Co.

My findings include, but are not limited to:

TVY performances that emphasize movement...

1. Allow young people to interact with the performance as though they were experiencing it in their own bodies (mirror neuron system).
2. Aid in building up a young person's ability to connect their brains and their bodies in reaction to an environment/stimulus (neuromuscular activation).
3. Create a safe space for young brains and bodies to become receptive to the performance and the social interaction presented by the performers (emotional feedback system).

Through this research, I am to illuminate how critical the body is to the cyclical pattern of seeing, experiencing and knowing that supports the essential growth and development of the very young brain and body. A step further, I call to action the need for very young children to have access to this kind of work to support that development.