



Improvisation theater facilitation guide

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Improvisational theatre

The improvisation theater (*improv* or *impro*) is a form of theater based on spontaneity, on collaboration with others and on the connection between the members of the group. Nothing is planned, it is not done according to a predefined scenario, the characters and the dialogue between them, the action and where it takes place are created spontaneously and in collaboration by the participants. Although most of the improvisational shows are comedies, there are also non-comedy forms.

This kind of performance is based on **improvisation** (the ability to create or interpret spontaneously without previous training). In improvisation, the participants do not know what follows, the scene is created ad-hoc. This is why, it is important for the group members to pay attention to each other, so that to react appropriately. When you improvise, even if you are a specialist, each scene is a novelty, you live a new experience with every group of people together with whom you improvise. Participants must pay attention to partners, so that to react appropriately.

Anyone can perform, anyone can improvise.

(Spolin Viola, 1999)

Improvisation techniques are used in movies and television, both for the creation of characters and scenarios and as part of the final product.

The basic principle of the improvisational theater is simple: *improvisation involves interpretation without a scenario*. As a rule, the improvisation exercises start with a group of actors whom are given suggestions by the audience on the relations between characters, the place where the action takes place, the occupations they have, etc. Starting from these suggestions, actors will create dialogues, scenes, contexts, etc. The collaboration among the members of the group is very important, as well as their cohesion and active listening, the ability of the group members to stay connected with each other and to focus their attention on the stage partners.

Short history

The earliest reference on the improvisation theater dates back to 391 B.C. and is found in the Atellan Lighthouse in Africa; between the 16th and 18th centuries different performers' bands improvised on the streets of Italy. In the 1890s, the theorists and theater directors Konstantin Stanislavski and Jacques Copeau used improvisation techniques both in the training/preparation of actors and for rehearsals¹.

¹ Alison Hodge (cord.) *Twentieth Century Acting Training*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Improvisation exercises for children formed the basis of the dramatic education of the twentieth century, following the progressive education movement initiated by John Dewey in 1916. These were developed by Viola Spolin in the 1940s, 50s and 60s and included in the book "Improvisation for the Theater", the first book in which were presented techniques specific to the improvisational theater. Viola Spolin continued to develop games, exercises and improvisation techniques, aimed at developing creativity and spontaneity that can be used both in the theater world and in the classroom.

Among the prominent representatives of the improvisation theater are the British playwright and director Keith Johnstone, Paul Sills and David Shepherd, founders of the first improvisational theater in the United States of America (Compass Theater in 1955), Elaine May-American scriptwriter, director and comedian, as well as the American actor and writer Del P. Close, the first to influence the modern improvisational theater, etc.

Principles of Improvisation theater

There are no absolute rules in improvisation, but it is possible to speak of some common principles highlighted by most of the representatives of the improvisational theater.

*Improvisation is not for people looking for safety, **yes** is for those who want adventure.* (Mihaela Sîrbu, 2017).

1. Say „yes” and add something! („Yes, and...”) Accept everything your partner proposes, no matter how absurd the idea seems to you. Then add new ideas and go further. This process is necessary so that to build a reality together with your group colleagues.

*So, say **yes**. And if you're lucky, you'll find people who will say **yes**.* (Stephen Colbert, 2006).

2. Act now, think later! In improvisation, it is important to react immediately, spontaneously, without thinking too much about what you will do or what you will say. If you think too much about how you react, you will not react appropriately.

3. Listen! Pay attention! It is important to listen carefully to your partners and build the scene based on their ideas. Active listening involves not only hearing, but all other senses; it means to look, feel, smell, taste, be present, think about what is happening here and now.

4. You are never alone! Collaboration between the partners of the group is essential for the success of an improvisation exercise. A scene cannot be created if everyone tries to assert themselves and not as a group.

5. Make your partner look good! Valorize your partner! Focus on your partner, highlight his/her talent, pay attention to him/her. If you manage to make your partner "look good" and feel good, then you will also look good.

6. Forget who leads and who is led! The audience does not have to figure out who is responsible for creating a scene. The role of the leader must be taken in turn, without notice, by all those in the group.

7. Don't try to be funny! In improvisation, it is important not to try to be original or funny, but to be yourself. The more you try to be funny, it is more likely that the scene will seem forced.

8. You cannot make mistakes! Take risks and act with confidence, without fear of making mistakes. Do not pressure yourself, release yourself from the fear of being embarrassing. Feel free to make mistakes. In improvisation there are no mistakes; the only mistake is that of not accepting the game and the rules.

9. Create your character! Be aware of the character you are going to play, where you are and who you are interacting with, then take up your role and act accordingly.

10. Avoid the "7 sins" of improvisation:

- **blockages:** denial/rejection of ideas and suggestions of others and even of your own (for example: **A:** *What a nice dress you wear today!* **B:** *Which dress? I do not wear any dresses*).
- **cowardice,** ignoring the ideas of others, refusal to provide information (for example: **A:** *What time is it?* **B:** *I have no idea*).
- **taking an insignificant role:** trying to make others contribute with all the ideas (for example: **A:** *Where do we go today?* **B:** *At the shop* **A:** *Why do we go there?* **B:** *To buy a TV.* **A:** *Why?* **B:** *Because the one that I had ... was broken*).
- **joking, mocking:** jokes made at the expense of the scene that unfolds. **A:** *I challenge you to a duel!* **B:** *Do we duel with the pillows? Ha-ha-ha!*
- **evasion:** avoiding concrete answers, using many words without saying anything. (for example: **A:** *What do you plan to change in the company?* **B:** *That's a very good question There are many important things that I'm thinking now. I am actually thinking that I 'm sure I will bring many improvements ...*).
- **procrastination/delay:** avoid action (for example: **A:** *Are you going to fire me?* **B:** *your attitude toward your colleagues lately and the lack of interest in your job duties are not appreciated by the company's management. I would like to ask you what is behind this attitude?*).

- **canceling:** rejecting/removing an idea that was already been agreed (for example: **A:** *I was very scared when I came across those monsters in the forest.* **B:** *Yes, Laura, but you know they are not real, your rich imagination is to blame.*)

Improvisation theater - as a method of (formal and non-formal) education

As a method of education, the improvisation theater develops spontaneity, attention and empathy through the techniques of building characters and favors the creation of a stimulating working environment. All principles mentioned in the previous pages apply without exception whenever this method is used.

Improvisation represents a useful tool for professions of all kinds, even for those that have nothing to do with dramaturgy.

The improvisational theater can be used in education, research, business, for personal development and sometimes it can be used in psychotherapy, as a tool for gaining insight into a person's thoughts, feelings and relationships. It can also be used for problem solving, research, professional development, or teambuilding.

The whole world is a scene and most of us play the role without rehearsing it before. (Sean O'Casey, playwright)

The fact that the method is focused on a number of specific and varied exercises and that one of its strengths is versatility, the possibility of being adapted to the needs of the participants (kindergarten, pupils, students, young people or adults), size of the group it is worked with, the themes to be addressed, the problems to be solved, the space or the time available make it easy to be applied.

In education, the method can be used both in teaching and learning activities and in evaluation activities, both as a method of formal education ("Yes, and ..." technique, *Ghibberish exercises, Group story*, etc.) and as a method of non-formal education. The exercises and principles of this method, the focus on real collaboration between group partners and good communication and coordination between them, ensure the cohesion of the group (pupils and teacher/teachers).

Learning objectives of the method

The improvisation theater method is used to form or develop certain skills and attitudes of those involved. Given the specificity of this method, it can be adapted to different needs of the group and used for different age levels, from children to adults.

Using this method in the school environment helps not only to expressing emotions, but can also be used to learn life lessons, social, historical or fictitious experiences, in co-operation

with others. Developing these abilities in a collaborative environment where pupils feel safe with each other ensures the development of an individual's potential.

Thus, by using the improvisational theater, specific techniques, games and exercises, objectives can be achieved, such as:

- developing communication skills;
- the ability to adapt to different situations or people;
- cohesion of the group;
- the ability to make quick decisions on the spot;
- developing critical thinking;
- the ability to manage emotional factors;
- the ability to maintain an active attention;
- stimulating creativity, imagination and initiative;
- developing self-confidence;
- spontaneity;
- developing teamwork skills;
- active listening skills;
- developing tolerance and empathy;
- the ability to creatively solve problems;
- personal development;
- the ability to accept, for others and for themselves, different ideas and characters, etc.

Mastering the art of improvisation will help the pupils, students, young people or adults from different professional backgrounds become able to think fast, be independent, put their ideas into practice; it prepares them for a profession, for society, for life. The success of using this method consists in developing self-confidence of those involved, as well as in developing the ability to react quickly and effectively to situations in everyday life.

Teachers who frequently use techniques and exercises of the improvisation theater method get to know their pupils better, find out what their strengths or weaknesses are, which allows them to adapt their teaching activity to the class' requirements/needs/problems. They develop creativity, become better listeners, are more reflexive and more open to the ideas of others (pupils, colleagues, parents of children, etc.).

Participants and roles

Within the method of improvisation theater, there are several roles that can be adopted/acquired at a given time, during the participation in the exercises or the proposed games: the role of "actor" (the active participant), the role of "spectator" (participants who sit

on the sidelines and watch what happens during the games), the role of facilitator (teacher, trainer, etc.).

The role of facilitator/coordinator can be played by a teacher, a trainer or any person who has studied the method and mastered its core principles, as well as the aspects that have to be taken into account in organizing a workshop or performing specific exercises of the method (determining the composition of the groups, the number of participants, the venue, the choice of exercises/games, etc.). The facilitator is the one who presents the rules of the game, supervises the activity, moves from one group to another to determine the independent players to cooperate with their colleagues and the most prudent or passive players to get involved in the group's activities. In some situations, the facilitator can actively engage in the proposed exercises, either to show the participants what to do or to better understand what the group members are experiencing.

When the team/teams work(s), the facilitators have to be careful both to the audience's reaction and to the work of the group they coordinate.

Recommendations for facilitators:

- avoid giving examples, this can inhibit spontaneity;
- be flexible, adapt to the needs or suggestions of pupils/students/people you work with;
- do not rush the participants, some people need more time to react/act;
- ensure a favorable environment, so that everyone feels safe and valued;
- respect the level of each participant and challenge him/her to reach his/her full potential;
- clearly and concisely explain the rules of the game, the proposed exercise;
- read as many books as possible about improvisation-based games.

The role of „actor”/player/active participant can be played by all those children who are actively involved in the games or exercises proposed by the facilitator. They must participate freely, without being forced to assume a role and can give up at any time in the game.

Recommendations for players

- be spontaneous: act, do not react;
- be flexible, take on the ideas of your colleagues and develop them;
- know yourself first and then the others;
- pay attention to the partners involved in the game, without them, there is no play;
- creativity does not involve reorganization, but transformation; transform yourself, not the others;
- pay attention to the instructions received; if you do not understand something, ask.

The role of „spectator” is not a passive role, as one might think. Those who choose to sit on the sidelines and watch the players will pay attention to what is happening, because each exercise or game will be discussed by all participants, regardless of their role. In addition, the

spectators are the ones who can offer suggestions to the players, recommend them, for example, a product to advertise, a letter of the alphabet to start all the words of a sentence, etc. A spectator can decide to give up his/her role and become actively involved in the game.

Recommendations for spectators

- be spontaneous in your reactions;
- analyze the activities of colleagues without judging them;
- engage in the exercise when you want;
- pay attention to what happens during the game and offer feedback;
- help your colleagues develop the exercise/game.

It should be mentioned that these roles are not fixed, they are interchangeable. For example, the facilitator may choose to engage in the proposed games and exercises to better understand the dynamics of the group and the players' experiences; one of the pupils who is an *actor* may decide to withdraw from the game without being held accountable for this. Anytime a player who was a *spectator* can actively engage in exercises or games. Children can also take over some of the facilitator/coordinator's duties and supervise the work of their colleagues, providing guidance, etc.

Organizing the workshops

The term workshop is used generically for an activity which partly or fully based on exercises that are specific to the improvisation theater method. Viola Spolin (1986) provided a framework for organizing a workshop based on improvisation games, listing the issues that have to be taken into consideration by a facilitator.

Determining team composition - to avoid preferences or assembling the same teams, it is recommended that they are formed by counting. Whenever the exercise changes, the composition of the teams will change. Thus, participants will be able to collaborate with all group/class colleagues.

The number of participants may vary according to the proposed exercise. The most relevant number of participants in a game is 10, but the number of members in a team can range from 5 to 25 members.

Venue - Improvisation exercises may take place both indoor (classroom, sports hall, etc.) and outdoors (school yard, park, dedicated facilities, etc.). The area in which the activities are organized has to be large enough in order to allow the proposed exercises. It is also desirable that it can be easily adapted to the requirements of the game and allow each participant to have access to everything that is going on.

Freedom of choice - no one can be compelled to participate in an exercise/improvisation game. A person has the right to choose whether or not to be involved in the proposed activity, to withdraw from work even during its course, without being sanctioned. In this situation, Viola Spolin suggests appointing one of the participants to help his/her colleague. The name of the retired player should not be mentioned, but the use of general names: colleague, friend, partner, etc. is recommended.

Understanding at the group level - After determining the composition of the group and presenting the rules of the game, it is necessary to determine the position of each member of the team. For example, team members need to jointly determine where the action will take place, the characters they will play and what they will do in a scene. "As players begin to trust the game and the approach, they will accept the differences between them."²

Sidecoaches - involves taking on the role of guiding the others, according to their needs. Assigning the role of "coach", in turn, to each participant, favors the development of self-confidence, as well as sensitivity and attention to the needs of the group partners.

Designing the workshops to meet different needs - the games used must be tailored to the participants. They also need to be varied, to target both playing and having fun, as well as problem solving or intuition.

Using additional materials - the materials refer to the games or the improvisation exercises provided by the facilitator, as well as to materials, such as poems or stories that can be adapted by the participants, to famous paintings or materials that can be used during the proposed activities (balls, paper of different colors, various objects, etc.)

Who and how does assess?

The assessment is realised at the end of each improvisation exercise by all participants: players, audience, facilitator. It analyzes the main aspects considered in the exercise (solving the problem, collaboration between the members of the group, communication between them). The attitude of the "assessing group" will be unbiased, the comments will be objective and will refer to the exercise. It is essential that the evaluation contributes to solving the problems, the feedback to be constructive, eliminating the player's anxiety and feelings of guilt.

² Spolin, V., *Theatre Games For the Classroom*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1986, p. 17, available at https://books.google.ro/books?id=_Cp-xvnCEgIC&lpg=PA27&ots=LPIy5uwYOU&dq=spolin&lr=&pg=PA27&redir_esc=y#v=twopage&q&f=false, accessed at: 17.08.2017

During assessment, it is necessary that the fear of being judged or the part played to be seen as good/poor, right/wrong to be eliminated, as they restrict spontaneity, risk taking, creativity, critical thinking, attention to others and the work done, etc., all those skills that are formed and developed by the improvisational theater. Once players get rid of these fears, they will give up the self-control generated by the fear of being embarrassing and they will be open to new experiences and willing to take risks.

In the same time, the facilitator's assessment should be objective and focused on predefined aspects, such as: player concentration (if complete or partial), communication between partners, their interpretation, if the problem has been resolved through the exercise, if the players "have shown" or "said" what they had to convey, if they interpreted or reacted, if they allowed something unexpected to happen etc.

Confidence in the other members of the group makes the participants open to assessment, to accept the suggestions and observations of others and to perceive their constructive value. Participants need to understand that the assessment has the role of solving different issues and not criticizing their performance. The assessment made by players depends on their level of understanding, the proposed problem to be solved, or their ability to focus attention. If the participants understand very well what is happening on the stage, then it is recommended that the assessment to be done by them, not by the facilitator.

The assessment will be based on what happened and has been communicated, not on what the participants intended to convey, and should not include personal views on how the scene/exercise/game should have taken place.

Within this method, assessment represents an important part of the process and it is essential to understand the issues presented, both for "actors" and for "public."

Examples of games specific to this method

Generally speaking, the improvisation games are based on the interaction between the participants and aim at exploring and being aware of the movements of their own body, overcoming stage fright and self-imposed barriers, adapting to different situations or people,

„Does not suppose anything. Assess just what you saw!“

(Viola Spolin, 1986)

developing the active attention of the participants. All games are based on the "Say **yes** and add something" principle.

Viola Spolin has identified several types of games that can be used in class with the pupils: **warm-up games** focused on the interaction between participants (Shield and bomb); **rhythmic movement games** aimed at

exploring and being aware of the movements of your own body; **transformation games** that guide and help the pupil to feel the space and everything surrounding him/her. For example, the "ball" is not an imaginary one, but it is a part of space - air (Sound ball, Catch and pass). **Sense-development games** help participants to analyze their actions/reactions from the perspective of all five senses (Draw according to directions, Mirror). In addition to these categories, there are also games aimed at developing group cohesion and spontaneity, language and expressiveness (Group Story, Giberrish, The Expert).

All the games presented below can be adapted and applied at all levels of education, including higher education, within professional development courses or workshops.

Sound ball

Aim: interaction among group members, focusing the attention of the players on a moving object

Number of participants: minimum 10 - maximum 20

Game description: The participants will stand in a circle. One of them will throw an *air ball* to another participant, while making a sound. The one who catches the ball will mimic the sound of the thrower and then throw the ball to another player, releasing a new sound, different from the previous one.

Variation: The throwing/catching of the ball and the sounds that accompany these activities will be continuous, without pausing.

Players are advised to stretch their hands over their head to catch the ball or they are suggested that the ball is moving very slowly, so they must wait until they catch the ball.

Remarks: As the game takes place, players become more creative and relaxed, the sounds released and the way of throwing the imaginary balls are more complex.

The facilitator can take over players' ideas to develop or change the game.

Players must be permanently connected to each other to "see" when they are passed the ball, in order to mimic the sound of the thrower as accurately as possible.

Catch and pass

Aim: focusing on imaginary objects

Number of participants: minimum 10 - maximum 20

Game description: The participants will stand in a circle. The facilitator or one of the players will throw an air ball to another player and tell its color (the blue ball). After several passes, the facilitator will throw another ball of air (the red ball), the other ball remaining in play. The process is repeated: the yellow ball will be thrown, an ice cream will be given to one of them, a full bag, a very heavy box, etc.. Participants will mimic the real moves they would have done if they were carrying a heavy box, a bag, etc.). Each time a ball is thrown or an object is passed to another player, his/her name is said. At the end of the game, the participants are asked to tell which objects they have.

Remarks: Although the game has been played for several times, all objects have never been "found". Balls of different colors were among the most often "lost" objects.

Visual contact is very important in this game. You have to make sure that the partner to whom you pass the object looks at you and understands your intention. You do not need to be aware of all the objects in the game, but only of the one you are responsible for at a particular moment.

The story of the group

Aim: taking over and developing the partner's idea; increasing group cohesion

Number of participants: minimum 5 - maximum 20

Game description: The participants will be placed in a circle. One of the players will start a story. This will be continued by a colleague at the facilitator's signal. The duration of the exercise varies depending on the age of the players. When the players are children, no more than 2 tours will be completed.

Remarks: This type of exercise contributes to the development of the language of those involved and especially ensures the cohesion of the group. Exercise can be repeated at different time intervals. Thus, as the links between the participants are closer, the story becomes more fluid and logical. Participants take over and develop partners' ideas.

It is an exercise that can be used when working with a new group, where the participants do not know each other. In school, it can also be used to facilitate the inclusion of a new pupil in an already existing class.

Draw according to directions

Aim: development of senses (in this case, the development of tactile sense) and communication skills

Number of participants: minimum 5 - maximum 20

Game description: Players will be seated at the table/desk and will receive sheets and pencils. One of them will be seated on a chair in front of the others and will receive an object from the facilitator (any small object, such as key, pinecone, fruit, keychain, etc.). The received object will be held back, so that none of the participants can see it. Using only the sense of touch, the respective player will have to describe the object to the other players, so that they can draw it as closely as possible.

The game can be repeated several times, avoiding monotony or boredom.

The players who draw are not allowed to ask clarification questions.

Remarks: At the end of the exercise observations are made on the differences that occur between the person describing the object and those who receive the message.

The accuracy of the description/drawing of the object is influenced by the representations of each player.

Questions can be asked, such as: *How did you feel during the exercise ? Which of the roles seemed easier to you: the transmitter or the receiver? Why? Would it have been easier for you to have the opportunity to ask questions?*

Shield and bomb

Aim: adaptability to the situation, coordination with partners, flexibility

Number of participants: 10 – 12 players

Game description: The participants will be placed in a circle. Everyone has to choose, without naming them, two people from the game players, one of whom is the "shield" and the other represents the "bomb". At the signal of the game coordinator, the participants will run as far as possible from the person chosen as "the bomb" and the person who represents the "shield" has to stand between him/her and the "bomb". At the second signal of the coordinator, the players will "freeze".

It is analyzed the position of each player in relation to the chosen "bomb" and "shield".

Variation: Each player chooses two people without naming them. At the facilitator's signal,

they will sit down to form a triangle with the chosen person.

Remarks: In the beginning, the participants try to determine the chosen people to take a position that help him/her achieve his goal, trying to "change" the other, not himself.

The facilitator draws the attention to another principle of the improvisation theater: "we cannot change anyone except ourselves. You cannot be creative if you know what you have to do beforehand." (Mihaela Sirbu, actress)



The success of this game lies in the ability to adapt to the given situation. The players understand that those who have to position and reposition according to the chosen person are themselves.

Gibberish/Gramelo

Aim: communicating emotions and concepts without words

Number of participants: minimum 10 - maximum 20

Game description: One of the participants, sitting in front of others so that he/she can be seen, will explain a problem/situation using meaningless words that seem to belong to a familiar language (Italian, Spanish, Turkish, French, Chinese, etc.). Although the words have no meaning, the audience will understand the message. It is important the attitude of the speaker, his/her mimic, body language and intonation. It is very important for the speaker **to know what he/she is saying!** Thus he will be credible and authentic and will interact better with his/her audience.

Variations: *The translator*

Two of the participants will get a topic to discuss (for example: presenting a family recipe, promoting an event, etc.). One of the players will speak in Gibberish and the other will translate to the public what the stage partner says.

Remarks: The exercise is very important for developing listening skills and for understanding the non-verbal language.

The relationship between partners is essential. The translator has to take over from the partner's expressions, gestures and intonation, so that to be credible. In the same time,

the translator will try to respect the originally proposed topic.

Synchronization between the "expert" and the "translator" is also important.

The Expert

Aim: highlighting your partner

Number of participants: 10

Game description: A player interviews another player on a previously proposed topic. It is not mandatory for the proposed topics to be real; for example, the reporter can interview an expert about how he managed to teach a giraffe to play basketball. Everything the "expert" says is very interesting and beyond any doubt, every question asked by the "interviewer" is good and deserves a complete answer.

Variations: The expert can be played by two or more players at once. Depending on what is initially agreed, each of them will contribute to the answers offered to the interviewer by adding one word or more. In this situation, the collaboration between the partners and the attention to everything that happens in the interpreted scene will be maximized.

Remarks: The exercise develops listening ability, focusing on collaboration and active attention.

Again, the relationship between partners is essential.

The fifth principle presented in the guide, "Make your partner look good! Valorize him/her!" applies to this game.

The Mirror

Aim: critical analysis, attention development, synchronization of the movements with those of the partner

Number of participants: 10 or any other even number of participants

Game description: The participants are grouped in pairs and stand face to face. They will try to imitate each other's movements as if they would see their own reflection in the mirror. During the exercise, the facilitator will ask them to change the roles (each of the partners will propose the movements that the other will imitate).

For a better synchronization between colleagues, it is recommended that the movements are

made slower so that they can be anticipated by the partner

Variation: Players will be placed in a circle so they can see each other. One of the players will leave the room. During this time, it will be designated the person who will propose the moves. In order not to give away the game leader, the "mirrors" will not look at him/her, but will imitate the moves of the players in their visual range. The player who was removed from the room will try to identify the person who runs the game.

Remarks: Participants carefully observe the moves of their partners and try to imitate them as closely as possible and in real time. The visual contact between the players is very important.

Changing the roles between partners need to be done subtly, without being noticed by others.

The Painting

Aim: accepting and developing on the partner/partners idea

Number of participants: minimum 10 - maximum 20

Game description: the participants spontaneously create a "painting" representing the objects or the people who compose it. For example, one of the participants claims to be a bartender and "freezes" in a position corresponding to the assumed role. Another participant takes over the idea of the first one and adds to the painting, assuming the role of "bar client"; a third participant assumes the role of "chair" on which the client can sit. Adding to the painting can continue up to a maximum of 7 elements in a painting.

When the painting is complete, the person who started the game will choose, among his/her colleagues, the one who will stay (for example, the chair). Starting from this, another painting will be created, which will represent a new "image". The game can continue until all participants who want will be part of a painting.

Variation: Players will try to play a scene from a famous painting. It is desirable that each participant or group of participants subtly modify the original painting.

Remark: The participants take over the the idea of the partners in the painting and assume a role in completing the "painting".

Applications of the method

The improvisation theater contributes to the development of different skills, aptitudes and knowledge that enable participants to actively engage not only in the activities proposed during the workshops, but also beyond the safety they provide. Children and young people who have been involved in improvisation activities are more likely to take risks, make decisions, and help to solving problems encountered both in the work environment and within society. In turn, teachers using this method know better their pupils, adapt themselves easier to unexpected situations, creatively solve the issues they face at the class level, most often together with their pupils.

The method, through its exercises, games and techniques, can be used in the classroom during activities, especially those of recapitulation and systematization of content.

The fact that it is an easy-to-use method that can be adapted to different needs, makes possible to find it frequently in Erasmus+ projects, in any of the five areas: School Education, Higher Education, Vocational Education - VET, Youth, Adult Education.

The "Yes, and ..." technique - applications in recapitulation activities

A convincing example is provided by researchers Laura J. MacDonald, Amanda Solem and Verónica A. Segarra, in the study "Using the Improvisational "Yes, and..." Approach as a Review Technique in the Student-Centered Biology Classroom"³. They presented three ways of applying the technique "Yes, and ...", a technique specific to the improvisation theater method, in cellular biology courses, held at Hastings College, at High Point University and at Hendrix College.

The Hastings College course aimed at recapitulating the contents of a learning unit (summative assessment). The teacher clarified the topic and continued with a statement about it; each pupil in the class added to what the previous person said, thus structuring the lesson. The technique has been applied throughout the semester, offering participants (pupils and teachers) the opportunity to make connections between the learned content and to clarify various unclear aspects.

In the case of the **High Point University course**, the teacher used the "Yes, and ..." technique during the regular assessment. Thus, the teacher made a general statement about the topic of the lesson, and the pupils added detailed information.

In both situations, the technique was first implemented at the level of the entire class and then used in smaller groups of 3-4 pupils.

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5134958/>

At **Hendrix College**, the "Yes and ..." technique was piloted as a summative assessment activity at the end of the semester, on a number of 40-50 pupils. They were provided with a list of topics studied during the semester. Spread in small groups, the pupils chose the topic they recapitulated using the "Yes, and ..." technique. In addition, each group received a list of keywords to help them recall the important concepts studied and instructions.

In all cases, the technique helped the pupils to better understand the topics studied and to deepen them. They appreciated the opportunity to work in small groups with their colleagues, thus having the opportunity to identify new perspectives, which were different from their own. Teachers appreciated the ease of applying this technique, the fact that it can be adapted to the needs of the group and to the various topics addressed. In addition, they have found that the method allows correcting pupils' misconceptions and facilitates formative and summative assessment.

"The story of the group" - the project *The story to be continued ...*

Within the Erasmus+ project ***The story to be continued...***, initiated by Professor Adriana Lefter (Elena Doamna High School, Tecuci) in partnership with their partner in Slovakia, one of the exercises specific to the improvisation theater was successfully applied: "The Story of the group".

The project, which was joined by two other partners from Poland and Portugal, aimed at developing the communication skills in the native language and in English of 10-11 year olds by creating a story entitled *How the Lunchbox traveled around the world*.

The project partners set the order in which they will draft the story and agreed on the main aspects they will follow (the main character and its name, the length of the fragment that each team will have to write, touching on ecological topics in the story, etc.). The pupils from Slovakia wrote the first two pages of the story, followed by Romanian, Polish and then Portuguese pupils. The texts created were accompanied by representative images.

The final product of this project was represented by the book in which the adventures of the food box were presented.

The children were very creative and open to the messages and suggestions of the project partners, they accepted and developed the ideas of their colleagues and, at the same time, they had fun. In addition, the use of the method favored collaboration and establishment of friendly relations between the partners involved in the project (pupils and teachers).

How the Lunchbox traveled around the world (fragment)

Lunchbox found out that it had arrived in a waste recycling center. It was in a wide space, surrounded by a high fence and, around, it could hear the noisy cars working day and night.

Up above, at the top of the garbage pile high as a mountain, it could see the large plains and the hills covered by flowers and trees. It was in Scotland, what a joy!

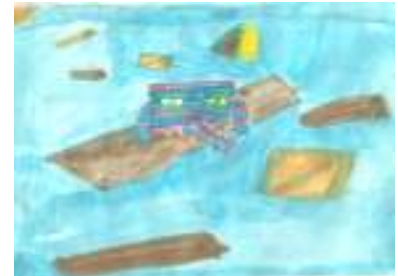


Lunchbox was very pleased with all the beauties, but its journey had to continue. Crossing seven hills and seven plains, it came across a huge field: "A blue plain? Where am I? "It took a step ... and another, and realized it was on the shore of the blue ocean.

Many ships were resting in the harbor and Lunchbox could hardly find any space to move along the luggage in order to get on the boat.

The journey was long; one of the days, the box went on the deck to admire the beauties. Precisely that moment, a strong wave hit the boat and the Lunchbox fell into the whirling waters of the ocean.

By miracle, a plank was slowly floating nearby and Lunchbox climbed it, grateful for being alive. It has been floating for seven days and seven nights, when ... from far away, it has seen the land. It was saved !!!



The entire story is available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/lfteradriana/cap-1-1220767>

„The Story of the group” – the project United for Health: European Peers

Even if a project is not exclusively based on the *improvisation theater* method, certain exercises or techniques specific to this method may be used at different moments/sequences of the project.

This is the case for eTwinning project **United for Health: European Peers**, designed by Professor Cornelia Frai, from the "Avram Iancu" National College, Ștei, with eight partners from five European countries (Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and Turkey). Although the basic idea of the project was to highlight the importance of health in everyday life and to develop the pupils' skills for a healthy life, one of the activities of the partners was to create a **story of the group**. Thus, the pupils were divided into 8 international groups and created 8 collaborative stories in which they tackled topics such as healthy eating, the importance of sports and

outdoor games, the preservation of a clean and healthy environment, etc. Pupils from all partner countries were distributed in each team. To make stories, they used the application <https://storybird.com>

The good hedgehog Echipa D (fragment)

... The doctor said he didn't have any problem, he was just playing. The mother wasn't convinced at all, but she let her son to play and draw all day. He also learned how to sew. But, one day.... **(Spanish team)**

SPANISH TEAM D



The doctor said that he didn't have any problem, he was just playing. The mother wasn't convinced at all, but she let her son to play and draw all day. He also learned how to sew. But, one day....



Kirpican ate so many apples that his stomach was simply too full and he started to feel bad again.

Romanian team

Kirpican ate so many apples that his stomach was simply too full and he started to feel bad. **(Romanian team)**

Poor Kirpican started to hallucinate again, probably as a late effect of the poisonous flower he ate earlier His condition got so bad that he started to use his mother's make-up. **(Romanian team)**



Two other stories can be read fully online:

<https://storybird.com/books/team-c-2/?token=cpk7racxsx>

<https://storybird.com/books/team-a-3/?token=6tzsdjarfv>

„Role play” and „Gibberish” – the project **Does the earth have borders? Migration and Human-Rights**



The European project **Does the earth have borders? Migration and Human-Rights** which brought together teachers and pupils from five

countries (Greece, Germany, Italy, Poland and Tunisia), addressed the issue of migration and aimed at learning about the current situation of refugees in Europe. For a better understanding of the phenomenon of migration, it was addressed both by studying current information on refugees and by analyzing texts from literature, philosophy and history.

One of the project's activities, *The Refugee Journey - an interactive experience*, was based on several exercises specific to the improvisation theater method: "Ghibberish" and Role Playing.

Students aged between 15 and 17 have acquired different roles: refugee, human trafficker, resident of an unknown country in which they arrived. Pupils simulated the refugees' journey from their home country into a safe country. The "Refugees" started their long journey accompanied by human traffickers who promised their help, but during the first night, they stole the money and valuable goods and abandoned them. The "Refugees" remain in a foreign place without financial means, without being able to ask for help, not knowing the language of the country in which they were left. Thus, the pupils were given the opportunity to interpret and understand the words of *Gibberian* locals, who spoke *Gibberish*, and to find a way to communicate with each other.

At the end of the exercises, the pupils (actors and the public), together with the teacher, discussed on the basis of their experiences. Questions were asked about how they felt during the roles they played in different moments of the game, how they felt when they tried to communicate with someone who did not speak their language, etc.

During the exercises, the pupils worked together, found creative solutions to the problems they had encountered and better understood the situation of the refugees.

Detailed information about this project is available at:

<https://twinspace.etwinning.net/9984/pages/page/59451>

Why use the *improvisation theater* method?

Dan Klein, a lecturer at Stanford's Department of Theater and Performance, states that one of the teachers' responsibilities is to ensure a safe environment in which their pupils can be themselves, without fear of being judged or rejected, in which they have the courage to take risks and the improvisation games help to the creation of this environment.

The games and techniques specific to the method favor the development of creativity, critical thinking, encourage collaboration and communication. They are also fun for all, from children to adults.

Jeff Sevens, professor of music and history at Chicago's Austin Polytechnical Academy, considers that it is important and helpful for a teacher to use techniques, games and improvisation exercises in class. For example, the technique "Yes, and .." changes the pupils' attitude towards colleagues, teachers and the tasks they receive. It determines everyone involved to be open to their colleagues' ideas, to take over and develop them, without perceiving them as threats or as tasks they are bound to solve.

Many of the improvisation games emphasize on self-acceptance and on the acceptance of others, on giving up prejudices and judging others.

They can be easily integrated into the school curriculum: for example, using the exercise named the *story of the group* and its variations, the *expert*, *gibberish*, communication skills in mother tongue, but also in a foreign language, can be developed. At the same time, the skills needed to support speech in front of the audience are also acquired.

With these types of exercises, pupils can get creative products during classes, in collaboration with group partners (for example, a story or a theory developed by children starting from a new taught content, a song of the class/group, etc.). .).

The method may prove to be really useful when it is intended to develop the various types of intelligences identified by the American psychologist Howard Gardner; the diversity of games allows and ensures the development of linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, naturalistic, kinesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. At the same time, teachers have the opportunity to know their pupils better, to discover their skills and interests.

There are games that help to "build" a new concept, basically teaching can be done together with the pupils. Thus, any content in school curriculum that has several sequences (a story, a history) that is made up of component parts (human body, engine) or which represents a process (the water circuit in nature, the photosynthesis process), can be taught through games such as "guided story", "parts of a whole," "the painting," etc. The fact that the pupils are directly involved in their own learning ensures a thorough and lasting acquisition of knowledge. In addition, they develop critical thinking, solve problems, and have increased self-

esteem. The teacher guides the learning of pupils, having the possibility to correct the misunderstood notions and to fill the gaps of his/her pupils.

The improvisation techniques give those who use them, whether children, pupils or teachers, the ability to see things from another point of view. The fact that pupils assume a role allows them to better understand the character and change their perspective. Dramatizing during school activities is an important tool for teachers, through which pupils learn life lessons, live different social experiences or moments in history, etc.

Not least, the frequent use of the techniques and games of this method in class, "transforms" the teacher. He/she will become, in turn, more creative and positive, more flexible and open to the suggestions of his/her pupils, more responsive to the needs of the class/pupils and a better listener.

So, *accept, add something and go ahead!* Say *Yes, and!*

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Resources for teachers:

<http://esldrama.weebly.com/resources-improvisation.html>

<http://learnimprov.com/>

<http://learnimprov.com/gibberish-exercises/>

Games:

<https://spolingamesonline.org/warm-up-games/>

<https://improwiki.com/en/wiki/improv/special/category/77/warm-ups>

<http://improvcyclopedia.org/categories//Continuation.html>