



Activity Title: The rules and games of improvisation

Description of the activity: (Please include details on the following areas: target age group, preferred group size, ideal setting to carry out the activity)

The exercises included here are suitable for all ages and the groups should/could involve students in common activities. The optimal group size is 12-15 participants in one session. Identify one or two students, who are interested in theatre and give them information about the possibilities of improvisation theatre and the games they could play with the group they form. Give them links and further reading materials – see the bottom of this file.

Improvisation is acting (in theatre or in life in general) without preparation. Responding to the specific conditions of the environment and the inner feelings of the participants.

The rules, which improvisers follow, universally applicable in everyday communication, are the following:

(1) Be connected with each other. We need bonds and understanding in order to be successful members of society. Quite similarly, an improv group needs to be connected, all members being on the same page at all times.

(2) Listen to each other! Which means not to focus on our own responses and barely hear 50% of what the other has to say, but to focus on the message coming from the other side, even if this would mean taking longer to respond. (**GAME** – organize a dialogue, in which each next speaker has to start his/her line with the letter, with which the last word of the line of the speaker before him/her ended) Listening is readiness and will to change! If our mind is already made up about something, we are not really listening. We are just waiting for the other side to say what they have to say.

(3) Use “Yes, and ...”!

GAME – organize a scene or a group discussion, in which each next speaker needs to say “yes” and then continue with something they add.

EXAMPLE:

A: This morning my alarm did not go off and I was really late for work.

B: Yes, and probably your boss was mad at you.

A: Yes, and he gave me a handful of extra tasks and is requiring me to come and work on Saturday.

B: Yes, and your wife now will probably be angry with you, because you will not be able to take her to that matinee you were planning.

A: Yes, and I expect she will not speak to me for a whole week and we have so many things to figure out for my mother’s visit at the end of the month

And so on and so on.

Saying “no” is forbidden in improvisation theatre, because NO stops progress and kills the idea. Even if we do not want to do something or approve of something, we need to be able to find a way to say “yes” to the person and “no” to the idea/proposal. „I would very much like to spend the weekend with you, but I feel so tired and bruised from my last bike ride ... let us try and figure out a less straining activity, which we could do together.” Just a YES is not enough however. We also need the AND, because this is the contribution, which creates something bigger and different from what each one of us would have created on his/her own.

(4) Be present in the respective space and time with body and soul.

(5) Not focus on the self only, trying to look good, but focus on helping the others look good.

(6) Be flexible in order to react to unexpected changes and events, which disagree with certain preliminary fixations we may have developed on how things should have developed or evolved.

GAME - Divide into couples and build scenes. Player A decides about something and starts the scene. Player B, who has absolutely no idea what A was thinking about, has to respond to the improvisation without breaking the logic of what player A is starting to build. Have the students discuss their ideas afterwards.

GAME - Divide into couples that stare at each for 20 seconds. Then each couple turns back to back and each participant makes 3 major changes in his/her look – tie the hair back or let it loose, roll up a sleeve, take off a shoe, whatever ... Then the couple faces each other again and they need to spot and list the three changes the other player has made. This is an excellent game for making the other feel good – because you noticed everything about them and you were able to list their change decisions.

Learning objectives - key competences, which are influenced via this activity: (What learning outcomes does this activity cover as far as attainment of certain key competences is concerned?)

Within the CULPEER context these exercises can be used for attaining the following key competences:

Communicating in a mother tongue: searching for and reading materials about improvisation theatre will broaden the active vocabulary and the implementation of the improvisation games will stimulate the ability to express thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions orally.

Communicating in a foreign language: reading materials and watching videos in English for example and then practicing improvisation in a foreign language would improve your paraphrasing, interpreting or translating skills as well as your intercultural understanding.

Digital competence: confident and critical usage of information and communications technology in relation with the need to retrieve and exchange various digitalized pieces of information on improvisation theatre.

Learning to learn: contribution to the ability to organize one's learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in the improvisation group. Improved motivation and confidence in one's abilities to learn new things and to use the knowledge in practice.

Social and civic competences: whenever the topic on the table is related to social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation, theatre can be particularly effective for building and activating this type of competence, especially in the domain of improving one's interpersonal and intercultural competences, equipping individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, as well as solve conflicts where necessary. Improvisation is usually humorous, which makes it particularly useful for neutralizing negative attitudes. It helps people uplift their awareness about their inner feelings and share their uniqueness in a safe environment. Improvisation intends for people to relax and feel comfortable within a community, working together, because in improvisation there are no wrong moves or decisions.

Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship: theatre has ethical values at its base and unlocks the ability to turn ideas into action and to seize opportunities. Lack of initiative and entrepreneurship is sometimes due to lack of self-confidence, which improvisation can easily neutralize – being accepted and embraced by the group, knowing that the aims of the others are to make you feel and look better, increases self-confidence; so does the chance to present yourself and be heard; the achievements of the group as a whole certainly increases the self-confidence of its members.

Cultural awareness and expression: following the rules of improvisation, participants will develop the ability to appreciate the creative importance of ideas, experiences and emotions as well as to put practice culture. Theatre increases the empathy and the feeling of trust and confidence within the group and this supports the opening towards the others, because in these exercises the participants get rid of the ego: it is no longer "my idea" and "your idea", but rather "the first idea, the second idea, the third idea and so on" and people start thinking not about the "shoulds", but about the "coulds", which immensely increases productivity.

Expected Outcomes:

Improved key competences (see list above).

Particularly important is also the improved empathy and understanding of others and the broadened perspectives and increased confidence and trust within the group, because each participant has had a chance for self-expression without the risk of being ridiculed or made to look bad or improper due to judgement or prejudice.

Activity Structure: (What are the components of the activity? What resources or staffing will be required)

The activities only require a hall/room, which can accommodate the participants and secure their comfort and enough space for each of them. The selected young people to lead the workshops should be initially trained, if possible by professional actors/improvisers and presented with all the reading and video materials in order to prepare for the peer learning process. Several weeks for preparation of the two are necessary. The common group activities can follow after and have a weekly regularity.

Activity duration:

1 h 30 min per meeting. At the end of a school term, the improv group can create a small semi-improvised performance for the rest of the school. Semi-improvised could mean that each member chooses a certain character type and builds on its features during the entire duration of the drama workshop sessions.

Resources:

Reading material and a huge collection of improvisation games - <http://improvcyclopedia.org/>

Videos on improvisation theatre

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3TsyT_EDBc - "The art of improvisation | Rapid Fire Theatre | TEDxEdmonton." This talk was given at a local TEDx event, produced independently of the TED Conferences. This performance was entirely unscripted, and unfolded before the eyes of our audience. With acoustic musical accompaniment and live painting on stage, our improvisers tell a story of love, loss and mayonnaise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDSP8wYIMzY> - "Ten Ways to Practice Improvisation Acting Skills : Theater Lessons"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUO-pWl0riQ> - "TEDxVictoria - Dave Morris: The Way of Improvisation." Improviser and storyteller Dave Morris teaches you 7 steps to improvising and how they apply to life in "The Way of Improvisation." Filmed at TEDxVictoria on November 19 2011

<http://www.dohafilminstitute.com/videos/acting-workshop-with-kevin-spacey-improvisation> - Improvisation workshop led by Kevin Spacey

<https://vimeo.com/tag:improvisation> - Videos on improvisation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=054BUa3Z0os> - How to practice improv with the "Bucket" game. Learn how to play improv games to practice acting skills in this free video on theatre and performance. Expert: Matthew Milo. Watch other videos from the same improv theatre expert.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyxHujdRIpk> - Jennifer Hunter, a faculty member of Lake Superior State University, explores how we can use improvisational comedy everyday to achieve a greater sense of self. Published on Mar 30, 2015