



ISTA Connect Before and After: considerations for teachers bringing students

The ISTA Connect initiative was established in 2013 as a service learning programme with the aim of using theatre and the ISTA Experience to:

- connect diverse young people from different communities and backgrounds;
- connect ISTA to a range of communities and young people worldwide that it has not worked with before and who would benefit from the ISTA Experience;
- burst what might be conceived as the international school “bubble”;
- connect ISTA member schools to their communities through service learning.

The ISTA Connect festival brings together young people from ISTA member schools with young people from the host school’s pre-existing local service learning community to engage, not in service learning, but in collaborative theatre making and play. Learning at an ISTA Connect festival comes through dialogue, exchange and friendship.

What is service learning?

Service learning involves bringing together diverse communities so that they can learn together and from each other. The service provided by the school community could involve a wide range of possibilities from building or decorating facilities, to language lessons and the provision of leisure activities or to the development of programmes of empowerment for excluded communities. ISTA Connect festivals work with the host school’s existing service learning relationships.

Who attends the festival?

As well as students from the host school and from visiting schools, young people from the school’s service learning communities attend the festival as full participants. Their participation is funded by ISTA and they are referred to as ISTA Scholars. The purpose is not simply altruistic but, in accordance with the ethos of ISTA, designed to bring different people from different places together through theatre.

Preparing students for an ISTA Connect

Working with ISTA Scholars

Though the relationship between the host school and the service learning community is one of service, the focus for all participants at an ISTA festival is one of **collaboration** and **mutual learning**. It is important that the visiting international school students do not see the relationship with the ISTA Scholars as a relationship of service but one of mutual creation, learning and collaborative play.

This requires you to prepare visiting students by getting them to consider:

a) Language

Explain the nature of the festival to the students in advance and prepare them for the fact that some of the scholars may not speak English or have the same linguistic reference points. This may have an impact on the rhythm and pace of the sessions. Students should be prepared to support each other and help other students and scholars who may be struggling.

PREP: Prepare students by examining strategies for how they might meet and work with young people who don't speak English. You might want to think about exploring this through drama looking at body language, face etc.

b) Experience of drama

The young scholars may not have any prior experience of drama, theatre or working collaboratively and physically. Students need to be patient, supportive and sensitive to the ISTA Scholars. Play is a great way to find common ground and a common energy but standard drama activities which may be familiar to students of drama may be new and challenging to students who have no experience of the art form.

PREP: Prepare students by getting them to consider what it must be like encountering drama for the first time. Maybe get students to work with younger students who have not got any experience of drama.

c) International mindedness

The ISTA Connect festival encourages us to actively and consciously consider the international nature of our work and be sensitive to the social, cultural and economic contexts of others. In some community contexts, many of our previously held assumptions regarding interaction, theatre work, collaboration and what is appropriate may need to be reassessed. This is an important learning opportunity for all students and students need to be mindful not to make judgments based on external differences but to seek the commonalities.

PREP: Prepare students by discussing what it means to be internationally-minded and what attributes, qualities and behaviours are demonstrated by an internationally-minded young person. Discuss how we form judgments and ways to keep an open mind.

d) The final piece

The ISTA Connect festival ends with a sharing rather than a fully blown performance regardless of the age group. This is a culmination of the collaboration and is a celebration of connection and our common humanity.

PREP: Explain the spirit of the final piece and discuss such things as target audience, reasons why we create theatre etc. This is a great learning opportunity to

discuss artistic intention, purpose, target audience and the role that theatre plays in a community.

Make sure you have carefully read any information in advance from ISTA and the host regarding the nature of the ISTA Scholars and any specific social or cultural considerations as this will help you to prepare the students.

ISTA Connect follow up: some possibilities of what to do after the festival back at school

The ISTA Connect festival is a good opportunity for follow up work back at the school. It could be the launch of your own service learning programme or an opportunity to make new links and connections.

You could consider hosting an ISTA Connect festival or begin a programme where the students from your school, led by those who have been to the festival, form a link with a particular community and offer drama workshops as a means of collaboration and connection with them.

Here are some types of follow up work:

Presentation. This could be a dramatic presentation or a speech and visuals to a year group, to another class or to the whole school explaining the ISTA Connect experience, the communities the students have engaged with at the festival or the Connect programme. A presentation is a great launch for your own school's Connect project.

Campaign. This may be a consciousness raising campaign or an action focused initiative around a particular issue or a particular community inspired by the ISTA Connect festival. Students may write letters, make postcards, leaflets, banners, set up an online community or create a piece of theatre to address a particular issue. This may also be linked to the school's service learning programme.

Artistic. This could be a piece of theatre, a short film, a website, a piece of writing etc which has been inspired by the ISTA Connect experience, the communities the students have engaged with at the festival or the Connect programme.

Connection. You could use the ISTA Connect as a starting point to form a relationship with a group in your own community and use drama exercises, approaches and play to connect with them. You could set up a small group of workshop leaders that use drama in a number of communities to create connections between the school and these communities.

Learning. You could devise a unit of work inspired by the ISTA Connect experience, the communities the students have engaged with at the festival or the Connect programme.

The ISTA Connect experience is a rich learning and community experience so follow up work is highly recommended to make the most of the experience.

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September 2017