

Dynamic and Effective Teaching Using Applied Improvisation

Structure and Improvisation yield Flexibility and Presence in the Classroom

Upside-Down Introductions

(Providing a direct experience in “being who you are and who you’re not”)

In pairs, participants tell each other about themselves, including why and how they became a professor

Each, then, introduces their partner to the larger group – but in the first person – playing the role of their partner

Talk to My Agent

(“Getting to know” with a quick infusion of energy)

groups of 3: (Reporter, Subject, Agent)

Reporter to Subject: “Name one thing you love about yourself”

Agent immediately jumps in and provides an energetic and heightened pitch of the subjects chosen attribute.

Repeat until everyone has had the chance to play all three roles

Picture Story

(A practical exploration into the power of storytelling to develop a strong and personal connection with an audience.)

Using a blank piece of paper, players describe the “who, what and where” of the “photograph;” including the story behind it and any relationships between the people in it.

Describe a photograph of a professor in the process of teaching.

Diamond Dance

(A great and fun way to get people up on their feet and moving.)

Number the four sides of the room (1 – 4) for the front, back, right wall, left wall of the room.

Explain to the group that they are to face whichever direction is appropriate for the number called: when 1 is called, they all face front; when 2 is called, they all face the right; etc.

They are to follow the movement of whoever is in front of them. If no one is in front of them, they are the leader.

Play party dance style music and call out numbers, giving each number a couple of turns.

Gibberish/English combined with Gibberish Demonstration

(Communication that transcends language.)

Player(s) demonstrate or teach a concept, product or skill while being side-coached between Gibberish and English

Conversation, while in Gibberish, is to flow normally and advance in meaning

Throwing Light

(An entertaining and challenging way to discuss a secret topic related to the subject area that can eventually involve the entire group. The game can stand as a practical demonstration of how the power of story can help to get us out of our heads and into the present moment.)

Two players choose a topic of conversation. They engage in conversation about the topic without directly mentioning it.

They try to mislead the others without making false statements.

The others may not ask questions or guess the topic aloud but are to join the conversation when they feel they know its subject.

Sources

- Alda, Alan. *If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look on My Face?: My Adventures in the Art and Science of Relating and Communicating*. New York: Random House. 2017
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- Pink, Daniel H. *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth about Moving Others*. New York: Riverhead Books. 2012
- Sawyer, R. Keith, ed. *Structure and Improvisation in Creative Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater (3rd edition)*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press. 1999.

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Presented by



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Worked closely with theatre legend, the late Paul Sills – founder of The Second City and son of Viola Spolin (considered the mother of modern-day improvisation).

Selected to take over and carry on Sills' renowned acting workshops in Door County, Wisconsin.

Guest artist at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts summer program for drama students.

For the past thirty-three years, Sparky has been a full-time drama professor with the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta.