

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN
GENUINE DIALOGUE AND IMPROV

by

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ABSTRACT

The value of improv training extends beyond the stage. Improv has been successfully utilized and applied in a variety of ways in the workplace, school, and community. This study examines the connection between genuine dialogue and improv to determine if improv exhibits dialogic qualities. Three focus groups were conducted with a total of nineteen improv students. Additionally, an interview was conducted with the director of a hospital's Innovation Lab where improv is used in an organizational setting. The conditions for dialogue set by Gordon (2006) served as a guideline for analyzing data. Thematic analysis generated categories used to analyze data. The most prominent of Gordon's conditions for dialogue within improv were Imagination & Innovation, Vulnerability and Immediacy of Presence. The importance of this study, implications and future studies for the connection between improv and dialogue are examined.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I experienced the benefits of the improvisation (*improv*) training through a series of classes offered at ABC Comedy Lab in Orlando, Florida. My experience in improv was overwhelmingly positive, both personally and professionally. As a perfectionist, I often agonized over my choices, both in life and creatively as a professional actress and singer. Through improv training I discovered that my desire to be “perfect” was a hindrance that prevented me from being “present” and impeded my ability to play. Improv training’s positive bent also served as a tool, rewiring me to be more accepting of others and myself. With the emphasis on “being in the moment” and the safety net of an accepting and positive environment, improv offered me the freedom to play, the opportunity to experiment and fail, and the ability to create. Observing the ways in which the “rules of improv” created a safe environment for communication and growth piqued my interest in how those rules might overlap and align with the conditions for dialogue. It is my aim to more closely examine the connections between improv training and genuine dialogue within the scope of this work.

In my research, I found that the line of distinction between improv training and theatre training was often blurred. Rollins College Theatre and Improv professor, David Charles, explains:

Improv allows actors to explore their own creative voice, fosters ensemble and teamwork, serves as an antidote to the strictures of type casting, and provides strategies for existing and responding truthfully in the moment (among many other tools and gifts). These strategies strike me as essential for all modern actors, regardless of their focus on scripted or non-scripted work. (D. Charles, personal communication, February 15, 2014).

While some theatre purists might differentiate between theatre and improv, I agree with Professor Charles, that improv training is now considered an essential part of any actor's training. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, improv games, improv exercises, theatre games and theatre exercises will be considered interchangeable terms.

Improv

Improv involves “spontaneous make-believe” (Tavares, 2012, p. 3), a form of unscripted theatre with its roots in comedy. It began as a theatrical art form in Ancient Rome known as The Atellan Farce, but disappeared into obscurity when its descendant, Commedia dell'arte, was outlawed by Napoleon in 1797 (“Atellan Farce,” 2014). Today, we are able to enjoy the theatrical art form of Improv by attending shows at Improv theatres and watching shows such as “Whose Line Is It Anyway” thanks not only to those who originated it, but those who revived the tradition in the 20th century, e.g. Keith Johnstone and Viola Spolin (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008).

Improv now stands alone as an art form and undeniably, the skills gained through improv training have served as a springboard into stage, television, and movie careers for many current actors and actresses, i.e. Will Ferrell, Mike Myers, Stephen Colbert, Melissa McCarthy, Kathy Griffin, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, and Steve Carrel. Today, improv is routinely used in theatre training (D. Charles, personal communication, February 15, 2014; Yorton, 2010), but has also been successfully utilized and applied outside theatre in a variety of ways.

Teachers use improv games in educational settings and have found that they improve the communication skills of students. Students' speech, writing skills, and the awareness of nonverbal cues improve as they participate in improv games (Moshavi, 2001; Spolin, 1986). In the business sector, improv is often used as an effective team-building technique, to improve

communication among co-workers, and as a negotiation-training tool (Dutton, 2012; Jackson, 1995; Moshavi, 2001). In medicine, hospitals have used improv as a training mechanism for medical personnel on procedures and protocol (O'Donnell & Shaver, 1990), to increase empathy in doctors (Pink, 2005) and improve patient/doctor communication (Shochet, King, Levine, Clever, & Wright, 2013). Florida Hospital has implemented a creative, problem-solving department, "The Innovation Lab" that relies heavily on improv exercises to build empathy and resolve issues in new and imaginative ways (R. Paul, personal communication, February 20, 2014). In short, improv training works, but why? The contemplation of that answer gives those in the communication field a number of reasons to explore improv in greater depth.

Our culture has seen a growth in "depersonalization" due to factors such as commercialism and technology (Yankelovich, 1999). To use a term that Martin Buber coined, the "I-It" is growing. While advances in technology continue to give us unprecedented access to other people, places, and information, people today report increasingly high levels of loneliness and feelings of distance from others (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Instead of technology drawing us closer to each other, it invites us to fragment ourselves into isolated subcultures. This "Silo Effect" is proliferating (Yankelovich, 1999). Fragmentation is a hurdle that must be addressed in order to engage with others (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Gerard (2005) contends that improv may provide a positive human collaboration to counter this "Silo Effect."

The subject of improv has received a great deal of attention with respect to the theatrical aspects of improv training, as well as improv applications in organizational training and education, but there is a dearth of existing literature exploring improv purely from a "communication" perspective. The medical field is in the early stages of using improv as a

means to improve communication between patients and medical personnel, but these practices do not examine and dissect the dialogical qualities of improv. Improv gets utilized simply because it works. This suggests that scholars might benefit from determining if dialogical components are informing improv's value. A greater understanding of the underlying conditions contributing to the positive outcomes of improv training might lead to more expansive and successful applications of improv as a means to meaningful communication. Perhaps more importantly, this research aims to determine whether opportunities exist for improv to create genuine communication experiences for participants that extend beyond the improv encounter.

Genuine Dialogue

Dialogue is a form of communication that was practiced in ancient times by Plato and Cicero, as well as other Greek and Roman philosophers, falling out of favor as more argumentative and persuasive forms of communication gained popularity (Hoover, 2011). Dialogue experienced a resurgence in the 20th century, and was expounded upon in the writings of philosopher and theologian, Martin Buber.

Martin Buber wrote extensively about genuine dialogue, describing it as a living mutual relation[ship] between participants. He explains that genuine dialogue exists when:

“Whether spoken or silent...each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation[ship] between himself and them" (Buber, 1965, p. 22).

Genuine dialogue requires mutual engagement in the process (Kramer, 2003) and a turning toward the other.

Genuine dialogue has been utilized as a means for resolving complex issues in peace talks (see Hoover, 2011; Isaacs, 1999), as the underlying concept guiding difficult negotiations (see Covey, 1991; Hoover, 2011) and to improve interpersonal communication in organizations and personal relationships (see Covey, 1991; Isaacs, 1999; Yankelovich, 1999). These uses are of great value in creating a more peaceful and less violent world (Hoover, 2011), something that is clearly worthy of examining in greater depth.

In our democracy and individualistic, highly technologized, fragmented society we have too often relied on contentious rhetoric to “win” arguments, a polarizing strategy (Yankelovich, 1999). Instead of resolving our differences through genuine dialogue, we have frequently become fixated on defending our position. This defensive strategy leads to a more rigid and uncompromising position, leading to a stalemate that benefits no one (Isaacs, 1999). Isaacs (1999) sees genuine dialogue as the solution to the polarization of contentious rhetoric. Genuine dialogue, a “conversation with a center, not sides,” (p. 17) offers a road map to resolve differences.

Americans long for a sense of community that cannot be gained through the use of technology and “top down” communication where they are “talked *at*.” They crave mutual understanding, a human touch, and a sense of belonging in their relationships (Yankelovich, 1999). “All real living is meeting,” (Buber, 1958/2000, p. 26) and requires the I and Thou mindset in order for interlocutors to be in direct relation and in concert with each other. Thinking that one can connect by “leaving the body behind” (Yankelovich, 1999, p. 259) underestimates the importance of face-to-face interactions (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). One might interpret these observations to mean that technology somehow makes us less human, but it

may be that technology is creating space for the things that make us “human” to actually increase in value.

Daniel Pink (2005) does not see the rise of technology as the demise of the human element. Instead, he suggests that our ready access to technology and knowledge makes the human qualities that cannot be replicated through technology worth even more. This shift from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age makes empathy and creativity prized commodities in today’s world (Pink, 2005). Additionally, the successes we have seen using genuine dialogue exemplify the potential it holds for this new “Conceptual Age” (Pink, 2005). In fact, genuine dialogue may provide us with the tools to resolve the most pressing issues of our time (Yankelovich, 1999).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the connection between improv exercises and genuine dialogue. An assumption grounding the study is that communication that mirrors traits of genuine dialogue tends to produce greater potential for communicative success. The focus is to determine if students of improv perceive that they experience the elements of genuine dialogue and foster greater connection and improved communication through the development of their improv skills. My aim throughout this study is to provide useful information to those individuals in education and organizational training with a desire to improve communication and connection, whether between teachers and students, employees and management, or peer groups within organizations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Improv

The first known improvisational theatre was known as the Atellan Farce, a brash comedic drama that originated in Ancient Italy. By 391 BC, the Atellan Farce had migrated away from Atellan and had gained popularity in Rome, eventually dissolving as an art form around 28 AD (Atellan Farce, 2003). It is theorized that the Atellan Farce may have served as an inspiration for commedia dell'arte (Fantham, 1989; Schmitt, 2010). Commedia dell'arte, an improvised performance by professional actors and actresses, gained popularity in the 16th century, and continued as an art form for over 200 years (Schmitt, 2010). During its heyday, 1570-1630, a large number of commedia dell'arte troupes toured Europe. Schmitt (2010) likens the improv of commedia dell'arte to today's sporting events; the element of not knowing whether the participants will or will not be successful in their efforts heightens the interest and excitement in this "one time only" event.

It is interesting to note that while certain key elements of improv have remained constant throughout time, such as the suspense created through improvisational surprises and the potential for failure, theatrical improvisation has evolved since commedia dell'arte's emphasis on the art of verbal rhetoric, with its witty repartee, malapropisms, and 'braggadocio' (Schmitt, 2012). While commedia dell'arte and modern improv have both employed the use of a narrative framework to create scenes (Schmitt, 2010; Schmitt, 2012), today's improv is less about *one-upping* one's scene partner in a rhetorical match (although that remains an option), and more about being in the moment of an authentic interactive experience with one's partner.

Actress /Writer/Improviser Tina Fey (2011), expresses the reach of improvisational qualities stating, “the rules of improvisation appealed to me not only as a way of creating comedy, but as a worldview” (p. 82). Because improv is both creative and spontaneous, it is a living art form that continues to evolve, which makes reaching a consensus about “rules” an unrealistic desire. However, while there are myriad approaches and uses for improv, the academic and popular literature used to research the subject of improv games points to agreement on certain rules or conditions necessary to create a successful improv experience. It is these rules that Fey may be referring to as having shaped the way she views the world. The conditions for improv that follow were repeatedly mentioned in a variety of the articles and books on the subject of improvisation. On that basis, the following conditions were chosen to explore in greater depth.

The Conditions of Improv

1. *Agree*: Commit to agreeing with what your improv partner offers. The “Rule of Agreement” allows a participant to honor and respect what their improv partner has created by saying, “yes” to offers (Fey, 2011). Knowing that one’s offer will be accepted creates a safe environment in which to share and exchange ideas. Yorton (2003) considers the “Rule of Agreement” to be a building block that is central to improvisation. When practiced, the “Rule of Agreement” creates a positive environment that encourages collaboration (Goldberg, 1999).
2. *Yes, and*: Accept an offer and add to it. Beyond agreement is the mutual understanding that there will be an exchange between participants that goes beyond the acceptance of an offer. Implied in *Yes, and* is the promise that each player will say “yes” and then add an

offer of his/her own (Fey, 2011). *Yes, and* assures that each partner has an opportunity to create and collaborate with the other and encourages dialogue by requiring active listening and communicating (Moshavi, 2001; Gagnon et al, 2012).

3. *Support your partner and make her/him look good:* Exercise an act of goodwill by considering the other person's success before your own. Supporting your improv partner requires a high reference level, meaning a player commits to understanding the ideas referenced by their partner. Additionally, in order to offer support, one must adopt a mindset of non-judgment (Halpern, 2006; Fox, 1986). Non-judgment does not apply simply to one's partner. The spontaneous nature of improv also requires players to practice non-judgment and resist being self-critical (Fox, 1986). Improvisation is communal, and requires mutual support (Diggles, 2004; Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012). Functioning with the mindset that "there are no mistakes, only opportunities" in improv (Fey, 2011, p. 85) a space where participants receive unconditional support free of judgment provides the freedom for non-competitive play (Spolin, 2005).
4. *Be in the moment. Don't plan ahead. Don't focus on the past:* Attend to the person in front of you and the process taking place *as it's taking place*. Good improvisation requires players to "be in the moment" and engage spontaneously (Gagnon et al, 2012, Goldberg, 1999). Actor/Improviser Mike Myers has stated that good improv is organic and "operating on the level of its latest offering" (Halpern, 2006, p. 42). David Razowsky, improv-trained actor and producer for The Second City Improv Troupe in Chicago, was asked about "being in the moment" while performing improv:

The actors creating the two characters on that stage are in response to only the inventory that's been created from the moment the scene began. I cannot build from anything in that scene that was not developed during the time that the scene was progressing. If I were to do that, my partner wouldn't know what I was talking about, referring to or building from. Those elements that aren't created in daylight are created in the darkness of the brain. I say it, you hear it. I think it, you can't hear it (D. Razowsky, personal communication, February, 9, 2014).

One's focus in improv should be on what is happening in the moment rather than thinking about how s/he is going to respond (Smrczek, 2009).

5. *Listen:* Listen completely and without judgment. Whole listening, with focus on the "other" person, is a critical improv skill (Smrczek, 2009). Listening closely to your improv partner supplies the blocks used to build a positive Improv experience (Schmitt, 2010) and must be done without judgment (Halpern, 2006; Fox, 1986).
6. *Relinquish Control/Be Vulnerable:* Trust in the process and allow it to happen without "taking charge." External focus requires decentering by shifting attention away from the "I". By surrendering the ego and the need to defend or protect the self, one can experience a sense of vulnerability that makes room for creativity and collaboration (Gagnon, et al 2012; Smrczek, 2012). David Razowsky, improv actor and producer, speaks about vulnerability as it relates to improv, saying:

In order to move your character forward you must realize that 'you' are not up there, that your 'personality' is not present, that you are playing a character. In order for

that to occur, the artist must possess and own the concept of vulnerability and non-egoic [sic] attachment (Razowsky, personal communication, Feb. 9, 2014).

Having created an environment that allows exploration and creativity, improv teaches us to embrace our vulnerability and enjoy things that may be unexpected or unfamiliar (Jackson, 1995). It is only through allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, that we can move toward being authenticity (Carrane & Allen, 2006).

7. *Be Willing to Transform:* Enter into the process with an open mind and heart. According to Leybourne (2010), Improv engenders creativity, bricolage (from the French word for “tinkering,” the construction or creation from a diverse range of available things) and intuition. Creating *is* transforming; it is the contribution of something novel, not simply a reshuffling of the ‘old’ and it is that process of transformation that is the spirit and core of improvisation (Spolin, 1986, p.4).

A safe environment is established for collaborating in improv exercises when the above conditions of improv are in place.

There is an extraordinarily large collection of improv games that have been compiled in the decades since improv made its resurgence in the 20th century. Reviewing two examples of improv games can provide a clearer picture of the general nature and specific elements included in improv exercises.

Improv games

One-Word Story: (see Gesell, 1997; Goldberg, 1991; McKnight & Scruggs, 2008) Players in a group collaborate to tell a story one word at a time. This exercise requires players to closely

listen to others, and demonstrate awareness of verbal and nonverbal communication. It requires a great deal of focus, teamwork and cooperation.

For a beginning group, the instructor may begin with a title and names of the main characters in the story, or perhaps assign a genre, such as action adventure, fable, or romance. The instructor will side-coach when needed in order to keep the story going and the environment positive and encouraging. An example might proceed as follows (S=student):

S1: Once

S2: mom

S3: dad

S4: Whoa. That makes no sense!

Instructor: Let's keep going and see if we can figure out a way to make it work.

S4: How? Once mom dad?

Instructor: Listen--once mom, dad...

S4: and

S5: I

S6: went

S7: candy

S8: What on earth?

Instructor: One word

S8: cane

S9: I don't know

Instructor: Listen to all the words

S9: shopping!

By virtue of doing this exercise, players become more comfortable and adept as their skills and trust in the group grow.

Deck of Cards: (Variation) (McKnight & Scruggs, 2008) Players assign status to a deck of cards, e.g. a “king” may be the CEO of a company, a “2” might be someone who is homeless and on the streets. Each player is given a card from a regular deck, but cannot look at his or her own card. Players receive instructions to hold their card in front of them so others can see it, but they themselves cannot. They must then walk around the room mingling with each other as they might do at a party. They should react to the other person as if that person is a character with status commensurate to the card they are holding. The instructor might side-coach, encouraging them to continue mingling and reacting to other players. After everyone has had a sufficient amount of time to circulate, the players are instructed to put themselves in an ordered line, from low to high, without looking at their cards. They can only look at their cards after the line has been established. A discussion should follow, such as how status affects how we treat others and feel about ourselves. This may lead to a verbal exchange about cliques, peer pressure or bullying.

Practical Applications of Improv

Viola Spolin initially wrote her first book of improv games to provide her improvisational techniques to theatres and drama teachers. Spolin (1986) saw the value of theater games extending beyond the walls of the theater into the classroom. Initially, the intention of theatre games was to be a training device for stage actors, but before long the exercises were deemed to be a valuable supplement to a school’s theater curriculum and

successfully utilized in that environment. This wider application of theater games led to the revitalization of improv as an art form and eventually to an even greater variety of uses for theater games beyond the stage and drama classroom.

Glenna Gerard (2005) explored the synergistic relationship between genuine dialogue and improv games after observing the ability of both to create connection among participants. While at an optional improv games class during a five-day dialogue program, Gerard (2005) found that every one of the games played “was a perfect metaphor for some aspect of dialogue” (p. 337). Gerard proposed three core principles to increase our ability to connect to others, all of which exist in both improv and dialogue: “intend yes-and, attend to the focus of energy, and allow transformation” (2005, p. 339). David Charles, Theatre and Improvisation Professor at Rollins College, when asked whether a correlation exists between improv and dialogue offered his thoughts, saying, “improv has an innate tendency towards the dialogic if for no other reason than due to its joint ownership” (D. Charles, personal communication, March 30, 2014). In Buber’s terms, the art of improv has experienced a shift from the I-It to the I-Thou. It is the I-Thou qualities of improv that extend its reach beyond the stage, into business, education, and as a way of walking through life.

Teachers serendipitously discovered that improv games improved the communication skills of students (Spolin, 1986). Through improv games, students learn to listen attentively, build a greater awareness of others’ nonverbal cues, and construct and tell stories through play. This organically leads to improvement in communication and writing skills (Spolin, 1986). Urban Improv (UI), a youth violence prevention (YVP) program in Boston, has been highly successful using improv games and role-playing to build students’ skills in a number of critical

ways. Through improv students resolve conflicts, make decisions on stage that carry over into real-life situations, and learn strategies that help them develop impulse control (Kisiel, et al., 2006). The UI program produces positive outcomes; Students develop prosocial behaviors, decrease aggressive behaviors and improve their academics. By implementing theater games and improvisation, students cooperate with others as they explore ethical issues in a safe environment (Kisiel, et al., 2006). The evidence indicates that expanding improv in the school setting may positively impact students before negative behaviors become firmly established. Theater based programs in the schools hold great promise for motivating students to develop valuable life, work, and academic skills (Kisiel, et al., 2006). The success of theatre games within the school setting led to a natural progression from the classroom to the work environment.

Improv is now considered a valuable tool to facilitate organizational learning (Akgun, Lynn, & Byrne, 2003; Mangan, 2011). Students at the Sloan School for Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology can take an Improvisational Leadership course where Instructor Daena Giardella stresses that the skills required of future leaders, i.e. empathy, listening, flexibility, can be learned through improv exercises (Mangan, 2011). Improv workshops in the business setting increased interaction among participants by creating a fun space that was conducive to learning. Improv exercises can offer experiential learning about creativity and leadership, and stimulate innovative ideas and co-learning (Huffacker, 2005). Moshavi (2001) discovered a variety of benefits for introducing improv games into management training. Skills that are valued in organizations are enhanced through improv training, i.e. team building, negotiating, creatively responding to clients, leading meetings, and generating ideas.

(see Dutton, 2012; Jackson, 1995; Moshavi, 2001). Improv training enhances listening skills leading to more successful, collaborative ‘win-win’ conversations. By practicing these skills in a safe environment, participants develop a more collaborative mindset that sets the stage for successful negotiations in the workplace (Dutton, 2012). Organizations benefit economically when open and effective intraorganizational and interorganizational communication exists, and employees experience increased morale when communication improves (Moshavi, 2001). With the World Health Organization reporting that low morale/depression is an epidemic in the developed world, creating a sense of belonging within the workplace has become increasingly important (Moshavi, 2001; Sennett, 2012). An estimated 15% of the population in the most economically and technologically advanced countries medicate to compensate for low morale and depression; searching for ways to lessen its hold might lead not only to a healthier and more connected workforce, but a healthier and more connected society (Sennett, 2012).

One of the valuable components leading to the success of improv in the organizational setting is the development of empathy (Covey, 1991). Howe (2013) tells us that “empathy puts me in your emotional shoes, sympathy simply tells you that I’ve walked there, too. Sympathy is me oriented; empathy is you oriented” (p. 12). Carl Rogers’ theory of communication was informed by his concept of dialogue, and influenced by Martin Buber. Rogers considered empathy dialogical in nature and recognized its healing properties (Cissna & Anderson, 1990, Howe, 2013). He cited three conditions—warmth, empathy, genuineness—which, when in place, foster helpful relationships and positive change (Howe, 2013). When we are feeling disconnected from others, empathic relationships have the power to realign us with others (Howe, 2013). Theater games allow us to look at life through another’s eyes, expanding our

empathic skills (Howe, 2013). The recognition that empathy is a necessary trait in today's work environment is demonstrated by the example of growing utilization of theatre exercises within the medical field.

Medical schools throughout the country have integrated improv exercises into their training curriculum for doctors (McCullough, 2012; Pink, 2005). When given the opportunity to spend the night in a hospital playing the role of a patient, UCLA medical students gain perspective on what their future patients experience during a hospital stay. At Columbia University and other medical schools, students participate in improvisational role-playing exercises to learn how to attend to patient's stories and nonverbal cues through the development of greater observational and listening skills (Pink, 2005). At Queen's University Belfast, future doctors explore ethical dilemmas and reflect on their values through theatre exercises. Students are given the chance to role-play, experimenting with how to approach a difficult consultation with a patient or how to deliver bad news to a family about a loved one. These improvisational opportunities allow students to grasp what a patient or family may be experiencing in those situations, and develop empathy in the process (McCullough, 2012). Patch Adams, M.D. proposes changes to the healthcare model in the United States. In his model, doctors and patients must develop a "strong mutual partnership" (Adams & Ryan, 2008). Although he has become well known for his clowning skills since the successful movie that bears his name, he believes that it is friendship, not laughter, that is the best medicine. Adams believes that humor and connectedness can enrich the patient-doctor relationship (Pettit, 2008). Sala, Krupat, & Roter (2002) found that humor serves as an equalizer, giving a sense of control to the patient, and creating a positive relationship between doctor and patient. Medical and technological know-

how cannot provide empathy. Empathy is uniquely human and “the erosion of empathy robs us of our humanity” (Howe, 2013, p. 201).

As technology advances, Pink (2005) proposes that our uniquely human qualities and abilities will become increasingly important in our culture. Aptitudes that are “high concept and high touch” (Pink, 2005, p. 51) have moved from the margins of our society to the core. High concept abilities include the birth of artistic and emotional creations, the development of a captivating narrative born through story telling, the skill to detect patterns and absorb unrelated ideas in order to apply them in a novel way—all uniquely human capacities. High touch abilities begin with the concept of empathy as it’s applied in human interactions, the expression of emotion and shared feelings, the desire to find and create meaning and a sense of belonging. If Pink (2005) is right, the art of improvisation is leading us in the right direction.

Genuine Dialogue

The key component of genuine dialogue is “seeing the other’ or ‘experiencing the other side’,” (Friedman, 2002, p. 101). According to Martin Buber, there are two relationships one has with an Other: the I-It relationship and the I-Thou (or I-You) relationship (1958). An I-Thou attitude requires a holistic and mutual relationship with another person, in the moment. An I-It attitude sees the other person as a static object or thing, and resides in the past (Buber, 1958). Buber’s concept of the dialogical I-Thou relationship offers a means of communication with the potential to enhance human relationships through the process of genuine dialogue (Kramer, 2003). It involves two or more people experiencing a “flow of meaning” in a mutual relationship, in which they are thinking together (Isaacs, 1999, p.19). Sometimes referred to as transformative dialogue, genuine dialogue is described as a form of communication which

requires that the participants be “present,” have the other in mind, and intentionally turn to each other in order to build a fluid, living and mutual relationship (Cooper, Chak, Cornish & Gillespie, 2013). Dialogue, in this sense, is not simply a discussion or conversation. A discussion has a conclusion and the goal is closure, whereas dialogue remains open, and welcomes new insights and options (Isaacs, 1999).

Dialogue is often described by scholars as a desirable form of communication for a number of reasons. Dialogue holds tremendous promise to create greater understanding among individuals through its ability to facilitate creative and transformative interactions (Cooper, et al., 2013). Through the use of genuine dialogue, we can learn, change and grow (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). Genuine dialogue impacts people, not only in how they think and relate to each other, but in the action they take together (Isaacs, 1999). Dialogue is comprised of “a quality of relationship and engagement” (Heath, et al., 2006, p. 345). Genuine dialogue is more than simply conversing, it is a form of communication requiring participants to “walk the narrow ridge” (Arnett, 1986, p.33) of remaining wholly oneself, while being wholly open to the Other (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). This intentional turning toward the Other establishes a mutual relationship that is alive and flowing in the moment (Cooper, et al., 2013).

Because dialogue possesses the potential to facilitate transformation, it has been recognized as a valuable tool in a number of disciplines, including the fields of psychotherapy, education, negotiation and the development of community (see Cooper, et al., 2013; Hoover, 2011; Isaacs, 1999). Yet, dialogue’s potential cannot be haphazardly achieved. Ellinor and Gerard (1998) stress that it is the intention and skills of the participants that determine the

integrity of the dialogue. But, intention and skill alone cannot support dialogue; there are a number of components needed for dialogue to thrive, and they are interwoven, as is a basket.

The strength of any given dialogue is created through awareness and observation of how those components adhere, not only to each other, but the core principles of purpose and intention (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Gordon (2006) outlined elements that, when interwoven, provide an environment conducive to genuine dialogue consistent with those core principles.

Elements of Genuine Dialogue

The below elements constitute the commitments, conditions and qualities favorable for genuine dialogue to flourish (Gordon, 2006).

1. *Unconditional Positive Regard*: Interlocutors must recognize that the Other is of value and accept her/him “as is.” Gordon (2006) believes respect must be conveyed to dialogue partners. To engage in genuine dialogue, one must look to the Other without the obstacle of judgment (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Psychologist and Phenomenologist Carl Rogers credits Unconditional Positive Regard for creating a safe environment in which supportive and healing relationships can thrive (Howe, 2013) and transformation can occur (Rogers, 2007). Without the foundation of unconditional positive regard, dialogue cannot succeed.
2. *Empathy*: A participant must place him or herself in the position of his or her dialogue partner. Interlocutors must provide feedback indicating that the contributions of one’s dialogue partner are understood and relatable. One’s individual point of view must be put aside to make space to imagine things from another’s perspective (Gordon, 2006). Communication requires a level of

- understanding and acceptance of others knowing that, from their perspective; their ideas and beliefs are true and correct (Covey, 1991).
3. *Genuineness*: A dialogue participant must present his or her “real self” without ulterior motives or attempts to manipulate the Other. One must be willing to be genuine, without entertaining a thought about a strategy or an agenda (Gordon, 2006). The spirit of the dialogue must be truthful, with a commitment to share freely, without distorting or editing one’s words. The process of genuine dialogue depends on legitimacy of one’s expression (Friedman, 2002). All must offer themselves to the process “as is.”
 4. *Mutual Equality and Collaboration*: In dialogue, a participant must commit to working with his or her partner, without the stricture of competition, as equals. “We don’t try to be “one-up” or “one-down” to the others—power is equalized, and we strive to cooperate and work together on fair footing” (Gordon, 2006, p. 24). Through interactions with others, one can experience what it is to be an authentic person (Friedman, 2002).
 5. *Immediacy of Presence*: Interactants must be “in the moment” with each other. This requires putting aside thoughts about the past and the future to be fully present in the moment (Gordon, 2006). Letting go of thoughts of the past and the future and focusing on the present moment allows for the release of habitual reactions and opens the door to new ways of relating to others (Isaacs, 1998).
 6. *Imagination and Innovation*: Dialogue calls upon interactants to put aside expectations and boundaries to create with “new eyes.” A participant must be willing

to “color outside the lines” of dialogue beyond the ‘typical’ parameters, and open oneself up to explore new ways of listening and speaking, “like improvisational jazz musicians or dancers, taking ourselves by surprise and finding “voice” (Gordon, 2006, p. 25). It is by opening oneself up to the perspectives of others that we are able to tap a wellspring of creativity (Cooper, et al., 2013).

7. *Vulnerability*: Dialogue asks participants to show the “real self,” to make mistakes and be open to change. An interlocutor must willingly admit if he or she is wrong. One must be willing to feel, and forget about appearances (Gordon, 2006). Being authentic requires self-awareness, and the alacrity to be open to the Other person (Cooper, et al., 2013).

These conditions point to skills and qualities that, when absent, lead to a breakdown in communication. The examples of breakdowns of communication in our culture highlight the importance of implementing genuine dialogue in our relationships, at home, school, work, our community, and as we walk through the world.

The Case for Genuine Dialogue

An inability to engage in cooperative thinking has become “imbedded in the very fabric of present day human interaction” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 5). The proposition to engage in a cooperative and genuine dialogue might be seen as a call to abandon our individuality, and consequently, met with resistance (Isaacs, 1999). In a culture entrenched in competition and zero-sum exchanges, our knee-jerk reaction to calls for cooperation has created stagnation and polarization (Sennett, 2012). One need look no further than the United States House of Representatives and Senate to see the toll that polarization has taken on our economy and

society. Carl Rogers (1995) identifies a hardening of positions within our culture where it is “commonplace” for one to believe “every other person must feel and think and believe the same as I do” (p.14). Yet, some efforts to bridge chasms in attitudes and action have been successful. After twenty-five years of relentless violence, Northern Ireland politician, John Hume, engaged in years of one-on-one dialogue with Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, which led to a successful de-escalation of the fighting in Northern Ireland (Isaacs, 1999). From prison, Nelson Mandela met with South African President de Klerk, to engage in a genuine dialogue mapping out a new direction for the country (Isaacs, 1999). Dialogue can allay our fear of change and advance us beyond our individual interests to the larger “social and cultural context” of our lives (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 14). This reach is not limited to political issues, however. Dialogue has achieved positive results in the workplace, as well.

There are a number of pernicious issues affecting morale in the workplace, not the least of which is growing reports of alienation (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). We have become increasingly fragmented as a society, an issue that cannot be remedied by simply “rearranging the physical components of a conversation” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 53). The components that underlie genuine dialogue provide an avenue to cohesiveness unavailable through other means (Yankelovich, 1999). Complex issues in the workplace cannot be addressed one issue at a time, bit by bit. The conditions for dialogue outlined in this research, like complex work issues, cannot be examined individually without considering how the parts relate to the whole (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Isaacs, 1999). Morale issues, for example, cannot be resolved by addressing one isolated, contributing component.

The issue of top-down talk is an example of an alienating behavior that deflates morale. To remedy this, companies such as Shell Oil have seen the value of engaging in dialogic strategies that equalize the voices within their company, allowing employees to devise new ways of thinking and working together (Isaacs, 1999). Florida Hospital has created the Innovation Lab, a space where dialogic principles are employed to empower employees of varying hierarchal levels to work together in order to resolve workplace issues in creative and innovative ways (Innovation Lab, Florida Hospital, 2014). Communication that cultivates diverse viewpoints is critical to the process of innovation (Hulsheger, 2009), and it is through innovation that transformation is born. So, mutual equality and collaboration, unconditional positive regard, imagination and innovation are obviously at work in the last two examples. However, imagination and innovation could not occur without the presence of mutual equality and collaboration. And, can mutual equality and collaboration exist without empathy?

Research points to a cultural decline in the empathy of college students. Recent studies have indicated a steady drop among college students in Empathic Concern, (“other-oriented feelings of sympathy for the misfortunes of others”) (Konrath, O’Brien, & Hsing, 2011, p. 181) and Perspective Taking (the tendency “to imagine other people’s points of view”) (Konrath, et al., 2011, p. 181). In the last twenty years, we have seen a rise in behaviors that are negatively correlated with empathy, e.g. narcissism, individualism, positive self-views. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram may provide a false sense of social connection, while in reality isolating users from engaging in face-to-face social opportunities by creating a virtual buffer between people (Konrath, et al., 2011). By adhering to the conditions for genuine dialogue, our awareness and practice of empathy grows. In a world that can leave us feeling

fragmented and unsettled, it is through empathic relationships that we are able to find comfort (Howe, 2013). Carl Rogers (1995) believes we must permit ourselves to understand others by putting aside our tendency to evaluate and judge. When we strive to see through another person's eyes, we have taken a step toward empathy, toward the I-Thou. It is when we move away from the I-It, and indulge in the I-Thou that we can begin to address and resolve the issues of our times.

Emotional Intelligence presupposes that one possesses a degree of self-awareness and empathy for others in order to navigate through work situations in an appropriate manner. This requires an understanding of the rules regarding the display of emotions in the workplace and the ability to know when, how, and if that display is necessary or requires adaptation in order to best relate to others in an organizational setting (Miller, 2012). Effective leaders possess high levels of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). In the past eleven years, Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) have taken a step beyond the concept of Emotional Intelligence to explore Social Intelligence, which taps into the interconnectedness of individuals in the workplace. This competency, based on the study of the brain and how we establish relationships to others, requires promoting positivity in those around you through one's own behavior. Our brains are equipped with mirror neurons, which imitate the actions and mood of others. In an organizational setting, these mirror neurons allow us to feel what others feel, and share experiences (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). The adage that the leader of an organization "sets the tone" is not only true, but is backed up by the discovery of mirror neurons in the field of neuroscience. The paradigm of competition as a motivator in the workplace is no longer considered by some to be the best way to inspire others to perform better. Daniel Pink (2011),

for example, makes a convincing case for discarding motivation techniques based on “rewards and punishments” and competition. He notes that, for creative and higher level work, such motivators are simply unsuccessful. These practices demotivate employees (Covey, 1991) preventing them from enjoying their work, which is “the right of all” (p. 264). Smiling and laughter has been shown to create cohesiveness and bonding among team members, which in turn leads to better performance, learning, and creativity. Laughter isn’t just good for us; it’s good for creating relationships, and good for business (Sala, Krupat, Roter, 2002). These discoveries may play a part in the success of genuine dialogue and improv.

Research shows that the elements of genuine dialogue and the conditions for improv each hold the potential to create the kind of positive experiences and relationships needed in today’s rapidly changing and fragmented society. This research examines the connection between genuine dialogue and improv, and whether participating in improv enhances our connection to others.

Research Questions

I propose the following research question:

RQ1: In what ways do improv exercise participants see improv demonstrating dialogic qualities?

RQ2: In what ways do improv exercise participants demonstrate the weakest connection between genuine dialogue and improv?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study explores the correlation between genuine dialogue and improv. This research examines the possible ways that improv exercises may affect the communication of participants, and whether qualities that improv fosters parallel that of genuine dialogue. This study seeks to determine whether improv encourages dialogic tendencies and creates feelings of connection. A qualitative design research was used for this study and data were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Participants

A purposive sample was used in this study. The researcher invited ABC Comedy Lab students to participate in focus groups with fellow improv students to discuss their experiences with improv. Those who expressed an interest were contacted via email or phone to confirm their participation. Three focus groups were held, containing eight, seven, and four participants, for a total of nineteen participants. Focus groups lasted from sixty to sixty-five minutes. In order to take part in the study, certain requirements had to be met: Participants had to be (1) eighteen or older, (2) presently taking improv classes at ABC, or (3) a former improv student at ABC. Participants varied in their level of improv experience, from first time improv students who had studied less than six months to more experienced students. The most experienced student reported having studied improv for six years. Participants ranged in age from nineteen to fifty-nine. There were nine females and ten males comprising the sample. There were a variety of vocations reported by participants, such as teacher, waitress, computer engineer, graphic artist, Rolfer, bouncer, laser scientist, program manager, salesperson. The researcher conducted a

thirty-minute interview with Florida Hospital Innovation Lab Director, Karen Tilstra. Ms. Tilstra was contacted via text message and agreed to participate.

Procedure

Qualitative research methods were deemed the most appropriate to gather data examining improv due to this study's desire to expound upon "an understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it" (Vasimoradi, 2013, p. 398). The study of improv lends itself to qualitative research methods due to the "in the moment" co-creation inherent in improv. Human interaction and a co-constructed social reality are immanent in improv, and both of the aforementioned are best explored through qualitative measures (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The dearth of communication-focused research exploring the connection between improv and genuine dialogue invites an in-depth initial examination to provide direction for future research.

Before collecting data, the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board approval. A focus group guide was designed with open questions allowing for each participant's personal "take" on the questions based on their own personal experiences and influences. Before the interview and each focus group, participants completed a demographic data sheet (See Appendix A). Each focus group began with an orientation explaining participant rights and guidelines for participation. The interviews were moderately structured, and participants were asked the same introductory questions during the focus groups sessions followed by planned and spontaneous probes (See Appendix B). A funnel approach was used, starting with general questions yielding general information to more specific questions and responses. The researcher served as the moderator for the focus groups, setting up an audio recording for each session using multiple recorders, and taking notes as needed to document any additional questions that were asked. The

researcher transcribed data, yielding sixty-three pages of data, single-spaced. The transcriptions do not include speech disfluencies, which were removed to make the data more easily understood. Thematic analysis generated categories used to analyze that data. A thematic analysis approach allowed the researcher to discover and then categorize the information obtained based on the repeated patterns that emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The conditions for dialogue set by Gordon (2006) served as a guideline for analyzing data, but themes and categories were not limited by those conditions. Rather, they served as a starting point for research that remained open to new themes and categories and the elimination of conditions not confirmed in the analysis of data. Gordon's conditions for dialogue are: Unconditional Positive Regard, Empathy, Genuineness, Mutual Equality and Collaboration, Immediacy of Presence, Imagination and Innovation, and Vulnerability.

Data collected was reviewed to determine themes using Owen's (1984) criteria—recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (p. 275). A theme is considered to have "reoccurred" when a minimum of two parts of the information share meaning, even if different words are used to describe it. Repetition is an explicit use of the same word, phrase or sentence in a reiterative manner. Forcefulness refers to the stress applied to an utterance or written sample indicating that it has greater significance to the participant. Forcefulness could be achieved through the use of increased volume or a change in vocal inflection for spoken word, or the use of bold or italics in a written account (Owen, 1984). Thematic analysis was chosen because of its ability to provide insight and an understanding about human relationships to this research.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were over the age of eighteen and volunteered to take part in a focus group. The purpose and methods of the study were explained to all participants. Each was given a demographic data sheet to fill out prior to their participation. Participants were informed that the audio recordings would be transcribed and that pseudonyms would be used to depersonalize the information provided during the focus group session. Participants were briefed prior to the focus group session, at which time it was made clear that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the discussion at any time and for any reason without repercussions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

A thematic analysis approach was used to identify conditions of dialogue, described by Gordon (2006). Although Gordon concedes, “There is no single comprehensive listing of the requirements for dialogue” (p.25), he considers his list of elements to be the most commonly identified in Communication literature as conditions that set the stage for genuine dialogue to occur. A review of literature confirmed this to be true. Communication literature related to Gordon’s Elements for Genuine Dialogue was used to supplement descriptions of the elements.

The data suggest that participants, to notably varying degrees, viewed all seven conditions of dialogue in improv: Unconditional Positive Regard, Empathy, Genuineness, Mutual Equality & Collaboration, Immediacy of Presence, Imagination & Innovation and Vulnerability. The most prominent three elements in the data, Imagination & Innovation, Vulnerability and Immediacy of Presence, will be presented. These three themes were the most recurrent, repeated and forceful themes emphasizing connections between genuine dialogue and improv. After reviewing the connections between improv and genuine dialogue, attention will then turn to addressing the limitations of improv in creating genuine dialogue. The most notable limitation found in the data was a lack of Empathy, an element that scholars of dialogue commonly emphasized as foundational to dialogue. Empathy was not prominent in the data as a benefit of improv that students identified. Students however, did identify a mindset that would undermine the potential for creating a more genuine form of improv. It is important to consider the traits of dialogue students of improv seem to internalize and those that are neglected. Understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of improvisation in cultivating dialogic

tendencies provides a stronger foundation for understanding how conditions for genuine dialogue may be nurtured.

Dialogic Qualities of Improv

Three dialogic themes surfaced as the most prominent in the group data using Gordon's Conditions for Dialogue (2006): Imagination & Innovation, Vulnerability and Immediacy of Presence. In this chapter, Imagination & Innovation will be explored first, followed by Vulnerability and then Immediacy of Presence. A brief overview of the data related to Empathy will follow.

Imagination & Innovation

One of the most prominent themes in the data involved Imagination & Innovation. This dialogic quality is described by Gordon (2006) as:

We free ourselves from rigid forms rules, norms, or anything that would constrain our verbal explorations and things get said in ways we have never said them before—we become like improvisational jazz musicians or dancers, taking ourselves by surprise and finding ‘voice’” (p. 24).

The ABC Improv students reported that they often experienced the dialogic aspect of Imagination & Innovation in improv. Jasper talks about his experience:

In improv, if you're doing an hour and half show, you're onstage for roughly a half an hour, forty-five minutes and doing twenty different scenes, you're doing all these different ideas, you get to bring out a character that you'd never be able to play anywhere else, you get to immerse yourself in this wonderful moment, and then you never have to

do it again. If it was terrible, guess what? You don't have to do it again. You get to do something completely different the next time.

Jasper's description of the creative aspect of improv was one of the reasons students reported being drawn to improv. Improv provides a space for immersing oneself in a "wonderful moment" to create something that has never been seen or heard before, and will never be seen or heard again. Each experience is new.

When asked why each of them got into improv, a number of the students talked about their desire to do something outside their comfort zone, their normal boundaries. Diana expresses how her improv experience enables her to put aside expectations and boundaries:

It allows you to dissect things and to take in information more in a fluid manner instead of constantly being stuck in this box of, "Okay, this is how this is going to work." You can then look at it, and hear from different people and utilize what you're getting to come up with a new plan. At least for me, in what I do. And, it also helps me to stop second-guessing myself and to go more on instinct, which I have learned a lot here. So I guess I return to it because of those tools.

Diana applies the concepts she has learned through her improv training at work. Many of the students spoke about how they benefit from the improv training they've received, and how they find themselves applying improv concepts onstage and offstage. Students, who initially signed up for classes to meet people, or advance an acting career, or to find relief from a stressful job, perceive that improv's value extends beyond their initial expectations. While the motivation for taking improv classes varied, responses about their experiences with improv were remarkably consistent with regard to Imagination and Innovation.

The improv tenet of, “Yes, and” is at the heart of Imagination and Innovation. “Yes” shows the willingness to open oneself up to new ways of thinking, while the “and” demonstrates an attitude consistent with innovation by making an offer of one’s own. Karen Tilstra, Director of the Florida Hospital Innovation Lab, considers a “Yes, and” attitude to be a prerequisite for innovation. Healthcare workers are process driven by nature and/or necessity, and Tilstra knew that creating a bridge for them would require opening them up to a new way of thinking. The “Yes, and” attitude is integral to that process. When Tilstra introduces improv she explains, “Because we want to take you to a different place mentally, emotionally and physically, we will do a few minutes of improv.” Tilstra turns around skeptics who may initially be resistant to the process by showing the value of improv to the innovation process, and providing the research that supports her claims. She credits improv as creating a space that is primed for innovation. Tilstra notes,

When I was doing my doctorate and learning a lot about the whole process of innovation and the creative process, I really saw that “Yes, and” was *so* much...*everything* with the “Yes, and” attitude. Not that you have to agree with everything, but keep an open mind and say, “Yes” and then you add...with “and” you’re adding to things.

The willingness to put aside boundaries and create with new eyes becomes possible when there is connection and openness to others. Being open to new ways of thinking and others requires a degree of vulnerability.

Vulnerability

The element of Vulnerability creates room for creativity and collaboration to occur, and is an integral component in genuine dialogue and improv. Authenticity can only be achieved by

allowing oneself to be vulnerable (Carrane & Allen, 2006). Gordon's (2006) description of Vulnerability reads:

We open ourselves to the possibility of being "wrong" and admitting it, of changing our attitudes, of feeling emotions, of abandoning impression management (p. 25).

Vulnerability relates to the Improv condition, Relinquish Control/Be Vulnerable, and includes the concept of self-awareness, an aspect of vulnerability frequently mentioned by dialogue scholars.

Focus group interviewees repeatedly mentioned feeling vulnerable and insecure. When one of the groups was asked an impromptu question about whether they have become more self-aware about their insecurities and more vulnerable as a result of participating in improv, the entire group responded affirmatively. When asked about the challenges they face in improv games, John responded, "I think my biggest challenge is not in terms of the challenges that arise in specific games, but challenges inside of *me* that arise on the stage." Students acknowledge that vulnerability is necessary to achieve a level of improv mastery on stage. Armando states, "Success wouldn't occur without the insecurity."

Numerous participants cited this self-awareness and vulnerability as an uncomfortable feeling. Bobbi describes the feeling of vulnerability and her reaction to it.

But, really, I guess for me trying improv was like jumping off a cliff. I mean, I am going to try something that I have no experience in, no reason to believe I can do well at it, and most of the time feel like I'm not doing well at it, you know? But, then to keep on going. There's something in there that makes it worth it to keep going.

The key to vulnerability is the willingness to engage in it, and to accept the risks involved. Referring back to Bobbi's analogy, jumping off a cliff is an act someone does willingly. She may be afraid or hesitant, but there is a part of her that wants to take that leap. Vulnerability cannot be forced. Willingness to engage authentically is inherent in Vulnerability making it an indispensable constituent of genuine dialogue and improv.

Students found that the benefits of making oneself vulnerable outweighed the drawbacks. Bobbi explains, "I feel like it mirrors your insecurities, but it also mirrors your good side, as well." Marie describes her experience with feelings of vulnerability, saying,

I've always been outgoing, but I haven't always been vulnerable. We all build our walls and I'm not talking about wearing your heart on your sleeve so much that you're an idiot, but being open to all the possibilities that every person you talk to could hold.

Focus group participants acknowledged the difficulty in making oneself vulnerable, but repeatedly expressed the benefits of doing so, such as becoming more becoming more self-aware and more open to others.

The self-awareness and vulnerability are noted by students as positively impacting their relationships beyond the context of doing improv. Cap describes how being vulnerable allowed him to connect to others in a new way.

The walls that I think over time I've built up to protect myself from hurt or disappointment or whatever, I never really thought about how much it kept other people out. So going through the classes and being vulnerable and remembering what that was like when I was a lot younger showed me that I could do that and still be okay, or that's

not the right word, but it taught me how to bring those walls down again and go, ‘Okay, but I can listen. I can adapt.’

Students report that their personal relationships have improved as they have evolved into people who are more open, honest, and vulnerable. Participants point to vulnerability as a necessary element for developing deeper and more meaningful personal connections to others.

Students also tout the benefit of vulnerability in the workplace. The absence of vulnerability can negatively impact one’s ability to develop meaningful relationships in the workplace. John displayed a high level of self-awareness when commenting about how the absence of vulnerability and positive regard negatively impacted his ability to teach his students effectively. He states,

When I started teaching my classes, I was super hard on people. I never said any sort of positive feedback. I’ve had a lot of things unlocked by improv, like that emotion-ness. I’ve met a lot of great people, learning it, teaching the classes I taught, you know? And, watching myself evolve from someone who was angry and bitter into someone who can actually teach a decent class now.

All the ABC students expressed agreement that improv evokes feelings of vulnerability. Even those with experience in scripted theater can find themselves feeling lost and vulnerable doing improv on stage without a script. One exchange between participants sums up the positive and negative pull of feelings when “getting out of one’s comfort zone” makes one feel insecure and vulnerable.

Armando: Isn’t that sort of the basis of improv? To make you insecure? Because you have no script. You have nothing. All you have is yourself...to rely on yourself...

Bartholomew: It's your ass on the line.

Diane: I'm okay feeling insecure and feeling that awkwardness that I have no idea what to do and maybe it makes me feel more insecure about some things, because on the other side I feel more secure. Like, it balances out. I feel more secure in my work. I feel more secure talking in front of people. So for me, while I'm saying lately that class has been hard because I'm realizing all these things I don't do, it's making me feel insecure...Overall, net, I still feel like it's a positive gain.

The ABC participants credit vulnerability for improving confidence in the work setting. Students mentioned that being willing to feel allowed them relate more openly and confidently to others--individually, in small groups projects, and in front of groups making presentations. The focus group students all acknowledge the aspect of vulnerability present in improv, and agree that the personal and professional gain from allowing oneself to experience the discomfort of making mistakes, and being willing to feel emotions, outweighs any possible disadvantages of doing so. Students expressed that, as painful as it may be, vulnerability and the insecurity that arises as a result of it is part of a personal and professional growth process they value.

Karen Tilstra uses improv to facilitate openness, connection and creativity. The condition of Vulnerability is prominent in data from her interview about the use of improv in her organization. She acknowledges the many challenges participants face to overcome feelings of vulnerability. In an organizational setting, the hierarchal structure can impede her goal to create an environment at FHIL where innovation and creativity can take place. Tilstra cites unwillingness to be vulnerable as something that can shut down the process of creativity and innovation. In describing this challenge, she explains, "The higher up on the hierarchy scale, the

more intimidated they are.” While doing an improv game, she recalled that “the guy who was the highest person in the room, he said, ‘Wow. I’m...you’re scaring me, Karen. It’s scary’.”

When asked what she thinks it is that scares them she offered the following explanation,

They’re just not used to saying, “Hey, you guys! Let’s just get ideas from everywhere and voices from everyone,” because in the corporate setting, you know, the executive director, he’s the one in control and, I think intellectually they know it. Even the President here said, “I get that (improv), and I make myself do it, but I am fighting years and years of culture of the high guy, the highest guy in the room is the one who is...there’s a certain prestige I have to have.” And, they just don’t go to that; they don’t *easily* go to that place. They don’t go to that place of, “Let’s just ‘yes, and’.”

The hierarchal structure within organizations may make it a challenge for participants at FHIL to allow themselves to be vulnerable (e.g. willing to feel, make mistakes, forget about appearances and be open to each other) but Tilstra has strategies to overcome those challenges. When she encounters an executive who doesn’t want to participate in the group improv exercises, she can see how self-conscious the others become. She states,

You might as well just set off dynamite in the room because it’s like, “Why are they here? They’re just watching. What if I say something and they don’t...? What if I do something stupid and he’s watching?” They just feel so awkward. So either we’re all in or we’re not in. That’s what we’ve said.

Tilstra encourages leaders to participate, but has been known to issue leaders who aren’t participating a “return time,” allowing them to save face, and the group to continue bonding without feeling awkward or judged. Gaps in status can make for an uncomfortable situation if

not addressed, but Tilstra does not allow that to happen. She adheres to principles valued both by scholars of dialogue and improv to “be in the moment” and deal with situations as they arise.

Immediacy of Presence

Immediacy of presence allows interactants to “be in the moment” and spontaneously react to each other. This requires a willingness to let go of the past and future and the habitual reactions that are tied to them. Gordon (2006) describes Immediacy of Presence as:

We are not excessively thinking of the past, nor fantasizing about the future, but being here and now with out dialogical partners in this present, existential, dialogical moment (Gordon, 2006, p. 24).

This aligns with the Improv Condition: Be in the moment. Don’t plan ahead. Don’t focus on the past. Students were not specifically asked about this concept, yet focus group participants spoke repeatedly and emphatically about the importance of “being present” and “being in the moment.” There were a number of positive gains reported by students who experienced being in the moment. Among the benefits mentioned was an increase in the ability to focus, both on stage and in their lives. That focus included listening more attentively, noticing verbal and nonverbal offers, and looking at others. Students cited the increasing number of distractions that come with modern technology, and the ability to attend to what is happening in the moment is a skill that students report as being helpful to them. Ophelia explains her thoughts on Immediacy of Presence, saying,

I think what improv teaches is focus. You have to learn, ‘Okay. No matter what’s going on, I have to listen. I have to pay attention. I’ve got to focus. I have to give this person that I am working with--not just playing, I’m working with them—I have to give them

my full attention, look them in the eyes, see what's going on.' And, I think that absolutely translates off the stage into both work and personal communication.

Ophelia describes the necessity of focus in improv translates into important interpersonal skills for her. Providing full attention and strong eye contact would normally be seen as displaying strong interpersonal skills, and improvisation, by necessity, calls for a high level of attentiveness to that which is occurring around the participant.

When discussing the concept of Immediacy of Presence, many of the students remarked that being present had a therapeutic effect on them. A number of them mentioned stressful work or home situations, and how letting go of thoughts about the past and future and fully immersing themselves in what was happening in the present moment was a welcome relief. Delia describes her experience, saying,

In the midst of hell, I could come in and it completely captivated me. I wasn't thinking about anything else that I had to worry about the next day. I just was in the moment with people I didn't necessarily know very well, and I had never really experienced anything like that in my life before.

Delia was not alone in finding that improv helped in clearing the mind of unwanted distractions. Being in the moment offered students the chance to let go of thoughts that bogged them down, saying, "It provides a complete escape for me. I can turn off work," and "this is the two or three hours in the week that I can actually be free." This "turning off work" "be[ing] free" and being "in the moment" all describe the kinds of immediacy of presence described by participants.

While the goal of good improv is to have Immediacy of Presence, some students found that there were barriers to their achievement of this ideal. The inability to "be in the moment"

was often described by ABC students as “being in my head.” Students commented on the negative effect of being in your head, and how doing so shuts down one’s ability to successfully engage in improv. Bobbi talked about feeling that she was not as good as the other players, and how being in her head makes it hard to recover from “the downward spiral.”

When students are able to achieve Immediacy of Presence in improv, they describe some important benefits that result from this characteristic. Several students note that being in the moment offers a greater sense of resiliency to those who practice it. Students describe an increased ability to recover from setbacks or mistakes by redirecting their focus on the present moment. Jack credits his improv experience and ability to be in the moment as aiding him with a required speech. He noted,

I was one of the only people who, when I kind of stuttered or messed up, I was able to take a beat, compose myself, and then keep going like nothing ever happened. I stayed in the moment. I didn’t let the screw up affect me. I just let it inspire me throughout the rest of my speech. Improv taught me if you screw up, ‘Let’s just keep going.’ Use that as more inspiration. It happened, you can’t change the fact that it happened, so accept that it happened and utilize the mistake, in a sense.

The skill of being present gave students a positive way to recover from setbacks, personally and professionally. Focusing on the present moment allows one to let go of thoughts and feelings that might hinder the present activity. Jack did not allow a mistake he made in his speech to “get in his head” by ruminating on it and staying in the past or worrying that he might make the same mistake later in the speech. By letting go of the past and the future to be in the moment, he was

able to “bounce back” and exhibited a level of focus and composure that allowed him to successfully perform his speech.

Additionally, Immediacy of Presence was mentioned as a way to interact with others and communicate in a more positive and inclusive way. Being in the moment was cited as a way to attend to others, but the attention to others was mentioned more than understanding others. Although understanding others and placing oneself in the position of one’s partner, was modestly mentioned, the absence of Empathy on the list of most pronounced conditions was unexpected, especially given the importance placed upon it in FHIL’s model. Because of the conflicting data regarding whether students were acquiring greater empathy as a result of improv, this was viewed as a limitation of improv in creating genuine dialogue.

Empathy

Empathy is held as a vital and necessary component of genuine dialogue, yet Empathy did not emerge as one of the three most prominent conditions in either the focus groups or interviewee data. FHIL and other organizations are currently using improv to develop empathy, citing its importance in communication practices and innovation. For FHIL, improv is used to create empathy, and yet it was modestly mentioned in the data. Tilstra believes that for her purposes, when empathy is high, she may not need to use improv as a tool. Improv helps her create group cohesiveness. When connection and empathy are present, there are times when improv might actually be a hindrance.

When asked about times when improv might be inappropriate or detrimental, Karen Tilstra responds,

We have times when we're getting deep empathy from end-users, like, for example, the Breast Care Project. We had doctors and patients who were going through breast treatment. They had on masks because they were heavy into chemo. And, they were sharing their stories, lots of tears. We really saw that level of connection that those women had supporting each other. We didn't even expect that at all. There are times when we are having end-user empathy, where we're having end-users come in and share their hard stories. We find the people are already there, and it seems like that (improv) would be a distraction. In fact, we don't need that. We're already connected.

In the organizational setting, empathy is seen as the result of improv, a necessary component of authentic connection. When deep support and empathy among participants is already present, improv games would be superfluous.

Focus group participants reveal that empathy has played an important role in interpersonal and workplace communication, but indicate a struggle with the concept at times. Those who recounted communication success stories shared examples of communication with others in which they were able to put their own point of view aside to see things from another's perspective. Jack believes his ability to put himself in another person's shoes has helped him communicate to customers and management. His willingness to see things from another's perspective has helped him understand what customers need. He recounted a conversation with a manager frustrated by the response she was getting from customers, in which he was able to convey why the customers might be confused. He believes that putting himself in the customer's shoes helped him communicate in a way that was productive and beneficial for his manager and patrons. Conversely, a few participants, having gained a level of confidence through improv,

confessed to being impatient with others who self-edit, don't have the level of honesty they've come to expect, or who lack the ability to make a decision and take action.

ABC students were very focused on their goals. Their impatience with others who are "not there yet" displays a lack of empathy. This may be related to their level of mastery and/or their reasons for being there. The ABC groups' motivations for taking improv classes were varied, but largely self-focused. Some of them were coming out of difficult situations, such as divorces, break ups or distressing relocations. Others were unhappy with their present situations, either professionally or personally, and were seeking an activity to provide relief. A few had friends who suggested they take classes together as a shared activity. A couple of the students saw ensemble shows at ABC Improv, thought it looked like an activity they would enjoy, and signed up for classes. One of the participants wanted to take improv classes to advance his career in entertainment. The expressed goals were self-centered, whereas empathy tends to involve a higher Other-orientation.

Approaches to Improv

Students provided data suggesting that there are varying approaches to improv. Some of the attitudes displayed by improv participants appear conducive to creating dialogue, and some do not. The dual nature of improv, as described by students, parallels the dialogical I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1965). The two relationships one has with an Other, the I-Thou and the I-It, are present in improv. ABC student, Bobbi, explains this dual nature of improv:

It's almost like the inauthentic part that we learn in improv--not that improv is inauthentic--but you know, the tricks and the games and those things. You can use that to your advantage to break the ice or to make a connection with someone you ordinarily

wouldn't and then you can drop that and just be real, which is the real good improv, I think. When you're really real. So, it's kind of like a double-edged sword in a way. In the same way a discussion can be missing the Other-focus required for genuine dialogue, improv can be devoid of the Other-focus needed for a more genuine improv. Sarah and Armando comment further on the duality of improv:

Sarah: I'm sure we've also all had people in our classes who, it's always just about the joke. Try and get the joke out, try and get the joke out, try and get the joke out. And, I think that's the insecurity because then they get...

Armando: Well, maybe it's the sort of rapid-fire response that protects them from getting to the genuine part.

Sarah: Yeah. And, when they're genuine it's not going for the joke so much and it's more...

Armando: You can't do the genuine thing without putting yourself into it, and you sort of expose some of yourself somehow. Boy this is really deep.

Improv, much like a discussion, has the potential to be shallow, used as a means to an end, or manipulate others. It simultaneously holds the potential to be open, meaningful and authentic. While Karen Tilstra's FHIL intentionally focuses on an Other-focused form of improv, the ABC students' focus was mixed. Some had an interest in, and expressed a desire for, participating in a more genuine I-Thou form of improv, while others' goals regarding improv were steadfastly self-focused.

While there are certainly limitations to improv and much remains to be understood, those who participate in improv clearly see a benefit for themselves and for other potential participants. This sentiment is, perhaps, best stated by Jack and John:

Jack: It teaches you to get outside your comfort zone. It doesn't necessarily mean that people are outside of theirs. It would be nice if...

John: ...the whole world did it together.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Implications

This study examines the dialogic qualities of improv. The first research question asked: in what ways do improv exercise participants see improv demonstrating dialogic qualities? The data suggests there is a connection between genuine dialogue and improv. All seven of Gordon's (2006) elements (Unconditional Positive Regard, Empathy, Genuineness, Mutual Equality and Collaboration, Immediacy of Presence, Imagination and Innovation, and Vulnerability) were evident in the collected data to varying degrees. The themes that emerged most prominently were the dialogic conditions of Imagination & Innovation, Vulnerability, and Immediacy of Presence.

Innovation & Imagination surfaced in the data to suggest that improv shares genuine dialogue's ability to advance interactions that are creative and transformative (Cooper, et al., 2013; Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2001). Improv, like genuine dialogue, is reported to possess transformational qualities, and has the potential to be applied more widely for those purposes in psychotherapy, education, negotiation and the development of community (see Cooper, et al., 2013; Hoover 2011; Isaacs, 1999). Students affirmed that they have experienced personal and professional growth, gained new insights and transformed as a result of their improv training. ABC student, Diane, said of improv, "It's just made me a better version of myself." Karen Tilstra of FHIL relies on improv to facilitate thinking in a new way, and credits improv for creating an opening that allows people to think differently and innovate. Her Innovation Lab at Florida Hospital has successfully innovated solutions to problems, addressed concerns, and resolved complaints. Her implementation of improv is a key component to that process of creative

problem solving. She describes her use of improv as “relentless” and has convinced naysayers of its value. Tilstra finds that improv connects people in a way that encourages collaboration.

Yankelovich (1999) believes the components of genuine dialogue provide an avenue to cohesiveness unavailable through other means. This data suggests that because those dialogic components exist in improv, cohesiveness can be gained through its use.

Immediacy of Presence emerged prominently in the data. Interview data with Karen Tilstra reveals that being in the moment is something that can happen naturally as one participates in improv games. The games, by design, guide one to focus on what is happening in the moment (Spolin, 1986). If one is unable to be in the moment, he/she is unable to play the game successfully. The ABC interviewees use the term “in my head” to refer to an inability to be in the moment, or as a cause for their problems collaborating with others. Being “in one’s head” is often described as second-guessing one’s choices, over-thinking, fear of making an offer, beating oneself up, not being in the moment, feeling self-conscious, etc. When asked how the improv games challenge her, Delia states,

For me, making sure that I’m more in tune to what the conversation is that I’m in, or the game I’m playing. Making sure that I don’t get so wrapped up in what I’m going to do next that I miss what the person is saying in front of me, or that thing that I’m supposed to be reacting to, because you’re not really reacting to anything if you’re stuck in your own head.

All of the aforementioned are indicative of a lack of Immediacy of Presence. Improv games can serve as a way to strengthen one’s ability to focus, increase one’s awareness of others, and develop narrative skills (Spolin, 1986). With technological advances, and the distractions that

come with them, improv's ability to steel one's focus and expand awareness of others creates a way for participants to open themselves up to the human qualities that are becoming increasingly important in our culture (Pink, 2005).

Vulnerability emerged as a prominent element in data from all interviewees. A sense of vulnerability plays an important role in creativity and collaboration (Gagnon, et al, 2012, Smrczek, 2012), making it a valuable element within interpersonal relationships as well as organizational and school settings. The data suggests that wherever creativity and collaboration are needed, an introduction to the element of Vulnerability is warranted.

The second research question asked: In what ways do improv exercise participants demonstrate the weakest connection between genuine dialogue and improv? The data points to areas where improv was weakly connected to Gordon's (2006) elements of genuine dialogue, the most notable of which was Empathy.

Carl Rogers believed that the ability to be genuine, warm and empathetic was integral to fostering relationships and positive change (Howe, 2013), yet Empathy did not present as one of the most prominent three elements of improv in the data. Establishing Empathy is one of the goals of the FHIL and their innovation program intentionally focuses on its presence. Tilstra frequently mentioned the integral role empathy plays in cultivating connection in her organization. While ABC students did mention empathetic feelings toward others, some of them conveyed a lack of empathy toward others, describing negative feelings about those lacking in qualities the students had acquired and honed through improv training. Students' motivations for participating in improv vary widely and differ greatly from FHIL's motivation, which may factor into the inconsistency of the findings regarding Empathy. Empathy has been described as

putting one's point of view aside to make space to see things from another person's perspective (Gordon, 2006), which requires a level of understanding and acceptance of others (Covey, 1991). It also requires intentionality. An improv curriculum that is tailored to foster empathy may see students benefit from reinforcing the capacity to see the other and experience "the other side" (Friedman, 2002).

Interviews conducted yielded important information regarding improv instruction. The transformation that occurs under Tilstra's direction is the end goal. Intention and direction are components that cannot be downplayed in the process of improv. Ellinor and Gerard (1998) believe that integrity of dialogue is determined by the intention and the skills of the participants. The data suggests that the same applies to improv. Improv that is haphazardly applied or poorly directed is unlikely to get participants to a place where they can "see the Other" (Friedman, 2002). Tilstra and focus group participants stress the importance of good direction in getting them to an authentic place where connection can occur. Viola Spolin (1986) notes that positive direction that allows for discovery is an integral component of improv games. When asked an impromptu question about whether the direction one receives in class is extremely important, each member of the group responded affirmatively. Based on the data, to get the best results, theatrical and applied improv programs should consider offering thoughtful direction provided by knowledgeable instructors when utilizing improv as part of an educational or training program.

Improv was described in the focus groups and interview as improving communication practices interpersonally and in the workplace. Participants spoke of how improv "breaks down walls" to facilitate communication with others. A noteworthy aspect of communication that

emerged in the data is the connection between improv and the reduction of CA. A number of students experienced a decline in CA and believe improv training is responsible. This suggests that improv could be of great value to educators and trainers who hope to lower CA and improve the communication skills of students and employees.

Based on my own experiences with improv, I saw potential for improv to improve one's preparedness for genuine dialogue and conversely, for the elements of genuine dialogue to enhance one's ability to engage in a more genuine improv. Reviewing and juxtaposing the literature on dialogue and improvisation, some clear connections emerged in how the goals of each converge. The belief that a strong connection exists between dialogic tendencies and improv skills was clearly demonstrated in the data from the focus group participants and in the interview with Karen Tilstra. Dialogue has been characterized as an effective means of enhancing communication and facilitating connection to others. The data suggest improv is undervalued as a tool to facilitate connection and improve communication skills and practices in education, business organizations, the home and the community. Literature on dialogue notes the importance of having communicative partners both ready and willing to engage in dialogue. Ellinor & Gerard suggest participants must have both the intention and the skill to engage in genuine dialogue in order for it to occur (1998). This suggests there may be possible benefits of having multiple people in a relationship or work environment with experience in improv. If only one person has the necessary skills, that may affect the potential for realizing dialogue. FHIL's success in harnessing improv to facilitate creativity, connection and empathy suggests that with intentionality, improv can align more closely with the elements of genuine dialogue leading to greater connection, creativity and transformation. The findings of this study could be analyzed

to help determine strategies to strengthen improv training curriculum and enhance improv participants' experience by deliberately aligning instructional exercises with the elements of genuine dialogue. The data suggest an improv experience designed to create the conditions conducive to genuine dialogue may expand participants' dialogic capabilities. Through focused, directed improv exercises, improv has the potential to transmute from an I-It encounter into the I-Thou experience of "genuine improv."

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

The participants in this study included nineteen improv students from an improvisational theater and Karen Tilstra, the Director of Florida Hospital Innovation Lab. The students participate in theatrical improv while Karen Tilstra uses improv in an organizational setting, making their motivations to participate and methods of utilizing improv disparate. Future research should consider the effect different utilization and motivation might have on the data, and ensure that both sides are equally represented. Students had differing levels of experience and expertise in improv, which may have affected responses to questions. Students are evolving as improvisers, and may have different perspectives as a result of the issues they experience as they move toward mastery. A sample that includes professional improvisers and instructors might offer a more balanced perspective and yield more varied responses to questions. Future research should consider the expansion of the participant numbers as a larger sample might provide more diversity.

Future Research

This research initially set out to examine the connection between genuine dialogue and improv, including how improv affects connection to others, and how one's communication practices might be influenced by improv. The data collected was too expansive and required a narrowing of scope. Research examining improv and connection, improv's affect on communication practices in the workplace, and improv's affect on interpersonal communication are areas to be examined in greater depth in the future. Students reported increased confidence and competency in their communication skills as a result of improv training. Future research should examine the connection between improv and CA reduction.

In ABC students, the presence of Empathy was evident, but inconsistent. Certain students expressed a greater acceptance of others, the ability to put themselves in another's shoes, while others expressed annoyance and a lack of ability to understand others' perspectives. Rogers (1995) believes one can consciously cultivate empathy within oneself through intention and awareness of self and others. Karen Tilstra's interview data suggests Empathy might be intentionally gained through directed improv exercises. For this reason, future research examining the potential for improv to increase empathy is warranted.

Improv participants refer to improv class as being fun, and full of laughter. Research shows that connection is created through laughter and fun (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008; Sala, Krupat, Roter, 2002). Tilstra has found that to be the case at FHIL, saying, "To me when people start laughing together, things change in a good way." Future research to examine how the "fun" aspect of improv training might serve as a means to achieve connection could lead to interesting insights about communication and "play".

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Kathleen O'Neal**

Date: **June 04, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 6/4/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: An Examination of the Connection Between Improv and Genuine Dialogue
Investigator: Kathleen O'Neal
IRB Number: SBE-14-10338
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Kanille Chay'.

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVED DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

Demographic Data Questions

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your gender? (Please circle one)
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
3. How do you describe yourself? (Please circle the option or options that best describe your ethnicity)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - Asian or Asian American
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Non-Hispanic White
4. Are you: (Please circle the one option that best describes your current relationship status)
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
 - Separated
 - Never been married
 - A member of an unmarried couple
 - Single
5. Are you currently: (Please circle the one option that best describes your employment situation.)
 - Employed for wages
 - Self-employed
 - Out of work for more than 1 year
 - Out of work for less than 1 year
 - A homemaker
 - A student
 - Retired
 - Unable to work

6. What is the highest grade or year of school you completed? (Please circle the one that best describes your education level)

- Never attended school or only attended kindergarten
- Grades 1 through 8(Elementary)
- Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)
- Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)
- College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)
- College 4 years (College graduate)
- Graduate School (Advanced Degree)

7. If working, inside or outside of the home, what is your occupation?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

Focus Group

Introduction

Hello. My name is Kate O’Neal and I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida conducting research on improv for my thesis, under the direction of Dr. Sally Hastings. I am conducting focus groups with students at SAK Comedy Lab to learn about your experiences with improv, and am delighted to have you all take part in this research. There has been very little research in this area, so you are now a part of something that may lead to new insights in the field of communication and more scholarly research on improv.

Tonight, we will discuss your experience with improv. I ask that we all show respect for one another’s opinions, knowing that each of our opinions and experiences may be different from the next person’s. This session will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, you may not take part in the focus group. You are free to refrain from answering any question, and can withdraw from the discussion if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. I will assign pseudonyms when reporting my findings in order to keep your identity confidential. It is my aim to publish my findings in academic journals so that your insights might encourage more research on improv. Before we begin our discussion, please fill out a short demographic data form. Once you have finished filling that out, we will begin.

Focus Group Questions

You are part of this focus group because you have experience as a student of improv. There are no right or wrong answers in this group discussion. This is simply an open forum to talk about your personal experiences.

1. Let’s begin by introducing ourselves. Can each of you tell the group your name, a little about your improv training and experience, and why you initially got involved with improv?
2. I’d like to hear from you about how you think your experience in improv has been useful outside the classroom.
3. In what ways do you find improv games challenge you?
4. Do you believe your experience with improv has improved your workplace communication skills? If so, how?
5. Do you believe your experience with improv has improved your interpersonal communication skills?
6. Sub-question—when using improv skills, do you think your ability to “connect with others changes? Can you elaborate?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and participation! If you would like to discuss anything with me individually, please stay after to speak with me. You can determine if you would like any further communication with me to be “on the record” or not by letting me know whether I can leave the

tape recorder running. Thank you, again!

One-on-One Interview

Introduction

Hello. My name is Kate O’Neal and I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida conducting research on improv for my thesis, under the direction of Dr. Sally Hastings. I am conducting this interview to learn about your experiences with improv, and am delighted to have you take part in this research. There has been very little research in this area, so you are now a part of something that may lead to new insights in the field of communication and more scholarly research on improv.

This session will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, we cannot continue with the interview. You are free to refrain from answering any question, and can withdraw from the interview if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. I can assign a pseudonym, at your request, when reporting my findings in order to keep your identity confidential. It is my aim to publish my findings in academic journals so that your insights might encourage more research on improv. After filling out a short demographic data form, we will begin.

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about why you initially got involved with improv?
2. I’d like to hear how you use improv in Florida Hospital’s Innovation Lab.
3. In what ways do you find improv games challenge those who participate?
4. Do you believe your experience with improv has enhanced workplace communication skills? If so, how?
5. Do you believe improv has enhanced the interpersonal communication skills of participants? If so, how?
6. Sub-question—when using improv skills, do you think your ability to “connect with others changes? Can you elaborate?
7. Are there circumstances under which you believe the use of improv would be unsuccessful?
8. Sub-question—Can you provide an example of a time when improv would not be an appropriate tool to achieve your goals?
9. Are there circumstances under which the use of improv would be detrimental?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and participation!

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