



Key Advice

Background on Social Presencing Theatre and 4D Mapping

As a teacher, it is important to familiarise yourself with the method in advance. Ideally, you have the chance to join a 4D mapping yourself, before applying it to your classroom. If this is not possible, this document will hopefully provide the necessary background information.

This tool builds on the method of Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), an embodied, arts-based approach to systems change developed by Arawana Hayashi in collaboration with the Presencing Institute. This document provides background for teachers to understand the principles behind the method and to prepare students for the 4D Mapping session.

What is Social Presencing Theatre?

SPT is a set of practices that combine movement, stillness, spatial awareness, and embodied dialogue to make visible what is often invisible in complex social systems. It allows groups to collectively see and sense themselves and uncover new pathways for transformation. The method draws on Theory U and focuses on creating the conditions for *presencing* — being fully present in the here and now, while sensing into emerging future possibilities.

Despite the word “theatre,” SPT is not about performance or acting. The word comes from the Greek *thea* — “a place for seeing”. In this context, it refers to a process of making visible dynamics, tensions, and possibilities within a social system.

SPT practices have been applied globally in business, government, education and civil society. At the heart of this tool is one of its core techniques: 4D Mapping.

What is 4D Mapping?

4D Mapping is a guided, embodied group practice that uses posture, movement and space to explore the current reality of a system and its potential future states. It helps reveal hidden dynamics, blind spots and deeper leverage points for change.

The process typically unfolds in two stages:

- Sculpture 1: Players embody the system as it currently is.
- Sculpture 2: They move into a shape that represents a possible emerging future.

Participants often report that just *seeing the system in motion* unlocks powerful insights and deepens awareness of complexity, roles and relationships.



Case preparation and format

4D Mapping is always based on a concrete case and a complex question that relates to a societal issue. A good case:

- Includes 8–12 clearly defined roles (e.g. stakeholders or forces within the system);
- Involves no easy or predefined solution;
- Focuses on a system that is in transformation, such as housing, education or climate policy.

You can choose to bring a predefined case yourself or ask students to prepare and propose cases in advance. Alternatively, you might devote one session to defining cases together with the group and use a second session for the actual 4D Mapping process. For inspiration, see the case examples provided under Key Advice, which are drawn from *Social Presencing Theatre: The Art of Making a True Move* by Arawana Hayashi (2021).

Examples of suitable questions:

- “What would transform higher education in the Netherlands to be relevant for society?”
- “What would empower youth to learn, earn and contribute to sustainable development in Cambodia?”

Tip: Even the act of discussing and clarifying a case is instructive as it already deepens understanding of the system.

Roles and space

- There are two main types of roles: players and space-holders.
- A facilitator guides the process, and a note-taker writes down key phrases spoken during the mapping.
- The ideal group size is 8 to 12 players, with the rest as space-holders seated in a circle.
- The quality of collective attention is essential. Both types of roles are vital.

Suggested role types

- Structural or systemic actors (e.g. institutions, leadership);
- Marginalised or excluded perspectives;
- Environmental or ecological dimensions,
- A role that embodies the highest future possibility of the system (aspirational role).

Tip: Use role cards with visible labels to support clarity and engagement during the session.

This handout is based on insights from <https://www.u-school.org/4dmapping> and <https://arawanahayashi.com/spt/>.