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Improvisation: A Complement to Curriculum

Practicum

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Chapter 1

Description of Practicum

Statement of Project

According to our culture and the perceptions of many contemporary professional instructors and curriculum writers, improvisation as an application or medium is a sort of sub-practice of theater and music. True, the goal of most modern actors is to create a simulation of society that an audience will believe to be authentic. The study of improvisation for actors attempts to cure the flaws of rehearsal. That is, a movement or reaction that is rehearsed a hundred times must still appear to be the first time the character is experiencing that moment. In music, improvisation begins as a technique for recovering from a mistake in a live performance. In instances where improvisation is used well, an audience will be completely unaware that what they heard was not necessarily what was written. Mastery of the skill improvisation becomes a tool for experiment, invention, and expression. When totaled, the sum of the time spent practicing for the possibility of a mistake may appear absurdly disproportionate to the time spent in performance. Why not use that extra time rehearsing the material and thus reducing the chance of a mistake to incredibly low odds. The truth is that the odds change when under pressure, when people are watching and the moment counts. The phrase *everybody makes mistakes* would not be so cliché if the odds were not against us *when it counts.* Also, the skill of improvisation will be useful in any and all subsequent performances, as well as other curricular and non-curricular subjects, far out weighing the actual practice time.

Seemingly what theater and music have in common is performance. In reality though, every minute of life is improvised. The present is a state of perpetual reaction constantly gorging on the uncertainty or predictability of the future. The result is a dance between instinct and knowledge negotiating our well being, often parallel and paradox. The general use of the term improvisation is a time to *make do* when an unexpected setback occurs. For example: A family is on a daytrip to a national park for some nuclear family recreation. Jim has packed a scrumptious picnic lunch including, egg salad, fruit cocktail, graham crackers with peanut butter and refreshing ginger ale. Unfortunately dad has forgotten to pack utensils and the kids are responding with a couple of nasty frowns understandably hungry from seeing so much wildlife. Luckily mom, always carries her scout knife and begins to whittle on twigs that by chance had fallen near their picnic site. mom calms the hungry troop with, "Don't worry gang, we'll improvise."

However, *making do* is more of a symptom of the solution. Improvisation, in the scenario above, is actually creative problem solving. If Mom didn't have her scout knife the family might have had to eat with their hands or just their mouths or maybe their feet, anything to accomplish the goal of eating lunch, satisfying their hunger- surviving. Survival begins with the amygdala. When our brain perceives a threat the amygdala takes control bypassing logic and reason from the frontal lobe for the time until the feeling of threat decreases. When the frontal lobe comes back on line it begins to formulate the appropriate precautions to avoid a similar threat in the future. Interpreting threats or stressful situations before they happen, making decisions about how to deal with or overcome unanticipated obstacles, engaging in dialog or debate particularly with

strong feelings, even maneuvering through emotions, all of these are platforms of the waking life where improvisation is not only employed, it is relied upon. In this way improvisation is never just blind reaction to events and feelings, it is decided action based on an aggregate of ones previous knowledge and experience. Our survival depends on our instincts, but improvisation is the gravity of evolution

Take the term *think quick.* This command is given to individuals from playful to very serious tasks. We ask all people of all ages in countless mediums to perform well in the moment. How is the speed of ones cognitive abilities enhanced? Wasn't everyone ambushed with a water balloon at some point? Those of us who froze for whatever reason and were soaked exhibited an inability to avoid the assault. This anecdote resembles the response many people have when *put on the spot,* as with a spontaneous public speech or uncomfortable reflection. When asked what the appropriate reaction to the situation of the water balloon, any halfway industrious youth might suggest, "Move out of the way," with variations on vengeance tactics of course. Most people might come to the same conclusion. A person may have the understanding of the appropriate response but the inability to process and respond quickly under extreme time constraints, other situations of stress, or simply in the moment of reaction. This is a symptom of test anxiety and unfortunately only barely recognized in modern education.

When an instructor administers any type of timed or graded assessment, or tests a students abilities and knowledge in an atmosphere that is without complete leisure all students will experience varying symptoms of anxiety. True, there are students that may perform better under these settings and those that do will always have a relative advantage over those that are mired to any degree. One of the most common, and

regrettably sometimes single, strategies suggested to students who may have difficulty on timed assessment is that they do not ponder each question until absolute certainty, but instead move on if a problem is not easily solved. Unfortunately test anxiety is not a fixed handicap, it fluctuates from test to test, problem to problem. This is not a call to eliminate the elements of time from testing but rather an approach to begin playing fair. How are ones mental reflexes toned and quickened? How is wit nurtured and knowledge made transparent and more easily accessed?

The lack of fair and honest testing is evident throughout our varying educational institutions at all levels. The discrepancies are blatant yet our culture is blind to so many of them. For instance, a student in band can enter at a low level, come to class regularly and make sufficient gains in skill and musical theory, and then the student may play terrible in the final concert. What grade will most teachers give the student? Yet the same student may enter a math class at a low level and make sufficient personal gain but not necessarily at the same pace or time line as the rest of the class, and suffer the penalties of frequent quizzing or testing that only serve to emphasize the difference in pace or time line perhaps injuring the students confidence at the same time. What grade will this student take home at the end of the semester? There are certainly always other factors and this practicum in no way aims to marginalize those. However, most will agree that these and all subjects are not treated equally and at the expense of students. So at the very least we should ask, why.

Immediate synthesis of knowledge is the goal of Improvisation. It is unreasonable to give students the leisure of homework study time, or class-paced curriculum coverage, and then test them in a timed environment without providing

strategy and practice in the mastery of timed response. "It is all in the timing," a popular theater phrase, says a lot about contemporary education.

Improvisation as an instructional medium is largely unutilized, in part because of the assumption that it is only a dramatic art and also due to and underestimation or awareness of its value. *Improvisation: A Compliment to Curriculum* is designed for use in conjunction, as a complement to existing curriculum and lessons in any subject. The exercises provided are a foundation for new ideas and the instructor is encouraged to modify the exercises to improve relevancy for students. The curriculum is developed from contemporary research and expert testimony.

Although the Improvisation curriculum is specifically designed for Secondary levels, Primary and college level instructors can simplify or enrich most of the material appropriately for their participants. Whether it is standardized (SAT), summative (semester review often multiple choice), spontaneous essay (Advanced Placement English), or oral/linguistic (ESL, foreign language), most students will finish high school having experienced several timed test. In extreme cases like the ACT and SAT and even the GRE the results will impact college admission. Because of the severity of the outcomes of timed tests, grades not the least, an educational system must take responsibility for preparing students for their best performance. Improvisation, when used to support curriculum, is one way of addressing this problem.

The lessons within are intended to accompany a semester of instruction. It will be implemented in high school, college, or community instruction in the Denver Metro area of Colorado in varying age groups. The participating students will be of various socioeconomic, and academic performance levels as well as possibly extreme variance in

age and life experience. Because of Denver's rich Hispanic community several students could possess an ESL label.

Project Goals

The goals of this practicum are to infiltrate the common difficulties that students share when expected to perform on cue such as: writers block, test anxiety, knowledge recognition under pressure, public speaking/ performance anxiety, tired syntax and ideas, general confidence and motivation, as well as an improved ability to integrate learning with meaning through synthesis. The intention is that instructors and students will use improvisational exercises and techniques to increase: confidence, response time, and accurate and creative responses within a timed assessment framework such as standardized tests, dramatic performance, in-class essays, cumulative reviews and any other scenario involving the assessment of an individuals knowledge and understanding under a controlled environment, as well as improved skills in building relationships.

Project Terms

Affective Domain. The emotional foundation and exposition in an individual

Assessment. A prescribed evaluation of achievement.

Authentic Assessment. Using a variety of measurements to build a composite that represents an individuals progression in learning. Also called Portfolio Assessment.

Brainstorming. a group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all members of the group.

Creative Dramatics. Improvisation through physically or vocally role-playing.

Cognition. The act or process of knowing including both awareness and judgment; *also*: a product of this act

Convergent Thinking. A logical chronology or series of devices that lead to a predictable or absolute end. (3+1=) 4

Divergent Thinking. Problem solving for where more than one answer is correct or where multiple if not infinite paths may be followed to a correct or sufficient end (a+b=4)

ESL. English as a Second Language

*Extemporaneous***.** Composed, performed, or uttered on the spur of the moment: Impromptu 2**:** carefully prepared but delivered without notes or text

Free Association. 1. The spontaneous and uncensored expression of thoughts or ideas, allowing each one to lead or suggest the next without focus. 2: Expression unhindered by focus or tension driven by a combination of immediate thought, feelings and subconscious 3: In psychoanalysis, a technique for exploring a patients unconscious by stimulating the spontaneous and uncensored expression of thoughts or feelings through the use of stimuli such as key words

Gesture Drawing. Quick, timed drawing exercises that avoid physical detail but emphasize mood and tone of an object or subject

Improvise. 1: to compose, recite, play, or sing extemporaneously 2: to make, invent, or arrange offhand 3: to fabricate out of what is conveniently on hand

*Impromptu***.** made, done, or formed on or as if on the spur of the moment : Improvised

Multiple Intelligence Theory. A theory developed by Howard Gardner that suggests there are eight intelligences: Mathematical/logical, Linguistic, Spatial, Naturalistic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Body/ Kinesthetic.

Referent. A subject that is the beginning point or medium for expression: a catalyst.

Role-Play. To assume the role of someone or something else in a physically dramatic action. Simulate.

Spontaneous. 1: proceeding from natural feeling or native tendency without external constraint 2: arising from a momentary impulse 3: controlled and directed internally 4: naturally unrestrained or uninhibited 5: developing without apparent external influence, force, cause, or treatment 6: not apparently contrived or manipulated: Natural 7: growing without cultivation

Standardized Testing. Multiple choice or short answer inductive reasoning tests. (Some standardized tests have added a timed analytical writing section largely assessed on structure more than content.

Synthesis. a new unified whole resulting from the combination of different ideas, influences, or objects.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Improvisation, according to Meisner (1987), is the study of impulse. It is the moment when our individuality is most genuine and exposed. Improvisation has also been called the muse, or inspiration; the source behind the spontaneous synthesis of accumulated knowledge. The virtuosos of improvisation are most noted through music, specifically the development of Jazz music in America. But jazz is actually an improvisational renaissance. Classical genius composers like Beethoven, Mozart and Bach were also masters at improvisation. (Nachmanovich, 1994) Einstein and Tesla used improvisational thinking in math, science, and physics. Tesla was able to problem solve so well in his head that when an invention went down on paper and production began he knew with sublime certainty it would work.

The standard belief that improvisation is a skill exhibited in performance most notably by masters, yet it the atmosphere of unscripted life. It is a skill that most accomplished individuals have honed to some degree, without even knowing it in some cases, at least in their area of expertise. In fact most students are expected to use some sort of improvisation skill daily in school such as brainstorming (creative development and problem solving), divergent thinking (multiple correct answers), timed memory and cognition (tests), and general discourse on material. Only, improvisation is rarely explained and developed. Instead, instructors expect students to simply perform, often at very low levels. Teachers often demand creative an concise writing but do not provide students with concrete suggestions. (Weir, 1994). In turn, students, teachers and administrators, and particularly parents may speculate the value of such exercises.

Dr. Pressing from the University of Melbourne's department of Psychology has researched the objective organs of improvisational skill extensively. By observing improvisational techniques in music from varying cultures he is able to break apart the husk of mysticism that surround the subject. In music, expertise shown through improvisation appears to the audience as a seamless real-time composition serving as a forum of expression both artistically through emotion and technically through intellectual choice and precision. Pressing's idea of improvisation is a system of expertise, [where] improvisers adapt to or circumvent psychological or cultural constraints.(Pressing, 1998, p # 1) Pressing begins with a slightly anti-western notion that expert status within any given field is not primarily dictated by an individual's gift in that area. Instead, relying on evidence of the Suzuki method of piano and violin instruction and research on absolute pitch, previously thought to be a gift for 0.01% of the population, suggests that between a critical gap of 3-7 years as many as 50% of children could be taught perfect pitch, he contends that most people start with similar potentials and the trait that eventually sets apart expert from accomplished novice is simply deliberate practice. Pressing's conclusion is that improvisation is really just a mess of highly rehearsed chunks of information that the improviser might hack into at will. The effect of all this rehearsal is a symbiotic relationship with knowledge where every new fragment has seemingly limitless applications. Pressing (1998) contends that the decisions that an expert will make at any given moment are directly related to the cultural constraints of the environment they came from. An individual's expression creates a picture, a history, an autobiography, and a psychological self-portrait and reveals both what the expert is intentionally displaying and much that is unsaid.

Some reasons for resistance to embracing creativity as an asset for all education subjects comes from a lack of awareness of current and existing research as well as an effective movement to infuse the research into professional instruction. This is partly because several aspects of cultivating creativity are in and of themselves controversial topics in contemporary classrooms. Modern views of creativity were first introduced to the pedagogical landscape in 1950 by Guilford when he presented his theory for the *Structure of Intellect* which he represented as a three dimensional model that contrasted concepts he called: operations, contents and products. (Bauman, 1981) Operations include primary intellectual processes such as cognition, memory, divergent production, convergent production, and evaluation. This level of the model can also be viewed as a summary of the processes occurring simultaneously as the process of improvisation. The concept of contents is made up of classes of information that the operations use including figurative, symbolic, semantic, and behavioral. This is analogous to referents especially those that are constrained for a focused outcome. The third concept, products, implies the resulting sum of operation plus content. Guilford considers output in these ways: units of information, classes of similar items, relations, systems or structured interconnected information, and transformation in characteristics of the content. Skills, knowledge, personality, history, attitude, all of the components of decision making fall under content. The product, or outcome, is multidimensional. (Bauman, 1981) It is at once the reaction produced from the relationship between conflict and action, the prediction of the reaction based on an understanding of both the operation and the content, and the reflection of the process completed whether positive or negative as it transforms into content. The transformation of product to content is evident in that

learning is possible. For example, if it takes a person seventeen tries to learn something, there is a difference, (something is gained), between try number five and ten and sixteen. If not, we could not learn.

Another model of creative thinking was designed by Williams which uses Guilford's theory as a foundation. (Bauman, 1981) Williams proposed a model that acts as a formula to produce a desired behavior that cultivates creativity. Subject environment (math, art, science, et cetera), plus teaching methodology (which he confined to eighteen specific methods), equals the desired behavior either intellectual or affective. Williams placed balanced emphasis on cognitive and affective outcomes but also separated them into four behaviors for each category; intellectual behaviors being: fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and affective behaviors like curiosity, courage to take a chance, complexity or willingness to challenge an idea or statement, and intuition or imagination. (Bauman, 1981) Williams' model, first published in 1970, brings more qualitative insight to the outcomes deemed desirable instead of stopping at the right or wrong answer. As a society we actually don't seek right and wrong in such minimalist terms, but rather search out perspectives that are thoughtful, acceptable, appropriate, intuitive, innovative, critical, controversial, surreal, ethical, conservational, efficient, enlightened, and so on. Even with this theory that is quite obviously more profound and arguably healthy for and educational environment, it is still perhaps largely underutilized today. However it has been implemented the model must be updated to include a survey of needs and assets within the individual as well as those of the instructor and relating system of influences. For the model to incorporate this sort of awareness acknowledges a complexity in learning that is infinite and questions what

qualities compose and effective educator and how to design an environment that supports the higher model.

If we are essentially improvising at all times how would we benefit from practicing improvising? Part of the answer to this is question is that we are unaware that we are improvising. We try to understand our world as a predictable set of events that occasionally is infiltrated by an oddity. Yet if we were not improvising, we could not avoid the situations which may interfere with a schedule. We would have to be completely objective, infallible, and emotionally flat. Suicide would be a norm. There is also the idea of reflexive improvisation as merely commonsense, a soup of survival instincts, logic, and emotion, a fact so obvious is it not worth mentioning let alone analyzing? Instead we might ask, if improvisation is such an encompassing aspect of life, why are we ignoring it in school? Why is it easier for children to be spontaneous than adults? Most of the research on improvisation as an instructional methodology is conducted in early childhood where exploration (a form of improvisational learning) is widely accepted as an atmosphere that encourages the development of social and cognitive skills. Many of these studies specifically look at the relationship between cognitive competence and pretend play. (Bergen, 2002) Children are industries of improvisation, but somewhere between pre-school and Secondary Education, improvisation generally becomes just a subheading of Theater Arts and the fringes of jazz ensembles. In fact standard educational practices subsequently with each higher grade take learning out of context, away from an improvisational “real life” forum, in order to quantify learning.

Studies in early childhood have become increasingly detailed describing how and why pretend play has a positive impact on emerging academic skill bases. (Theory of Mind TOM) research attempts to find the age at which children begin understand pretend play as a mental representation rather than just action (Bergen, 2002). The transition from action to mental representation is a step toward greater sophistication of imagination as well as increased degree of benefit for other mental skills. One explanation for the benefit toward academic development is the *Twin Earth* theory proposed by Lillard, which supposes that pretend play allows children to participate in and reason about nonactual situations (Bergen, 2002). Indeed people of all ages employ the Twin Earth model perhaps regularly: preparing for a presentation at work, imagining a conflict or event before it happens sketching out your performance ahead of time, any varying degree of empathy in fact requires some amount of pretending. Although long term studies of the intricacies linking pretend play with cognitive and emotional development are still in the data collection process there is already conclusive evidence that pretend play directly improves a child's ability to produce elaborate narratives, a foundation for literacy. Also, high quality pretend play has been shown to aid the development of social and linguistic competence, specifically models that rely more on implicit in-frame strategies and opposed to explicit out-of –frame strategies. Research has even been able to predict that children who have problems engaging in complex social pretense are more likely to experience peer rejection, social anxiety, loneliness, depression and low self-esteem later in childhood and adolescence, as well as increased academic difficulties (Bergen, 2000) Children with disabilities and are more likely to experience difficulties

engaging in pretense varying by situation although the benefits of pretend play are just as relevant for these students.

When spontaneous elaborate narratives are represented theatrically a new dimension of reality and organic tone is applied to the subject that allows the presenter to connect with the material emotionally as well as cognitively. In a list of Theater content Standards Published in Online Resources for Theater Education, improvisation appears in the first five of eight content standards. (Sun, 2001) Schools where funding is a problem may drop special arts classes. Improvisation that appears purposely in curriculum is a rarity in these cases and left for the English class section on Theatrical Arts. More often creative dramatics, *improvisational drama*, is left out of Language Arts curriculum and instead is used as a teaching method in social studies and history, business and vocational, foreign language, counseling and even science. (Robbins, 1988)

However, creative dramatics largely role-play oriented, is only one branch of improvisation. Sub categories of improvisation include; cognitive strategies such as: joint planning, negotiation, goal seeking, divergent thinking and problem solving, social and linguistic competence, academic skill development, and mental representation ability, Free Association and expressive writing, essay testing, gesture drawing, brainstorming. Bergen, 2002) With such a wide spectrum of social and personal asset building available in improvisation, it is strangely underused in contemporary education.

Within each of these categories successful enrichment and application to academic development has been discovered. Illusion Theater is a grant funded arts program that targets young children, adolescents and adults with theatrical presentations about the prevention of sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, HIV/AIDS, sexual

harassment, and the promotion of healthy relationships and diversity. (Patti,1995) Although the content of the presentations is rehearsed the performances are interactive and thus different with every audience creating improvisational delivery of information. By adding improvisation to structured content the performance becomes flexible and increases relevancy and impact to a range of audience.

Similarly, there is evidence that improvisation can be an asset to multicultural education in dismantling conflicts of cultural difference. The analysis of student writing and improvisations as texts offer images, stories and information about different student backgrounds, languages, histories, and cultures. (Collins and Everson 1993)

Extra curricular programs like Odyssey of the Mind address the mathematical and scientific discovery of problem solving with an emphasis in cooperative learning. The mission statement for Odyssey of the Mind states,

> Through the Odyssey of the Mind program we promote creativity by challenging teams to solve divergent problems, that is, those with more than one solution. By working in teams, participants learn teamwork, the appreciation and understanding of others, and that a group is a more powerful thinking force than an individual. They develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others though preparatory activities such as brainstorming and roll playing. (OM Program Guide, 2001 p.1)

The problem solving process that Odyssey of the Mind also known as, divergent thinking, embraces the perspective that knowledge has no paradigm. It is elastic not only objectively, but subjectively as well. Consider the “Back to Basics” campaign, Inclusion, Emersion, Phonics, Existentialism, Constructivism and perhaps in the next

decade, Aesthetics; all of these trends of reform are a constant evolution and digestion of education as a science, a trade, and an art. They simultaneously react against one and other, define the social constraints of the time, and indeed define the generations subject to the values and inhibitors of each. Humans could no more find a consensus for an educational model than they could for a brand of doughnut, nor should they. On a practical level one can view history as an accumulation of knowledge, story, and judgment. It may even be argued that if evolution is manifested it is only through the increased capacity of the intellectual and emotional reservoirs within each successive generation. It is the process of solving a problem that releases, intelligence, talent, and genius. (Spolin,1963)

Several other contests test quick thinking skills that while math centered do not only focus on inductive reasoning. Five of the seven goals for Math Olympiads, a national contest for K-8 students, are improvisation derivatives, including: To teach major strategies for problem solving, To develop Mathematical flexibility in solving problems, To strengthen Mathematical intuition, To foster Mathematical creativity and ingenuity, To provide for the satisfaction, joy, and thrill of meeting challenges. (Math Olympiads, p1) With math in particular there is a concern among National Council of Teaches of Mathematics (NCTM) and many unaffiliated Math instructors that although the push for students to migrate their studies toward Math and Science is prominent, students gifted in Math are not receiving adequate attention and instructional technique to extract these potentials. A suggestion to encourage growth for these students is to implement the use of inquiry based, discovery learning approaches that emphasize open-ended problems with multiple solutions or multiple paths to solutions. (Johnson, 2000)

For divergent thinking, brainstorming in particular, to flourish there are some rules, albeit primarily administrative. These rules emphasize the importance of the appropriate environment for free flowing cognition. All ideas generated are recorded, and no idea is disregarded or criticized. (Washington State Faculty Training Material, 2003) This guideline cannot be overemphasized. It does not suggest that every idea has the same value, as some critics attest, instead it avoids shutting the cognitive system down due to defense mechanisms. The first three, six or eleven ideas a student may have might well be average but the next one might be wholly unique, distinguishing and immensely rewarding with confidence.

While simple and almost commonsensical in theory the designs of improvisational methodologies may be, at the same time they ask instructors to transform their traditional role and identity not unlike other contemporary reforms that interact with previous instructional policies, with assessment practices, with administrative review and with the expectation s of everyone who constitutes a school. (Kusnick, 2003) Inherently any new paradigm needs teachers and systems willing to learn themselves, not only in structure and technique but belief and philosophy as well if the movement is to gain any footing relevant for reflection. It is as important for this model that instructors be adaptive as it is for the pursuit of better education. For instance, an instructor will need to foster independent thought by overcoming reliance on quantitative assessment, but at the same time mentor the etiquette of improvisation in collaborative synthesis like divergent thinking. When collaboration is advanced to a stage where a public is involved the instructor will attempt to conceptualize the responsibility that travels with interaction through understanding themselves as a steward of change.

These examples, like many, rarely mainstreamed into standards based curriculum. How can they be? Standards are paradigms. At the same time, research in Multiple Intelligences, EQ, and brain function and development to name a few, are unearthing evidence that mismanaged educational models are not only ineffective, but dangerous. Through the fissures that develop from stringency the ideas least favored will take root. Like the example of creative dramatics in social studies, improvisation is not being used in education where one might expect. Some English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms are now using dramatic enactment of poetry to involve students physically emotionally and cognitively in the leaning process. (Gasparro and Falleta, 1994) This type of role –play forces the student to be physically active in the lesson and supports body kinesthetic intelligence as described by Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory. (Gardner,1983 as cited in Armstrong, 2000) In fact improvisational exercises constantly cross reference MI theory and can be continuously modified to address any intelligence specifically through the use of brainstorming and cognitive skill lessons. (Armstrong, 2000)

Research cites that improvisation supports the Affective Domain as well. John Dorroh uses free writing and expressive writing daily in his science class. He claims these improvisational techniques increase student interest and productivity in addition to engaging the teacher more solidly into the content. (Dorroh, 1993) Improvised classroom drama has also been used to engage and motivate At-Risk students and develop respectful classroom relationships. (Krogness, 1995)

Understanding the relevance of improvisation in life and becoming aware of its potential benefits across curriculum still leaves the implementation challenges of

impromptu exercises. The primary concern with improvisational-based instruction lies within the sometimes ambiguous principles of assessment. The most reasonable assessment strategy for performance work is performance based assessment or authentic assessment. However, authentic assessment is contrary to the popular trend of standardized, multiple-choice tests that quantify achievement into numbers. The irony in this is that improvisational exercises that aim at alleviating traditional testing problems such as test anxiety, slow testing can actually help student scores on standardized tests.

The complaints surrounding authentic assessment are largely if not solely logistical. Money, of course, is the primary argument against it. Standardized testing is cheep, especially when the test is written by the instructor instead of purchased from a professional company. Congruent with the money problem is that of time. Performance–based assessment takes more time from the instructor as well as more intellectual attention because of the individualized attention on the student. Teachers and institutions are often not willing to devote the resources necessary for appropriate authentic assessment despite overwhelming research that supports it as altogether more accurate than standardized and traditional testing schemes.

Despite these concerns there is growing support for Performance-Based assessments, more often among alternative and charter public schools, higher education arts, and early childhood classrooms. In an effort to enrich curriculum to its fullest extent possible, and evaluate students more fairly, 28 states have begun to use essays to assess writing. (Ascher, 1990) Ascher notes that standardized tests produce “predictive validity” where as context or Performance-Based tests produce “ecological validity” or real life representations. From the time of Ascher’s article there has been a push to

include essay portions on standardized tests. So much that software companies are now marketing essay-grading software in attempt to reduce the cost of Performance-Based tests. (Lawrence and Phill, 2001) Performance based assessment can also help to accurately assess different intelligences based on Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory. (Torff, 1997)

An important aspect of improvisational curriculum is that it is not intended to replace content. Rather, it is used in conjunction with standard based curriculum to improve retention, recognition, relevancy and application as a "learning medium rather than as an art form, and is governed and validated through criteria other than aesthetics." (Combs, 1988 as cited in Robbins, 1988) Cobine (1996) emphasizes that improvisational exercises for writing instruction must be personally significant to the student. Wendy Dowd shows success using improvisation with reading Shakespeare. She follows a cycle that repeats itself through units: 1. Improvise, 2. Examine specific speeches in depth, 3. Speed write about a character's thoughts. This process engages the student more directly with the text and as a result students present more questions usually with increased depth. (Dowd,1999) In improvisation of music, musicians learn from starting with short motives of structure but freely interpret the direction and slowly build this technique. None of these examples would work without content being used and reinforced simultaneously. (Wildman PD, Unknown)

For improvisational exercises to work properly, the teacher cannot have a specific predetermined outcome because the students would likely never find one. The act or process is often more important than the results especially when improvisation is introduced as a strategy. One of the wonderful things about this method is that it

promotes risk taking. However teachers need to be careful not to damage the student's confidence in this exposed state. "The teacher who too often imposes [her/]his authority , or who conceives drama [improvisation] as a kind of inductive method for arriving at preordained correct answers will certainly vitiate the developmental values of drama and possibly its educational values as well. (Hoetker, 1969) Grades work better as reflections of participation at first if used at all. More importantly the teacher must take the role of a facilitator and build in content in whatever direction the class or student is taking.

Although there is research points out the clear advantages of using improvisation as an instructional methodology it is still an enigma of sorts. Many teachers can buy into the idea and try it in class but become confused with how to use its outcomes. Consistency is necessary for any skill to develop to a proficient level. In many cases teachers do not use exercises often enough or indulge too much time so as to discourage further use. Exercises are best unrepeated so that each exercise is truly a new way to use and adapt information. With successful implementation of this methodology student success levels will rise.

Chapter 3

Curriculum and Instructional Strategy

Introduction

Improvisation can be broken down into two general categories; deliberate and reflexive. Deliberate improvisation often occurs with a static referent such as a song that a musician plays freely on top of, or an equation or problem a scientist or mathematician may try to explain. In these situations a person is drawing on specific knowledge and expertise to appropriately resolve a specific task. Deliberate improvisation is a practice or exercise, primarily and ideally in an environment without consequence where the creative mind is allowed to develop comfort and thus produce unique responses because tit is uncensored by institutional expectations for behavior and normalcy.

Reflexive improvisation is the natural state of human function and behavior. It occurs as a person negotiates moment by moment the predicable and completely unexpected. Even planned events are an abstract notion of the future that must be journeyed to. Every event planned or otherwise, every relationship, every element of our environment is a referent. The person is always in a state of choice; action or non-action, there is always a referent or multiple referents being reacted to and at the same time those referents are dynamic, the priority of each constantly being checked against transpiring events of the present. These referents are like a rotating kaleidoscope and our brain is processing everything in real time. Examples of dynamic referents are everywhere. They are the mundane as well as consequential elements and decisions, and desires that create the flow of daily life; what a person chooses from a menu, what to say when prompted to give a toast at a celebration, awaking to an unexpected change in weather, a shoe coming

untied, an itch. Action and non-action are two points of a triangle, the third is emotion, a inescapable piece of the learning process often ignored in many educational environments despite overwhelming evidence of the affective domains influence on learning. The center of these three points is choice.

Creativity is an element of all subjects. Improvisation is a creative process as much as it is a summation of previously learned information and cognitive recollection displayed in reaction. Creative thinking in any subject is an advantage, indeed, it is the application of memorized and learned material. So why is the dichotomy between subjects considered creative and those deemed academic so profound? Why would we purposely distance ourselves from the essential trait of humanity, and for what? Many even share the concept that creativity is not necessarily an inherent trait but rather a selective gift that is usually viewed as a subject specific talent. For instance, a person may possess the ability to draw well and be considered *creative*, while someone who finds algorithms easy is called *smart*.

This chapter will provide example exercises from each of the nine intelligences as described by Howard Gardner. The intention is exhibit how improvisation can be implemented in varying educational environments, providing indeed, something for everyone. It is important to recognize that these examples can and should be modified between groups to maximize the benefit. In other words if a particular group is responding poorly, or with indifference, (anger, defensiveness, or hostility is not necessarily bad), the exercise should be altered in such a way that it means more to the participants.

Application

Needs Assessment

Public schools are under increasingly stringent guidelines and quotas to produce results in standardized testing that reflects adherence to homogenized rules of development and knowledge acquisition. It is not only unrealistic but also inappropriate to ask teachers to ignore the rigors placed on them from the public and political community. Therefore, this program has been designed to use small increments of class time. It is designed to adaptable to any grade level, skill set, or socioeconomic consideration. This program is a modifier for in class academic and emotional performance and should be used to enhance curriculum activities not replace units of knowledge.

It is understandable that parents today, most having experienced a traditional and in many ways standardized education would embrace the easy data that comes with modern standardized testing. Their expectation of something as inorganic as standardized testing is not surprising as it mimics their educational model. In many examples both parents are working and perhaps even more so concerned that their children are getting the education that they expect. The private sector is forced to address the same traditionalism that is based on safety instead of study. To have a growing cross section of parents and politicians focused on the quality of education for today's youth is not a problem. However to have those same investors be confused, even sometimes deluded about educational paradigms, particularly effective models often leads to extremely unprosperous segments of a student's time devoted to primitive and

punitive instructional models that do little for improving independent and critical thinking skills as well as complex intelligent responses to problems.

Depending upon state and district policies a student may have to chronically perform to some standard assessment. While this practicum has a much wider impact than the structural conservativist designs it may first be demonstrated as a relief to these dominant pressures in a classroom. Students might spend weeks addressing strategies for performing well on these assessments. They receive pressure from teachers, administrators and even parents on an outcome that they cannot fully comprehend. This unnatural stress parallels the feeling of low income families to survive, middle income families to succeed and wealthy families to persevere, even conquer. Ironically, the element being duplicated is stress, not higher performance. This practicum attempts to bring students back to a harbor of learning and creativity rather than intense regurgitation. Through the implementation of these or like designs students should exhibit a more relaxed and confident profile. Far out reaching these short term assessment achievements, however are substantial long term developments. The abilities to react with appropriate and intelligent material, complex or multifaceted problem solving skills, the ability to reflect, adapt and succeed are all attributes of improvisational expertise. This practicum will strengthen testing ability but more importantly, it will build better learners and more observant instructors.

Vision

Imagine waking up to powerful thunder, lightning crashes, and an incessant barrage of hammering rain. You remember that the shallow darkness and unfamiliar smell around you is your attic where your family sought refuge when the flood waters

breeched the second floor of your house. The hundred mile-per-hour winds are peeling the shingles off of the roof just like your father showed you how to clean the scales off a perch. Imagine the fear, the helplessness, and try to understand that many students feel this way when it's time to clear their desks and take a timed examination, or stand up in front of a crowd and make noises that will be interpreted as sentences and paragraphs that will all come together and make sense without looking stupid.

Now imagine the scene above is static. It is a black and white photograph being passed out to a classroom of students. Imagine there are tubes of paint surrounding each student. The class has three minutes to paint them in any way they feel. Imagine the color.

Mission

Improve testing ability in K-12 students through practicing improvisational techniques in a low risk environment.

Goals

1. *Students will be able to adapt spontaneously to random stimuli*.

Learned information is different than memorized information. Oftentimes a student will believe they understand information only to perform poorly on an examination simply because the information appeared differently on the test. By practicing reacting to changing stimuli and the need to change stimuli to achieve a different outcome will develop an improved ability to recognize similar models with different information and similar information responding to varying models.

2. *Students will conquer test anxiety*.

While few studies if any can say what percentage of a student's score in a timed assessment is at the mercy of an individuals test anxiety it is a prominent challenge for students and teachers attempting to evaluate individual and class achievement. Diminishing or evicting altogether the possibility for the freeze of anxiety by developing the mental reflexes associated with adapting, processing, synthesizing and regurgitating in the moment will not only improve test scores but will also improve the chance for accurate assessment and in turn appropriate follow up instruction.

3. *Students will respond to critical thinking challenges with demonstrably higher quality responses in clarity, depth of understanding, richness, altruism, and aesthetics*.

The media has a particularly malicious reputation with contemporary youth. While its intentions are debatable, there are and will likely always be a predetermination in youth that slants toward the media's program of what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and horrendous, what is possible and impossible, what does success look like as opposed to failure. The media's voice is strong, and controversial when it appears louder than a parent, a teacher, pastor, mentor, and even a peer. Yet each of these remains one voice that a developing mind must learn to juxtapose with itself if it is to cultivate a voice that is unique and intelligent.

The ability to speak coherently, understand social cues and body language, and assess the subtext of dialogue will be demonstrated, practiced and reflexibly demonstrated again based on varying social, emotional, and cognitive threads through role play and group divergent thinking.

Objectives

1. Students will show measurable *consistency growth* in spontaneous response exercises as responses to improvisational exercises and strategies are applied to the Funnel of Expression (See Figure 1). Exercises will be conducted with students daily throughout the year. Monthly comparisons of exercise responses will be conducted with the student where evidence of that progress mined by the instructor is delivered to the student. This is largely the number of instances a student responds also representing an evaluation of speed. In a social dynamic this is easy to track, with intrapersonal reactions this can be more difficult to track and may involve sifting through written responses for number of new or changing ideas. *Supports Goals #1, #2

2. Students will show measurable *quality/ depth growth* in spontaneous response exercises as writing is applied to the Funnel of Expression (See Figure 1). Exercises will be conducted with students daily throughout the year. Monthly comparisons of exercise responses will be conducted with and the student to provide evidence of progress in rich language, changing, diverse or conflicting philosophies, quick wit and or insight, unexpected appropriate, observations. * Supports Goal #3

3. Students will exhibit an increased confidence in spontaneous response and or test taking. Student will be exposed to daily improvisational exercises and constant teacher encouragement for creative risk taking. At semesters end within a self-evaluation, the student will answer the questions "How comfortable do you feel with spontaneous response exercises compared to the start of the semester? How were you challenged? What would you change?"

They will also grow to expect and respect the critical feedback provided by the instructor in work and applications beyond these exercises. This is not only increased confidence in themselves but increased confidence in the act of learning and being able to take knowledge, change it use it for immediate needs and rely on learning and education as a valuable asset. * Supports Goals #2, #3

Figure 1 Funnel of Expression

1 Objective	***2*** Personal	***3*** Local	***4*** Universal
Student participates with redundant language, does not exhibit risk taking.	***Student adequately satisfies the prompt, avoiding redundancy but unable to explore anything but surface material, exhibits novice risk taking.***	***Student approaches the prompt with unique and layered perspective and strong language and concept, can interpret and augment peer responses.***	***Student responds with aggressive creativity rich language and voice, often seeing undiscovered meaning and relevance, responds with perpetual creativity and authenticity.***

Explanation of Rubric

It should first be said that this rubric is misused if it is anything other than a barometer for the instructor. This is not a grading devise or student vs. student measure and to use it as such would risk severe emotional damage to individuals. It is one thing to harbor a belief of creative sterility, and devastating to be told so. The above rubric attempts to quantify creativity, originality, existentialism and also the lack there of strictly for the use of an instructor to possibly gauge and identify links the confidence, cognition, aesthetics and diversity of individual responses. No doubt there are infinite ways of approaching this goal that should be equally respected.

In an attempt to give examples of what responses in each of the domains imagine a group of three students and a teacher sit facing each other. They are performing a divergent thinking or brainstorming exercise. There is a prop: a red plastic ball with a six inch diamiter-slightly elastic. The task is for each participant to generate a possible use for the object.

Teacher: "You could play a game with it." This is an objective example because there is nothing new in it. A game is a standard use for the object and the response required little thought to generate.

Student 1: "I could hide in my friends bushes and throw it at their doorbell as a joke." This is personal because the object is still being used in a common way, that is, throwing it, but the use is only benefiting the user and therefore minimal thought and little risk.

Student 2: "I could use it as a neck pillow." This response transfers to a local level because it ceases to be a ball. The response is entrepreneurial and possibly has implications wider than the individual.

Student 3: "You could give it as a peace offering to an invading alien race that is afraid of corners and cool colors." In this response not only does the object cease to be a ball it transforms into a symbol, with themes, storyline, and implications that are worldly or beyond.

Activities/ Exercises

Linguistics

1. Free Association Exercises: One student thinks of a noun representing something physical and concrete. Another student immediately declares an emotion to be attached to the image augmenting it in an unusual and spontaneous direction.

   For example:

   Student 1: Bird

   Student 2: Lust

   Student 1: Window

   Student 2: Depression

   Student 1: Dirt

   Student 2: Fear

   The purpose of this free association of words is intended to free the mind from programming gridlock that can thwart immediate responsive creativity. This same experiment could be modified infinitely. The same two students could be given more freedom if Student 1 spoke any noun and Student 2 was only to respond with an adjective. Or multiple students could be used to spontaneously create sentences, possibly with little or no literal meaning but certainly rich with unexpected images.

2. Develop a Character in Reverse: This exercise uses Socratic reasoning to develop a character. First, one student is given a statement describing and intimate personality trait

    For example: "I like to eat frogs on Tuesdays." Or, "I'm not very good about washing my ears."

   The class only responds with, "Why?" The first student must follow each question with another descriptive statement slowly building a spontaneous character backwards. The inquiry can proceed as long as the student can keep up with fresh descriptive statements. This may also be done in the round.

Numbers and Logic

1. ABC-123-Short Story: Arrange a class in a circle. Begin a short story with each student contributing one sentence. The rules are that the student must start with the sequential letter of the alphabet and the corresponding number of the letters order must appear in the sentence. For example:

    A salamander had but one wish. Before he was two years old he longed to see the Bahamas. Clearly there were only three things stopping him . . .

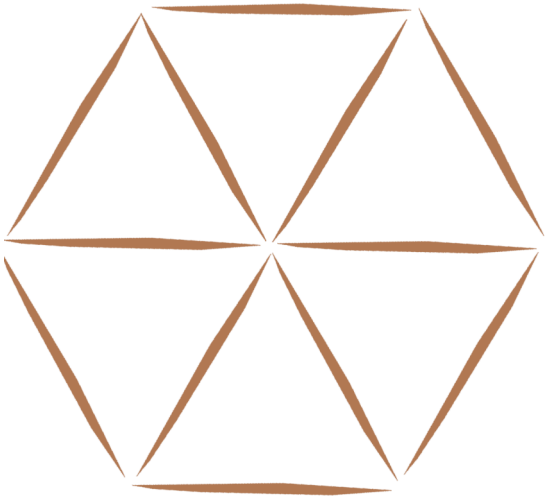
   Continue around the circle through the 26 letters or start again with "A" until the story concludes.

   For more advanced students increase the difficulty of the formula with numbers For instance every third person must use a number in a specific sequence like prime numbers in their sentence.

2. Word games like wuzzles, crossword puzzles, Scrabble, or number and logic puzzles are ideal for individual improvisation in this category supporting interpersonal learning styles.

   For example:

   Without eliminating toothpicks, change the position of four toothpicks so that only three equilateral triangles are formed.



Answer

Puzzle adapted from Pierre Berloquin, 100 Perceptual Puzzles, Barnes & Noble Press 1995.

Music

1. Build a Song

   Put students in groups of four or more. Ask them to develop a song, rap, or limerick describing a mathematic function, scientific theory or law of physics. Ideally this would be given to students after they had some exposure to the particular subject, maybe in conjunction with a review. This activity allows for possible humor and cross references the class material with something novel yet unique to the students and student culture building a stronger memory of material

that may be largely conceptual or perhaps clinical, where normal mastery involves the redundancy offered in field work, or internship.

To start group of students are arranged in a line. Student 1 begins to sing a typical bass line; something along the lines of an organ grinder or classic country ditty. After the line has been established Student 2 begins with a repetitive addition to the bass. This addition can be anything from a mock trumpet noise to a cymbal crash to a dog bark. Each student there after adds something different changing the shape of the spontaneous composition.

2. The Twelve Bar Blues is a classic example of an infrastructure perfect for improvisational training but any simple chord progression will do as long as the group is comfortable. For beginning students try a drum circle where beat and rhythm can be reinforced with minimal risk from potentially exposed individuals. For more experienced students, allow each member to take a solo, or improvised expression on the form and key.

Naturalistic

1. Role Play: Explore personifications of Ecological/ scientific and social/political conflicts:

   For Example: Student 1 is a 400 year old Red Wood tree cross examining the CEO of a Major logging Corporation in an anthropomorphic court. Or polar bear and a seal debate the ethics of the food chain on a daytime talk show(this may be an allegory for the pros and cons of vegetarianism, and even evolution.

2. Improvisation in Nature: Use an outdoors setting for any of these exercises. Use natural litter for props. Simulate a team of astronauts landing on another planet and seeing this setting for the first time. Have them write their "first time" descriptions in a journal or log book. Take it further by retrieving specimens form the field that the students choose and (with assistance if needed) develop laboratory tests on the samples. Let the students questions contribute guidance toward more experimentation. Focus as much time as possible in the field. as naturalists thrive on this environment.

Intrapersonal

1. Closed free association: Each student lies down (good for kinesthetic learners too) away from each other with eyes closed. The instructor then calls out prompts, (words or phrases) and each student immediately internally responds with regard to how they feel or think about the specific prompt. Fifteen to twenty second intervals of silence should be given between the prompts for the student's reflection. For example:

    Prompt: Fungus

    Possible internal reactions: "Gross," "I want to have fun today," "I wish I were hiking."

    Students should feel encouraged to share any thoughts that may have surprised them, or were particularly vivid afterwards. In general though this is a private exercise strictly for the students.

2. Note to Self: This exercise is particularly flexible by subject. Have the student compose a letter or monologue to their self. This alone can be a therapeutic and focusing tool to transition between topics and moods and activity.

   Augment the exercise by superimposing qualities on the self. For instance prompt the students to put themselves in historical places, times, and even in historical personas. This exercise forced the complexity and richness of paradox because the first and second person are the same. It also adds the dimension of affect, not only from the real student, but the logical collection of moments from history. This recognition of some appropriate emotions for story, or history, provides context and attachment to otherwise detached information leading to empathy and perhaps even altruism.

Interpersonal

1. Trust Falls: Trust falls are a very concrete way to capture the concept of faith the improvisation is in the act of release. The release of excuses, inhibitions, biases, and judgment in a moment where one's well being is delivered to their peers. This exercise has long been used in team building but the foundation is faith. Create a catching team by lining up two rows of students facing each other, arms length apart. The line should extend outward from a platform standing between chest and head level of the catching team. Each student should be given the opportunity to fall. The student falling will stand at the edge of the top of the platform with her back to the catching team. The catching team should extend on each side of the Faller, the lines should be as long as the Faller is tall. Each

person in the catching team links arms with the person facing them. When the Faller is ready they will allow their self to fall backwards into the arms of the catching team. The instructor should also participate in this exercise.

2. Divergent Strategy: Compose a problem that requires multiple solutions. Particularly one that utilized many different strengths. Assign groups based on diversifying strengths to solve the problem. For example, city planning is a complex problem that may have a variety of solutions depending on the individual strength within a team set to easing those problems. Have each group design a development or redevelopment. For older students use real examples of urban or suburban problem areas. Allow them freedom to diagnose problems beyond the obvious or given. Variations such as student invention, and parameters like green living can color the project differently depending on class goals and individual capabilities.

Kinesthetic

1. Silent Switch Freeze: The improvisational game "switch freeze" consists of two characters carrying out an impromptu scene. The scene continues until someone from the audience yells "freeze," at which time the actors freeze their movement and the audience member takes the place of one of the actors beginning a completely new scene. With Silent Switch Freeze no dialog is allowed which forces the characters to use body language in place of words. This exercise is perhaps the most valuable of those mentioned in this lesson plan because in

Drama, oftentimes the first characteristic to be omitted is body language and realistic movement. Silent Switch Freeze will most likely look more exaggerated than reality but it will discover the importance of body language to the students.

2. HORSE Review: Hang a toy or NERF basketball hoop in the classroom. Divide the class into diverse review teams. Each team plays a game of HORSE against one another. The traditional rules of HORSE are as follows: Each team rotates members who take a shot at the basket. If the ball goes in the team gets a letter beginning with H. The first one to spell HORSE wins. In HORSE Review each team only gets to take a shot if they answer a review question correctly. Endless variations can follow. For instance, instead of spelling HORSE they might spell Bonaparte, or Magna Carta 1215. Allow open play for all teams to scramble for the answer instead of giving each team a time limit to answer. This will increase the pressure to perform well at speed but without increased consequence.

Spatial

1. Group Impromptu Mural: This exercise will take longer than 15 minutes and need additional set up and cleanup time. Using inexpensive muslin or an old flat and old latex paints of various colors conduct a group mural project. To begin with roll a six-sided dice. The number that shows will indicate the number of brush strokes a student is allowed that turn. Cycle through the group so that all the students have a chance to add to the mural in any way they want, (no ones addition is sacred). Once everyone in the group has added to the piece roll the

dice again for a new stroke number. This exercise is also good as a bonding project for team building. It could be a class work that hangs for a semester representing a single class identity.

2. Story Board: Story Boards are still used in marketing pitches for visual mediums they force the artist/ author to deliver a message through the use of symbols, perspective, line, visual contras, and in some cases words though words should be a minimal component at most. Allow a class to explore a subject, concept or theme through add on story boarding. This might all be done on a chalk board where one student begins the story by finishing the first frame, another student continues the story in the next frame, and so on. Realistic drawing skills are not necessarily required nor the best way to approach the exercise.

Existential

1. 10 Things (3 day exercise):

   Day 1- Instruct students to spontaneously compose a list of 10 things they would change if they could. This should be completely open form and could pertain to themselves other individuals or greater humanity and/ or the physical world.

   Day 2- Instruct students to spontaneously compose a list of 10 things they would keep the same for all time. There will likely be a shift in many students to concepts less physical than the first day's list.

   Day 3- Instruct students to spontaneously compose a list of 10 things they will change. While there may be some repeated or related elements from the first list

there should again be a shift to more philosophical or nature of being questions at the same time concrete or finite measure to completion.

For high school students, this exercise will vary widely between freshmen and seniors as the development of the frontal lobe of the brain begins to really kick in for seniors (and junior girls). It would be interesting to administer this tool at the end of every year of high school then compare an individual's answers with their previous responses.

2. Awareness not only makes us human, but is a priceless improvisational skill. Often times the moments in life where we are most aware are sudden shocks to our senses, touching a hot iron, hearing an emergency siren, and tragedies, or shocks to our emotional system. A place to start honing awareness (particularly in younger students) is through sensory development. It is common for individuals who loose a sense to experience a heightening of other senses in compensation. Create opportunities for students to temporarily go without a sense. Blind fold, ear muff simple exercise for this is keeping a log or journal of co-incidents that occur in one's life. These can either be shared with a class or group or not. Often times these become great topics for essays along with continued writing and reflection.

Chapter 4

Evaluation

Feedback and Review

The students understanding the importance or benefit of improvisation may be difficult to coach. However over time the student will see improvement and a greater agility in quick, real, and effective responses. The direct feedback should be encouraging and at the same time a retrospective comparison. A video of the student's first improvisation compared to the end of a semester of regular improvisational exercise will strike awe into the student and develop a reputation for the positive use of improvisation material.

Review of class information can be included into the exercises to capitalize on exaggerated association learning and indirect learning.

Modeling

The instructor should feel free to participate in improvisations. It will give adolescent students the understanding that this is a valid teaching format and not just *play time.*

Assessment and Check for Understanding

Assessment for effectiveness in these exercises has to come from the instructor's constant attention to improvements in the student's performance and or genuine response. The instructor should keep a brief log of student break-throughs and highlights. At the same time the instructor should shelf warm-ups that don't seem to do the class any good

and create new exercises modeled after the ones that work best. A before and after video will also give the instructor proof of the student's achievement. The instructor should communicate often and openly with the students about the role these exercises are playing in their education. Students should also be encouraged to inform their instructor if they ever feel that the training has helped them in other subjects.

Portfolio

Portfolio Assessments are increasingly popular with progressive districts. They seek to collect a spectrum of examples of the students progress. Improvisational examples will often be highlights to an individuals portfolio because they allow for the greatest chance of genuine character and spontaneous magic in the same way candid pictures do.

Traditional Assessment

Traditional assessment and standardized tests do not have to be absent for improvisational methodologies to work. On the contrary, students will show improved performance on these rigid formulas just as Jazz players synthesize harmonies over complex and rigid chord changes with immediate confidence, just as a mathematician might break codes in time of war. The stress of an inorganic confine like timed standardized testing is a reality and should not be ignored or denied. Improvisational practice will open a dam of controlled complex problem solving, a synaptic cooperative. It will improve the best testers and well as allow those frozen by the unnatural environment to compete, perform, and overcome.

Review of Practicum

Activities from the practicum were implemented in a creative writing class developed for a South Suburban Recreational District in Englewood Colorado in March, April and May of 2005, The student body fluctuated between six and ten members of the community. The age of the participants ranged from 16 to 82 but the majority fell between 40 and 60. Women participants out numbered males by more than six to one.

Preconceptions and Inhibitions

Because the class was voluntary, motivation level of the students was overall high. However, low tuition, $45.00, and a short course time, two hours a week for four weeks, together a minimal investment, added to generally low expectation of learning. The depressed expectation insisted upon proof of no or minimal risk with regard to the activities presented. A general trend appeared that the older the student the greater the difficulty in participation of an activity that they determined unorthodox, or unfamiliar. In two more extreme examples students could not appropriately participate though the instructions admittedly were clear and examples were present.

Closed Free Association

The timid nature of the student body required the free writing exercises to be closed, or without sharing the response to prompts. The intrapersonal qualities of the closed realm buffered them against the combination of new exercise, and unknown environment and possibly emotional material. As suggested in chapter three, the appropriate modifications to this activity were made specifically to the group. The prompts would begin concrete

and, with each week, become more abstract. Week one the prompt was a ceramic pitcher. Week two was a toy farm tractor, week three was a Nordic folk song, and week four was a non-representational piece of art. The exercise lasted five minutes each time and remained passive, that is, students began writing on their own and never shared what they wrote down unless the writing was submitted to be critiqued for feedback, however this was not a requirement.

Discussion

Every week the group of students were lead through open workshopping of work submitted the week prior to the group for reading. The initial comments of course are not improvised. They are thoughtful comments about a specific writing. However, as preconceived comments are given, discussion about the comments and conclusions drawn to the text unfolds. In this discussion, and sometimes debate, students are immediately faced with points of view and suggestions that are sometimes similar to their own but also often very different. During this discussion they are forced to compare their thoughts against those of the other group members and then revise thei comments in the moment to account for and speak directly to opinions and assertions as they struggle to understand the writing in depth. How in depth depends on the students and the instructor. discussion at this level is synthesis in action.

Evaluation of Practicum

While there was some obvious progressions in students ability to address a writing prompt with confidence and language, a more accurate evaluation of the free

association exercise in the Practicum deserves more time than four days out of a month. something more like two days a week for a traditional semester or more sould show far greater growth and even transformations.

The discussion aspect of the class was far more candid. Within the four week session all students showed demonstrable growth in the depth of reading, comprehending and reviewing as exhibited through discussions. As discussions improved the writing of the students generally improved creating a cycle of synthesis.

Student Feedback

Students were not given any formal evaluation other than the class time comments and written notes on copies of their manuscripts. If the class changes from a monthly format to something considerably longer measures could be implimented to make the participants more aware of the methodology in hopes of directly enhancing the data being collected and in stride work closer to the facilities directors for the park and recreation curriculum to train staff in these methodologies for other subjects.

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