



The ISTA Ensemble Method

Introducing the ISTA Ensemble Method

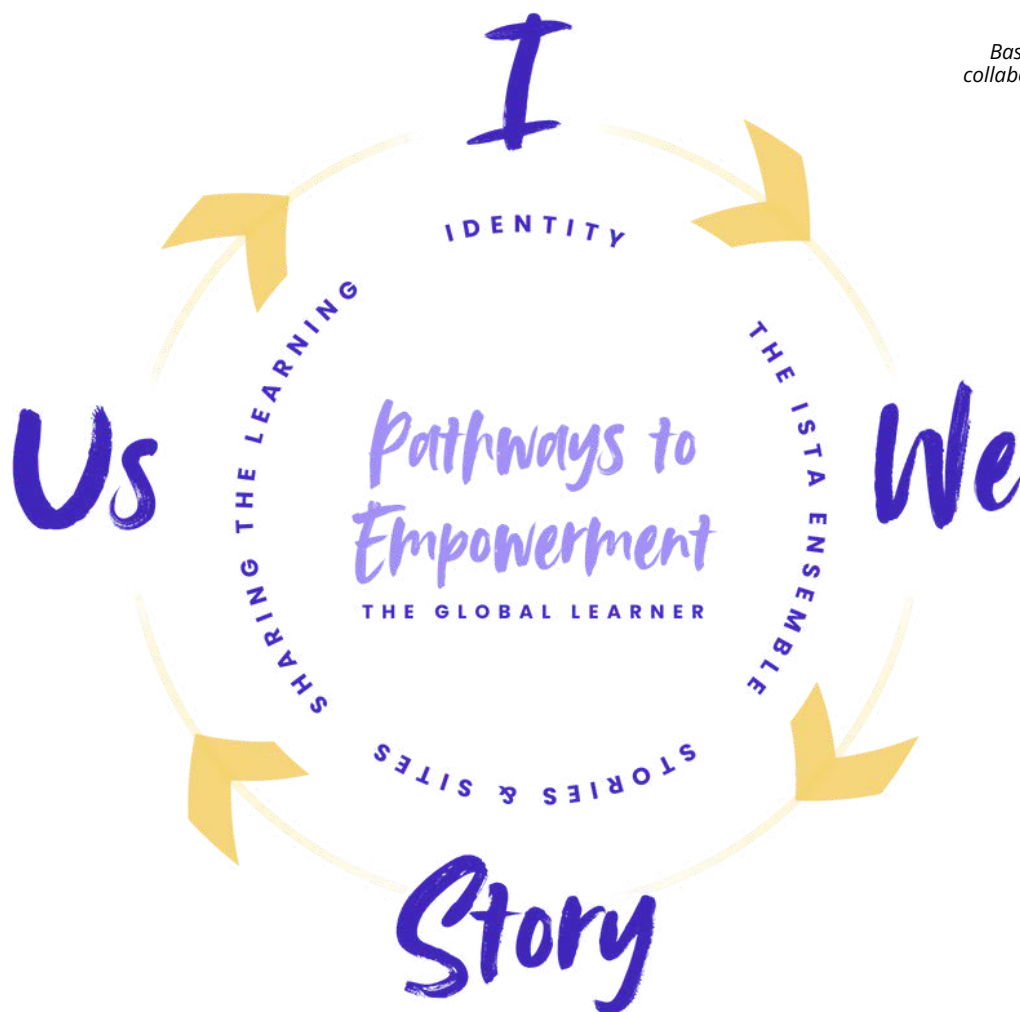
The ISTA Ensemble Method is our signature approach to creating powerful, student-centred learning experiences through theatre. It brings young people from diverse backgrounds together to explore global themes, build community, and co-create original work in a non-competitive, collaborative environment. Rooted in inquiry, storytelling, and cultural connection, the method fosters creativity, empathy, and global understanding —core to ISTA’s mission.



Based on a model developed in collaboration with Mike Pasternak

Unpacking the ISTA Ensemble Method

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IDENTITY

Each festival begins by recognising the individual — their name, story, and perspective — through simple identity-based activities that honour personal histories and perspectives.

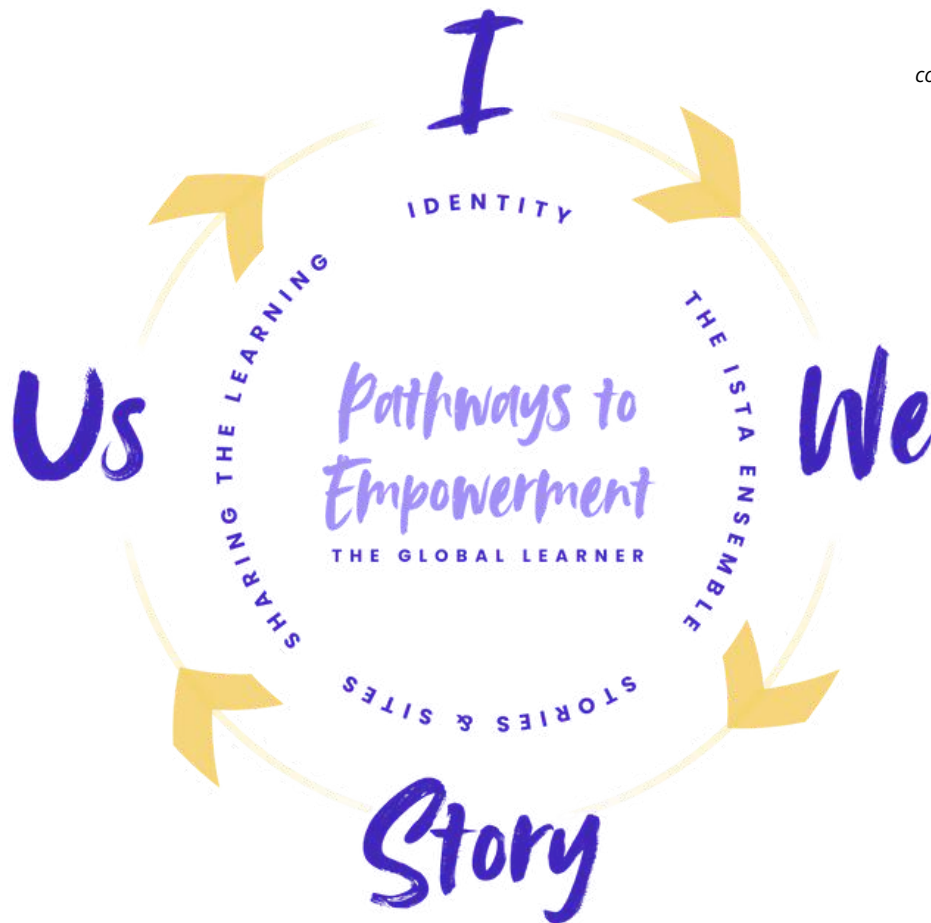


THE ISTA ENSEMBLE

Participants build community through ensemble-based collaboration and shared storytelling, learning with and from one another as they form an ISTA ensemble.

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ENGAGING WITH STORIES & SITES

A cultural story and site selected by the host/ISTA become creative lenses for exploring the season's Global Challenge through theatre, film, dance and the related arts.



SHARING THE LEARNING

Participants shape their global understanding into an artistic response, created through ensemble collaboration and theatrical exploration, and share it with an audience to celebrate and deepen the learning.



PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

As global learners, participants reflect on their experience, consider its impact and legacy, and explore how to take their learning back into their own communities.

Why the ISTA Ensemble Method Matters

The ISTA Ensemble Method is more than a framework for making theatre — it's a way of learning, relating, and being in the world. At its core, it enables young people to develop the skills, perspectives and relationships they need to navigate a complex, global future.

Across decades of ISTA festivals, research, and feedback from students, educators, and artists, a consistent message emerges: the ensemble method transforms the learning experience. It deepens engagement, fosters empathy, and builds a sense of belonging. Through collaboration, young people don't just make theatre — they become part of something larger than themselves.

In a time where education can often feel individualised and high-stakes, ISTA festivals offer something different:

- ✓ A safe, failure-free space where taking creative risks is encouraged
- ✓ A model of shared authorship, where power is distributed, not imposed
- ✓ A culturally rich context where difference is not just accepted but celebrated
- ✓ A physical and embodied approach to learning that engages heart, mind and body
- ✓ A commitment to process over product, where learning is co-created, not prescribed



The Impact of the ISTA Ensemble Method

Students consistently report that what they value most about their ISTA experience is connection — to peers from other cultures, to professional artists, to new ideas, and to themselves. Working within a temporary but tightly knit ensemble allows them to develop key 21st century skills: collaboration, communication, cultural literacy, and creative inquiry.

Crucially, participants experience what it means to act together — not just on stage, but in service of a shared purpose. In this way, ensemble is not simply a method for making theatre. It is a rehearsal for collective action in the real world. As one school leader observed, ISTA gives young people the chance to “step out of their known selves and reimagine who they can be — and how they can belong.”

The final sharing at each festival is not a polished performance — it is a shared moment of discovery. It is theatre as reflection, as activism, and as celebration. It invites participants and audiences alike to witness how creativity and collaboration can shape understanding.

In every festival, the ensemble method delivers something lasting:

“*A learning experience that is deeply personal, profoundly communal, and unapologetically hopeful.*”

Adapted from Artistidou, D (2019) The Nature of Immersive, Experiential Learning at ISTA Festivals and the Impact of the ISTA Ensemble Method. ISTA, UK

