

Creating a theatre character through body awareness

Description

Actors have to develop a character. A character that the audience can relate to. But how do actors develop such a character and finally become this character for the theatre evening or for the film production? This exercise is very much about body awareness. How does the character of a character change when one adopts a different posture? This exercise shows the connection between inner posture (inner identification with a new role) and outer posture (the way we hold our body).

Method

single work

Materials

[Hand out](#)

Preparation

No preparation is needed.

Tips for implementation

This method requires a lot of body awareness and trainers have to be careful not to overstrain their participants. The exercise begins with relaxation exercises. Progressive muscle relaxation according to Jacobsen is particularly suitable for supporting participants in consciously feeling their own bodies.

Trainers can always ask questions about body awareness during the exercise. It is important to explain beforehand that participants should not answer these questions while they are practising. Rather, these questions should support the participants in becoming aware of their bodies.

Helpful questions in this context could be:

What does it feel like when you feel tension in this muscle group?

Trainers can also offer different qualities of feeling, such as:

Does it feel like a tank? Does it feel cold? Does it feel hot? Does it feel like something is stuck in this place? Etc.

How does it feel when you feel a relaxation here now?

Does it feel flowing? Does it feel soft? Does it feel wide? Etc.

Resources/References

The method presented here is a physical approach. It is about conscious perception. Developing a theatre character is based on attentive observation. How does the character of a figure change when one adopts a different posture?

In order for an actor or actress to rebuild such a theatre character, she or



Peter Praschinger

he must first make her or his own body as neutral and relaxed as possible. She or he must make space for the figure that is now to emerge. Only then can the step-by-step construction of a new theatre figure begin, as in a jigsaw puzzle.

One of the exercises presented to achieve a neutral and balanced body is progressive muscle relaxation according to Jacobsen. Progressive muscle relaxation has a direct effect on the body. The body switches from working to resting state. When the body is relaxed, it begins to regenerate. Progressive muscle relaxation leads to immediately detectable effects on the body and to long-term effects:

Direct effects on the body include the following:

- The parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for relaxation, becomes active.
- The heart rate decreases
- The blood pressure drops

Long-term effects on the body:

- Concentration, memory and endurance are increased
- Sensitisation to physical, mental and spiritual processes takes place.
- Self-awareness and self-responsibility are trained.
- One's own composure is promoted
- Stress can be better managed in general

Learning outcomes

Through this method/action, these benefits are achieved:

- Participants can become aware of their body.
- Participants can name different qualities of how their body feels.
- Participants experience and understand the connection between inner posture and outer posture (how we hold our body).

Description in clear steps

Step 1

When I prepare for a role as an actor, it is first important that I make my own body as neutral and balanced as possible. That's important because it's not supposed to be me as Peter Praschinger with my peculiarities on stage in the performance, but a very specific theatre character. A character that has its own traits. So that I can gradually find this character in the preparation for a certain role, which can then also be experienced by the audience, I first start with some exercises to make my body neutral. This also makes room for the character I will eventually become on stage or in the film production.

The following three exercises, which I use among other things to relax my body, can be downloaded as handouts from the listed materials:

- - Let go and relieve stress
- - Start movements from the belly
- - Progressive muscle relaxation according to Jacobsen

Step 2

If the body is now relaxed and open to new experiences, then the

experimentation begins.

Depending on the theatre role, I now consciously start to change things about myself that might suit my role. Physical changes do something to us. My task is to consciously bring about those physical changes in myself that fit the character I am supposed to portray on stage.

For example, I observe:

- What does it do to me when my breathing does not come out from the belly but from the chest?
- What does it do to me when there is a blockage in the chest?
- What feelings are evoked in me when I feel this blockage?
- How much energy is there in this body when I breathe from the chest??

Step 3

Then I move and pay attention to how my voice changes while my breathing continues to come from the chest.

This is how I eventually build my whole theatre character.

I then direct my attention to my shoulders for example:

- Does my figure have tense shoulders?
- Does she have drooping shoulders?
- Are the shoulders pulled forward or back?
- What feelings are evoked in me when I hold my shoulders like this?

Now I focus on my chest and shoulders at the same time and observe how this affects the way I look.

- How does this figure look when I feel a blockage in the chest and possibly have shoulders pulled forward?

Now I speak a few sentences of my role and check whether the theatre character with this posture is coherent for the respective play.

And I continue in exactly this way:

I put my focus on my arms, my legs, on the eyes, the mouth, the nose, the fingers, and so on, and experiment with small and larger changes that I consciously bring about in these places.

Step 4

My figure is only fully developed when I have gone through my whole body from the tips of my toes to the tips of my hair.

Website

Video clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qp9K-7QiC9g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaXJmjEcJuM>

Art category

Performing Arts

Days

- 1

Group size

- Individuals

Settings

- Face-to-face
- Online

Competence / skill

- Ability to capture, grow and bring an idea to life
- Communication
- Composure/emotional regulation
- Learning from experience / take up and integrate new knowledge

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<https://training.centaur-project.eu/exercises/CX137/>

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