

Yes, and...Lessons Borrowed from Improvisational Theater to Teach Primary Palliative Medicine Skills

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Improv To Go!
Education Takeaways

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Ground Rules

Listen to your Inner Voice and Follow Your Intuition

“Yes and”

Listen and Accept the Gifts that are Given to You

Be present in The Moment

Be Flexible

Let's play!

Helpful videos to describe improv

- “I got your back” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmcSoGrz5QI>
- “As you back up, you can create a larger world view...”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coZARWbdNIIs>
- A compilation of Improv advice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=malS0RgNNw0&t=333s>

Helpful reading to describe improv

Tina Fey's Rules of Improvisation That Will Change Your Life and Reduce Belly Fat* - from Bossypants by Tina Fey, Reagan Arthur Books; 2011.

1. The first rule of improvisation is AGREE.
2. The second rule of improvisation is not only to say yes, but YES, AND. You are supposed to agree and then add something of your own.
3. Whatever the problem, be part of the solution. Don't just sit around raising questions and pointing out obstacles. MAKE STATEMENTS.
4. The best rule: THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, only opportunities. In improv there are no mistakes, only beautiful happy accidents.

On Improv and Medical Education

Kaplan-Liss E, Lantz-Gefroh V, Bass E, et al. Teaching Medical Students to Communicate With Empathy and Clarity Using Improvisation. *Acad Med*. 2018;93(3):440-443.

Mehta A, Fu B, Chou E, Mitchell S, Fessell D. Improv: Transforming Physicians and Medicine. *Med Sci Educ*. 2020;31(1):263-266. Published 2020 Dec 1.

Sawyer, Robert Keith. *Pretend play as improvisation: Conversation in the preschool classroom*. Psychology Press, 1997.

Sawyer T, Fu B, Gray M, Umoren R. Medical Improvisation Training to Enhance the Antenatal Counseling Skills of Neonatologists and Neonatal Fellows: A Pilot Study. *J Matern-Fetal Neonatal Med Off J Eur Assoc Perinat Med Fed Asia Ocean Perinat Soc Int Soc Perinat Obstet*. August 2016:1-17. doi:10.1080/14767058.2016.1228059.

Watson K, Fu B. Medical Improv: A Novel Approach to Teaching Communication and Professionalism Skills. *Ann Intern Med*. July 2016. doi:10.7326/M15-2239.

The one-hour introductory session

- Video clip to introduce improv or share your lessons learned from improv as applied to your practice
- Share and discuss the “ground rules”
- 2-3 exercises, guided by a group leader
- Allow time for reflection and discussion on how this experience may influence practice

The ongoing sessions

- With a group that has tried improv together and feels comfortable with one another, consider the following exercises to continue to explore skills, build strengths, and play together.
- Always allow time and space to discuss the exercises and their applicability to medical practice
- Written reflection for ongoing implementation and education is highly encouraged

The 15-minute play session

- These offer opportunities to bring a team together, connected to and focused on one another.
- Consider prior to engaging in work that requires additional listening, collaboration, and support within team.
- Exercises to consider include: Pass the Hand Clap, Red Ball, Mirror

Exercises

Exercise	Explore	Skills	Hopes	Worries
<p>School teacher and parent - Aptitude test shows that your child is a dolphin</p>	<p>Delivering unexpected news</p>	<p>Consider that unexpected news may not be “bad” news.</p> <p>Avoid trying to fix confusion by providing more information or filling space with scientific facts/medical information.</p>	<p>Allow participants to share unexpected news in a low-stakes forum.</p>	<p>Encourage participants to avoid the urge to try to be funny, to fill the space, or to fix uncertainty with words.</p>
<p>Cut to the Chase – Pass a story through 5 people - 2 minutes > 1 minute > 30 seconds > 10 seconds > 7 seconds to present to group</p>	<p>What was lost, what didn't get passed down and why?</p>	<p>Listening and distilling important information.</p> <p>Appreciating what is important to the story-teller may not have been recognized as important to the hearers.</p>	<p>In the debrief invite an exploration of how it felt for the story-teller to have their story interpreted and distilled. Consider strategies to listen to the words that are said and also the meaning behind those words.</p>	<p>There may not be a “right” or “wrong” interpretation. Consider aspects of the story passed along, even if not fully accurate to the story, may be essential to communicate to the receiver.</p>

Exercise	Explore	Skills	Hopes	Worries
<p>Pass the Hand Clap – In a circle, one player starts by throwing a hand clap to their neighbor, who claps with player one in unison. The neighbor then passes the hand clap to the next neighbor. Play this till the clap really flows nicely around the circle. Then tell the group that players may decide to pass the hand clap back to the neighbor they got it from at any time.</p>	<p>Effort and concentration within simplicity and connectivity</p>	<p>Remaining connected yet nimble with those around you.</p> <p>Remembering to breathe and stay while concentrating on a task.</p>	<p>This game may elicit themes surrounding the benefits of being present with those around you.</p>	<p>One might notice personal tendencies to over-think or to berate oneself for not doing a task “right.”</p>
<p>Mirror – Working in pairs facing each other, one player begins moving (arms, legs, eyebrows) slowly, and the other player will mirror them. Over time, this becomes a game of give and take wherein no-one should be (continuously) leading. Keep movements slow.</p>	<p>Extreme presence and openness</p>	<p>Connectivity with those opposite you Remaining in sync with the person opposite you</p>	<p>Benefits noted when discussing the space when “we were leading and following at the same time” Overlap with communicating in nuanced situations Noting more comfort as a leader or a follower</p>	<p>One partner may lead entirely or not allow space to join with their partner.</p> <p>This exercise can feel uncomfortable in silence, stillness, and intimacy.</p>

Exercise	Explore	Skills	Hopes	Worries
<p>Yes Lets- Pick a group activity, like throwing a party. One player starts, saying "Let`s ..." filling in what she wants to do (i.e. "decorate!"). Then she starts actually doing what she said she wanted to do. A second player jumps in, saying "Let`s ..." to advance the group activity "i.e. wrap presents!"). Both players say "Yes, let`s do that" and does what was proposed. Third player jumps in, suggests what to do, and again all players loudly agree to do it, and actually do it. Continue till everyone has suggested an activity and performed said activity together.</p>	<p>Listening, creating an environment of support, building upon a scene, remaining open to unexpected changes</p>	<p>Careful listening Building nonjudgmental attitudes Remaining open and flexible to an ever-changing dialogue</p>	<p>Players may notice their tendencies toward comfort or discomfort in remaining nimble as a scene build and progresses</p>	<p>Some might think this game is about humor or building a funny scene Reminding the goal is simply to build an environment together and to notice ourselves within the game</p>
<p>Three Sentence Story- One player is given three sentences that are unconnected and unrelated from three members of the group. The main player must then build a short story that utilizes these three sentences in a cohesive narrative. This story should be as succinct as possible</p>	<p>Connecting varied aspects of a narrative into a whole</p>	<p>Providing communicative bridges to disparate thoughts Communicating varied sentiments into a cohesive narrative succinctly</p>	<p>Building communication tools to bring together thoughts and reflections from our patients to the medical team</p>	<p>This game may also lend itself toward an impulse to "need to be funny." The goal is not about humor, rather about connecting and communicating thoughts and statements</p>

Exercise	Explore	Skills	Hopes	Worries
<p>Time Traveler- Working in pairs, one player becomes a “time traveler” from the distant past having suddenly arrived in the present. Second partner must explain a medical intervention or treatment in a way the time traveler may understand</p>	<p>Simplifying medical language and communication</p>	<p>Noticing “medicalization” of language Becoming more attuned to each word that is conveyed medically and its potential need for clarification</p>	<p>The “time traveler” will truly take on the lens of being from another time, asking for clarity when a word is not from their “time period” Awareness of medical communication and need for clear and supportive communication becomes more clear</p>	<p>The time traveler plays more of a “character” as opposed to simply a human from a distant time The second player feels a need to “dumb down” or exclude information rather than seek and stretch language for greater clarity</p>

Thank you for playing and learning with us.

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