

# INCLUSIVE IMPRO THEATRE



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## *IMPROVISATION TECHNIQUES* GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

**Improv**isational theatre, often called improvisation or improv, is the form of theatre, often comedy, in which most or all of what is performed is unplanned or unscripted: created spontaneously by the performers.

The Improvisation used as a tool through the implementation of second part of the project with the conduction of a series of workshops under three headings: **VISUAL**, **VERBAL**, and **BODY** expression.

The **aim** of the workshops were to apply improvisation in classrooms as an educational tool as a way to develop communication skills, creative problem solving, and supportive team-work abilities that are used by improvisational, ensemble players.

The partners conducted three different types of workshops in cooperation with children. Additionally, more than **500 students & teachers** engaged in the workshops, discovering different improvisational techniques.

This guide for Improvisation Techniques under the three headings: verbal, visual, and body expressions consists of **80 different tips** based on the techniques developed.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS



**1. Thinking Corridor:** Place children in 2 groups and with the story stopping at some points, each group has to come up with a different version of the sequel.

The decision is made with everyone's participation and the emphasis is on the agreement and satisfaction of all group members.

## **2. Watch yourself on video:**

What's the most effective way to see your strengths and weaknesses and improve? Record yourself and watch it back! Public speakers consider this a must and so should you.

Don't like watching yourself on video? Get over it! If you want other people to watch you, the least you can do is watch yourself, too. It's one of the best ways to improve your performance at anything!



# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **3. Give yourself blind offers:**

Don't know what to say? Not sure what to do? Make a blind offer to yourself!

A blind offer is typically when you hand some invisible object to someone else and they let you know what you handed them. It's blind because you don't know what it is until later.

A blind offer to yourself is exactly the same. Pick something imaginary up without knowing what it is! Make some gesture or movement and only justify it after the fact.

You reach to pick something up. It's the baseball glove from when you were 7. Or the baby shoes you bought for the child that was never born. Or the treasure map your parents left you.



## **4. Use costumes:**

Again, you can just make everyone imagine that you're wearing a suit of armour or whatever.

And yet, remember how fun it was as a child when you played dress up? All children do it. It's fun, playful and adds an element of variety.



# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **5. Rock Art Project:**

Students were invited to design and create an image which would be painted on a small round stone. The painted stones would be used in our Wellbeing Garden. The theme was 'celebrating diversity and inclusivity'. Rocks were painted first with a layer of acrylic paint, students drew their design using pencil and when happy with the design, painted with acrylic paints.

## **6. Designation:**

Keeps children alert and promotes immediate decision-making. Read the story and give the children specific time to express themselves and their opinions.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **7. Recognize the emotion:**

It is not a real game, but an emotional recognition test: faces are shown that are expressing emotions (even uncommon ones, such as contempt or anguish) and the children have to comment on the images giving their own idea of what they see.



## **8. Music and Sound:**

Any activities that have an element of music or songs seemed to be extra interesting for the students and allowed them to express themselves personally - either in funny ways or serious.



## **9. Where are you standing?:**

Involves choosing one person to close his/her eyes and another to lead the group's movement. Everyone snaps their fingers or shakes their head, for example, and everyone imitates each subsequent movement. The student, with eyes closed once back in the room, must identify the leader. This group movement exercise facilitates coherence and cooperation among the children.



## **10. Playback story:**

It is an improvisation in which the narrator, the mime / mimes and the singer / singers will work together to recreate a moment of the studied story: the narrator begins the storytelling sequence, the mime interprets what he hears, and the singer accompanies by choosing his instrument - toy according to what he hears and sees.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

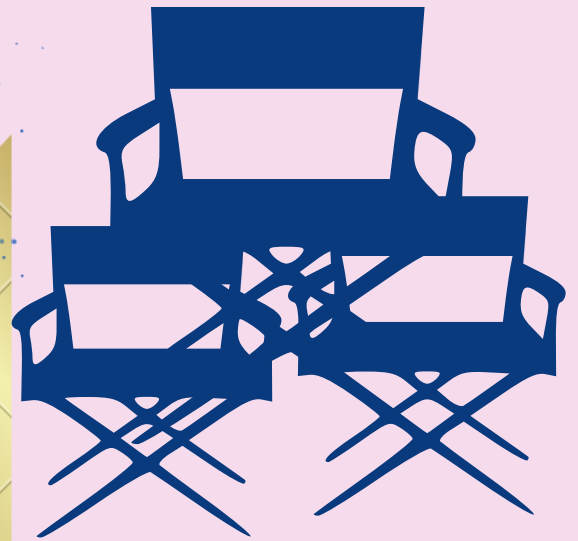
## **11. Sing! Sing! Sing!:**

If you're in impro for any period of time you'll wind up singing. It's going to happen!

Bite the bullet and get on with it! Start practicing. You can turn on music tracks without words and make up lyrics. Or, you can just start to sing and gradually a tune will develop.

Many people have what amounts to a phobia of singing. They will defend it by saying, "I can't sing! You've never heard a voice as bad as mine!"

What's actually the case is that at some point in your past you received a negative comment about your singing and it hurt your feelings. YOU may have been the one saying it! Whatever. It all comes back to self-esteem.



## **12. The body of knowledge:**

Some scenes of the fairy tale were dramatized in a shadow theatre with the children's bodies, where the children described the story only using their bodies and their shadows.

Let your body describe it!



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **13. Grammelot:**

The aim of the game is to invent a completely new language (using whistles or sounds for example) and to improvise a scene using only this language.

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## **14. Riddles:**

The students re-create the dialogue from the stories making up riddles. Each riddle aims to emphasize values like friendship, honor, acceptance, etc. The other students' response also came as a riddle.

## **15. Own Story:**

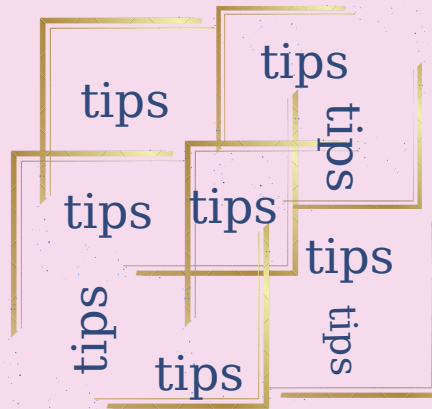
It is important to discuss improvisation and the meaning of creating your own story, so the students let out their creativity and don't follow the same structure.

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## **16. Rewriting:**

Rewriting a play only with adjectives or adverbs showed to be great, as students could then incorporate all feelings they know of - either from schoolwork or personal - but they were able to express them through the characters.

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## **17. Dance the character:**

Students listen to an excerpt from the story while looking at a picture of a character. At a certain moment, on a musical background established by the teacher, the fragment / character "dances".

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## **18. Find the rhythm:**

The students use musical tools to express the characters' features through music and rhythm. The teacher makes some sounds, and the students reproduce them based on the emotions each part of the story could transmit.

## **19. The puppet and the Marionettist:**

On stage there is a puppet: it cannot move or speak; it just has to follow the words of its puppeteer and interpret a scene using every part of its body.

## **20. Angels and Demons:**

Two groups face each other: one group positioned in the centre tries to intone a choral song, while the other tries to stop this song by speaking loud or by emitting sounds and verses.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **21. The feelings cube:**

Each value or feeling had a colour, the students represented in the body of their cube all the feelings they extracted from the story, the emotions they experienced as the story unfolded.

## **22. The statue:**

Exercise to be done in pairs: one plays the part of the sculptor, the other of the block of clay to be modelled. A facilitator gives a theme, and the sculptor must be able to impress his own idea in the clay block.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **23. Change small body language to create big effects:**

Part of being an amazing improviser is becoming a body language expert!

How much do you blink? How many gestures do you make? Are they fast or slow? Do you speak more to one person than another? How quickly do you reply when asked a question? Do you laugh a lot? Are you quiet or do you talk a lot? Do you smile much? Do you have straight posture or do you slouch? Do you pace the floor or stand still?

What's more, if you change one you're likely to change several. Change your posture and you're likely to change your eye contact and speed of movement. Change how much you blink and you may move around more.

Pick one specific piece of body language and focus on that. Find out what else changes. Discover what effect that creates.

*Small things can carry a big impact!*

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## **24. Move the story forward:**

Often, scenes get locked up with people bickering, talking, gossiping -- avoiding any kind of interesting action.

Move the story forward before that happens. Find a dead body, meet a ghost, discover a secret about your lover. Threaten, search, seduce... anything that moves things forward!

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## **25. Sequence pictures:**

The technique uses a series of fragments of a picture put together to express specific emotions or values that each fragment represents. It needs to be noted that the sequence can be chosen orderly or sometimes randomly for a more powerful effect and emphasis on the aimed value.



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## **26. Stories Brainstorming:**

Working with mixed groups of children, the storm of ideas- words was used, expressing feelings such as friendship, feelings of injustice-justice, loyalty, honesty, solidarity, so that the children could interpret and understand the concepts.

## **27. ChatterPix dialogues:**

The students create the puppets and then they used ChatterPix application to voice the puppets with lines from the stories. They recorded their own voices and used them in this application.



# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **28. Record and express:**

The students are free to create their own version of story and start improvising it through recordings. Through this procedure the students don't follow the stories plot but they create their own on the spot communicate with each other and collaborate together.

## **29. Characters Creation:**

Allowing the students to use equipment and design their own character is also great. This way they are able to identify themselves with it and personalize.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **30. Change Space:**

Some people talk and move slow all the time. Some people talk a mile a minute and gesture wildly -- all the time!

If you want to portray different characters and personalities, you'd better be able to change your pace! It's one of the simplest, easiest ways to convey a new character.

Simply having a different pace than your scene partner can make for great humor and delight an audience.

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## **31. Make your own version:**

Students using the Gibberish technique created their own story and started the narration to their classmates using non usual words. This exercise cultivated the emotions of the students trying to understand what he said. This procedure created strong bonds between the teams.

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## **32. Poems:**

Make up poems starting from the stories, and express your while practicing the visual and gestures exercises.

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## **33. Creativity Matters:**

Allowing the students to be creative by creating their own visual presentation, also allows them to find photos they think represents the values.

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## **34. Dream Collage:**

We explore the convention: 'I am Robin's friend and I fall asleep in the forest! What dream am I having?' Preceded by a brainstorming session about the emotions, colours, faces, animals, and place of the dream. Thus, through collage and discussion, children express their own version by positioning themselves as the hero of the fairy tale.

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## **35. Modeling clay characters:**

As the teacher reads the story / excerpt from the story, students model the characters they notice, then place them according to their feelings.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **36. Collage on paper and cardboard:**

The students choose the value of friendship and extracted specific aspects from the story that they considered important for the idea of friendship.

## **37. Replica drawing:**

The students try to represent as accurately as possible the original representation of the story, following the same idea, colours, background and general message of the story.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **38.Fingerprint Project:**

Students were invited to put their fingerprints around the words - 'We Are Salle'. The aim was to build a sense of inclusivity and belonging. Materials: ink and paper.

## **39.Body statues:**

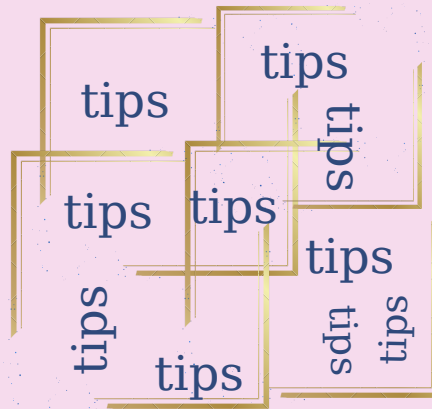
The students use their own bodies and facial expressions to show fear, courage, tolerance, friendship, and other values they considered important from the stories they read.

## **40.Disturbed Reading:**

The exercise consists of reading a text and someone tries to disturb the reading by speaking over it.

## **41.Unleash your Creativity:**

Promote creativity and imagination through the construction of improvised puppets for puppetry with the heroes of the story.



## **42.Pairs Work:**

When working in pairs, make sure to pair with competences that can help boost confidence and creativity in mind - ensures that they have different skill sets and interests.

## **43.The Role Play:**

Development of cooperation and writing skills through the design of the main character on cardboard and the recording of adjectives that characterize him/her as well as values that are projected through the story. Each student described and acted the main character in a different way.

## **44.Freedom:**

It works great if they are told not to use words or sounds, but only use their bodies to improvise the stories. This gives them a challenge, but also a greater understanding for communication without words and its benefits.

## **45.A setting in the classroom:**

It is important to create a setting in the classroom, where no student feels uncomfortable or is made fun of for these activities, as for some students it might be out of their comfort zone.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **46. Get props!**

Improv is amazing because you can have a blank stage, or no stage at all, and create entertaining theatre.

That doesn't mean you have to, though!

What if you acquired a whole bunch of props you can use? It can open up doors to more invention and creativity than is possible if you have no props whatsoever. You don't need a magical sofa, but some costumes and props can add variety and possibilities to your improv.

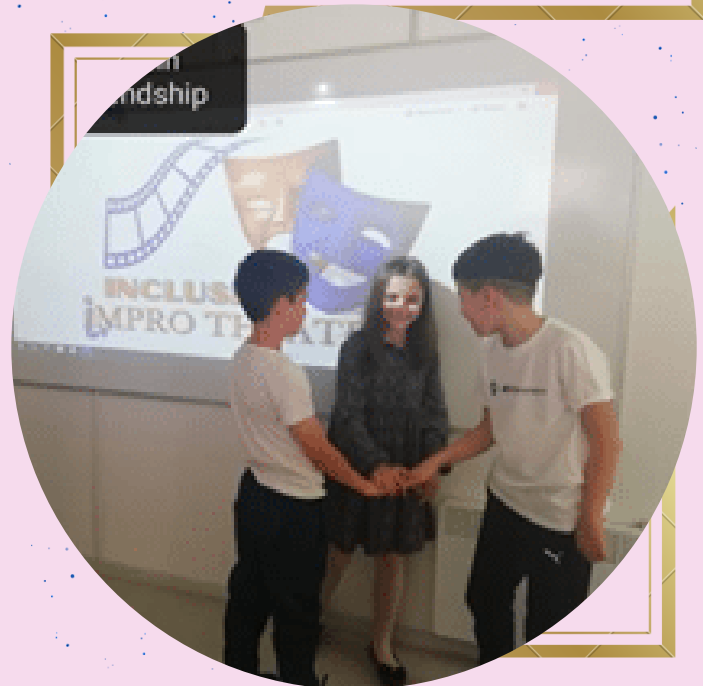
## **47. Use your body!:**

Ever notice the talking head syndrome? That's where a scene starts and each person's mouth is the only thing moving.

"Blah, blah, blah!"

Stop it!

Use your body! Move! Make some blind offers. Touch. Get on the floor. Move around the room. Crawl. Sit. Stand. Roll over. Play dead! Whatever, anything but standing around blabbing!



# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **48. Mimical expression:**

The classic exercise of mime: participants are given a theme on which they have to improvise a scene without being able to use words, but only expressions and gestures.

## **49. Under Pressure:**

Under time pressure, it works better that the students will receive the equipment (photos e.g.) and spend more time on creating their storyline. This way they can focus only on the improvisation, expressions, and creativity of the visuals, instead of the materials.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **50. Draw your Imagination:**

It is the first and most immediate reaction of children, whose imagination, stimulated by hearing the story, is directly and effortlessly expressed, and captured on paper with their everyday drawing tools. Children feel free to express their emotions and their imagination by depicting the heroes of the stories as they wish.

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## **51. The Mirror:**

Two actors stare into each other's eyes and try to anticipate each other's moves, exactly as if it were a reflection in the mirror. Everything must be imitated: from movements to facial expressions.

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## **52. Digital design:**

Use digital applications to represent the most important ideas from your favourite stories. Redrew the important paintings by means of Paint or Photoshop.

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## **53. Improvised dialogues:**

Represent a character or a group, give the feelings, emotions and values that the scene needs to depict and improvise the lines (the questions, the answers, the arguments).

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## **54. Thought Detection:**

By giving the children a central story or theme, they are left free to express the story with their body movements while the other members of the group try to identify what the child doing body improvisation is thinking.

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## **55. Make emotional sounds. Ummm hmmm...**

In real life people go, "Ah! Oh! Hmmm. Oops! Argh! Ohhhh! Ummm hmmm!"

We make all kinds of noises without noticing it. And, once we go on stage and get nervous, we go into talking-head mode. We don't make our normal expressive noises.

So, try adding some emotional noises to your scenes and find out what happens! Even if it feels unnatural at first.



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## **56. Sign messages:**

Use sign language to send each other messages of love, happiness, tolerance. Create a “mute” dialogue in which some students write the lines and there is also a translator- the one voicing the lines for the others.

## **57. Mix different kinds of scenes and games:**

Make sure that you create enough variety in how you create a show to keep people interested -- including you.

If you've been doing the same types of games and scenes so often that you've lost your excitement, change them. Try something new!

Mix up scenes with two people, three people, six people, or even just one person.

Bring up audience members. Take suggestions and then don't. Play something funny, then something serious. Do talking scenes and quiet scenes.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **58.Literacy Production:**

Using the text of a story as a starting point, the children explored and played with word patterns that resulted in the creation of literacy and new version of the story, using new words and created values.

## **61.Mutilated Improvisation:**

A theme and a body penalty are provided (e.g., a leg cannot be used): the actors must interpret the scene without being able to use that part of the body from start to finish.

## **63.The improvisation match:**

Students, divided into teams (for example, girls versus boys) will draw a note on which a value of the story is written. In turn, they will gesture, using eurythmy, what is written on the ticket. A judge will decide which team wins.

## **59.Dramatized your opinion:**

Express your opinion on topic of values and separated in teams express it through their body, using different moves, feelings and through expression.

## **60.Frozen Image:**

Try to create frozen images using the stories to express the feelings and roles of the main characters. This motivates students to act and express their feelings quickly.

## **62.Body paint:**

Paint your faces and bodies in colours representing fear or happiness, or courage. Make a rainbow out of the emotions extracted from the stories. The bodies are the canvas for the stories' photo album of emotions.

## **64.Free Improvisation:**

The classic exercise of theatrical improvisation: participants must use the body, space, and objects to reproduce a scene.

## **65.Feel Improvisation:**

Use a specific story, created a catalogue of the heroes' feelings. This exercise is a warmup aiming to motivate students to start express their feelings through their body movements and expressions without speaking.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **66. Practice not advancing:**

This can be a very humorous tool...

Imagine you're about to open the fridge door. It's stuck. You pull harder. It's still stuck. You get someone to help you pull. It won't budge. You try a rope and pulley system. Nope! You grab a gun and shoot the door. No luck! You get some dynamite and try to blow it open! Damn this fridge!

That's the act of staying with one activity. You're not advancing into another action. You stay with the action of trying to open the fridge. You try a dozen different ways and it gets more interesting the more you try!

## **67. The moto creation:**

Use a story and create a moto of it in cooperation with children.

Let the children explain the moto and see how many versions of explanations can be occurred. Without barriers and giving them the freedom to use any word they want the children in the workshops created the moto "Sharing is caring".



# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **68. Mess up!**

Any time you try to "do your best" is usually when you'll limit yourself. You'll edit-edit-edit!

Instead, try to do really bad. Bad! BAD!

People always, always let out a lot of energy that's normally pent up by trying to be perfect. Everybody has more fun - they become more creative, expressive and enjoyable. Plus, by doing "the wrong things," you learn to recognize when you're doing them! It's hard not to do what you don't notice that you're doing.

Feel the freedom of doing it wrong!

## **69. Puppet creator:**

Make the puppets impersonating their favourite characters. Be encouraged to build the puppets' bodies and faces as creative as possible, thinking of their inner qualities or flaws, the unique way each student understood the characters' voice.





# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **70. Play with how you move:**

How you move says volumes about you before you say a word! You walk, gesture, sit, and stand in a way particular to you.

Just look at your walk. How quickly or slowly do you walk? What parts of your body swing and move as you walk? Where is your body bound up and immobile? Where do you look and focus as you walk?

If you normally walk fast, try moving slowly. If you normally walk in a relaxed loose way, try being tight and bound. If you normally swing your arms, try keeping them still.

This will do more than create a different impression on the audience and make you look more interesting in scenes. It will actually change what you say and how you respond to others.

How we move is who we are -- try changing it!

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## **71. Utilize "relationship driven" vs. "action driven" scenes:**

A relationship driven scene is interesting because of the dynamics between the characters. (It can be a scene with just one person and still be about the person's relationship with themselves or the people they describe).

An action driven scene is about what happens. Someone discovers a body, they try to hide it, someone starts shooting at them, they are pulled into a seedy underworld of lies, lust and revenge.

A scene or story can contain elements of both. It's useful to aim for one, or to notice where it's naturally going and put the emphasis there. You'll notice that any book, play or Hollywood movie may be more focused on action (most of them) or on character and relationships.

Often it's the relationship driven stories that move us most.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **72. Forget being funny:**

The more you focus on being funny, the more you'll become driven by a need to please others. You'll lose your spontaneity and become nothing more than a mere slave to the whims of laughter. You may notice how a lot of comedians tend to not be so happy in their real lives.

Laughter is one of those things that tends to be as fickle as love. The more you try to force it, the more it moves away.

Focusing on anything else at all is will be more productive.

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## **73. Try being incongruent:**

In real life, people say one thing verbally while their body language says something entirely different. It happens all the time.

On stage, people often are more congruent. Someone is supposed to seduce another person and they just come out and say it and their body language totally matches. In real life, that person might not say anything directly. They may fear rejection, they may not be allowed to seduce them because of a working relationship. Whatever!

There are a lots of things like that. Maybe you don't like someone, but you're in a situation where you have to be polite to them. You can't just say, "I think you're a creep!" But your body language brings the idea across. Subtly.

This can be incredibly interesting to an audience!

Rather than being direct in your attitudes, desires and beliefs -- try to hide them. Resist the idea verbally while giving in physically or vice versa. Say, "No, we can't!" While physically you move closer to the person you desire so badly. It's hot stuff!

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## **74. Avoid too many questions?**

We often ask questions as a way to avoid adding anything ourselves. We do it as a way to make the other person do the creating. We want them to contribute the ideas. Then, we may even block those ideas we asked for!

Try doing scenes without asking any questions and find out what happens. Make more statements. Make demands! It's likely they'll be more active and you'll put yourself more on the line.



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# IMPROVISATION TIPS

## **75. Learn to use eye contact:**

Eye contact is one aspect of body language and it has an incredible impact.

The first step is becoming aware of eye contact. Use it as a means to convey a message about who you are and what your relationship is to the other person.

Do you make strong eye contact? Do you look away a lot? Do you blink a lot? Do you look more at one person than another? What does that say about you?

Plus, if you're interacting with an audience, learn to make eye contact with everyone in a way that makes them feel seen.

Has someone ever looked at you in a way where you felt they didn't really see you? You need to learn a combination of eye contact and facial expression to make whoever you're looking at feel acknowledged.

And, you need to do that with the entire audience. If you only look at certain people or certain parts of the audience, the people you ignore will feel weird and ignored.

## **76. Just die!**

There are certain things a lot of improvisers just won't do. Like dying.

That's because they would be out of the scene. Leave the scene before it's over? Never!

In fact, any strong action: dying, breaking up, killing, or firing someone is likely to be put off as long as possible. The improvisers are told one of them has to die in the scene. Minutes go by and they're making veiled threats. Hours pass. Night falls and soon the sun starts to rise in the east. Everyone is alive.

As in life, you have to take a strong action. It may seem like drawing it out adds drama. No, it adds time. It adds talking. It adds boredom. Rarely does it add drama. That's because it's an escape from the unknown. It's an escape from the irreversible. It's taking a strong stand.

Rather than beating around the bush, just hurry up and get it out of the way. Then, find out how it plays out. It's scary. Fear is interesting.



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## **77. Create a tilt:**

A tilt is when you take the happy world that's been created and you turn it on its head!

- You're talking to your loving wife and discover she's been having an affair...
- You're talking to your son and discover he died and he's asking you to avenge his murder...
- You're in the arms of your lover who reveals that he's a werewolf...

Once you tilt the scene, it becomes tremendously interesting to find out what happens next!

## **78. Include the audience:**

Get the audience involved in as many ways as you can think of:

- Personal suggestions from their lives: breakups, how they met, life changing decisions...
- Borrow objects from them.
- Have them assist in games.
- Put them on the line (if you fail a challenge, they're the ones who suffer some horrible fate!)
- Interact with them during scenes and games.
- Have them sing or do special effects noises.
- Make a group of them into a committee.



# IMPROVISATION TIPS



## **79. For serious and emotional scenes, focus on characters and relationships:**

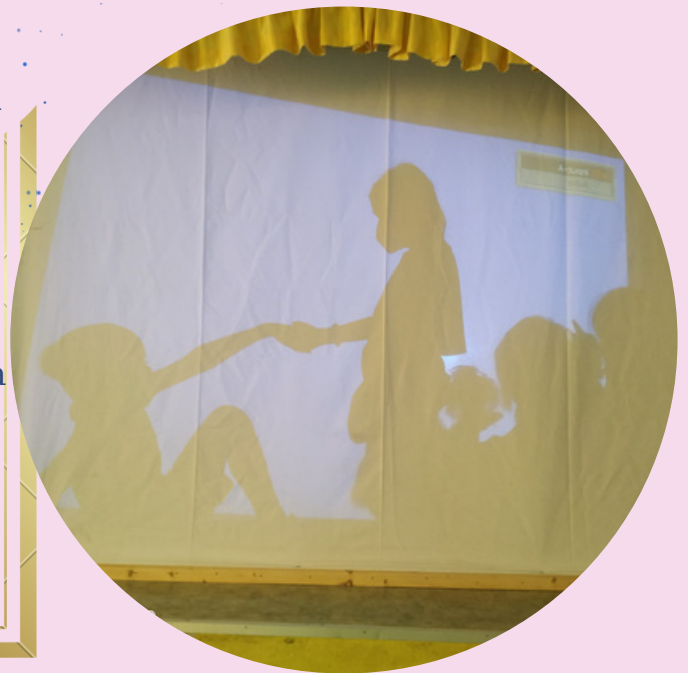
A long form improv set should contain a variety of scenes. Some scenes will be emotional, some will be tense, and some should be funny. The easiest way to make a scene serious is by focusing on the relationship of those on the stage (their characters).

Other ways to make a scene dramatic is to hold a moment, use the silence, and focus on the shifting emotional points that emerge as a scene unfolds.

## **80. Say "Yes'and!"**

For a story to be built, whether it is short form or long form, the players have to agree to the basic situation and set-up. The who, what, and where have to be developed for a scene to work.

By saying yes, we accept the reality created by our partners and begin the collaborative process from the start of a scene. The collaborative process or group mind helps make us giants, animals, villains, saints and more importantly put us in situations that we would normally avoid.





# CONCLUSIONS

The children enjoyed the process and the workshops in general, as well as new techniques occurred through the planning and implementation process of the workshops under the three different headings, body, verbal, and visual expression.

The team members and teachers were very happy as they noticed that through this procedure the children became more familiar with the meaning of values and their importance in everyday life.

After the completion of the project an assessment procedure conducted, and it occurred that the children's behaviour changes after working together.

*"The students who had the exclusion feeling participated very actively to the activities, creating strong bonds with the other students"*

The workshops proved to be an effective tool for putting into practice some of the themes of the stories, such as **respect** for others, **collaboration** and **problem-solving**.

The children actively participated and proved to be reactive and enthusiastic. The interesting fact was seeing the class act with commitment and team spirit and the workshops were also an opportunity to cement the group dynamics among the students.

All the improvisation techniques implemented are the result of study and rigorous preparation: some exercises (such as grammelot or mutilated improvisation) put a strain on the children, who did not give up in any case and carried out the exercises with determination and good will.



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# CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusion and feedback from teacher and students has been that all activities were fun and great learning for everyone. Some of the stories might be a bit too complex, especially when having to both focus on values and the characters/plays from the stories.

However, the students confirmed that ***impro is a great way to explore their own creativity***, whilst still allowing them to express their feelings and important concepts for their everyday life. The activities seemed to work best, when the students could combine the values from the stories with modern technology and their own personal interests.

It is also giving every student an opportunity to shine in their own way, as no activity had the same focus or required the same strong competences. This meant that for some of the activities it was not the "strongest" students who performed the best, as others who were more creative or spontaneous understood the assignments better and vice versa.

***"The world is a slightly better place for having improvisation in it than it was before. There's something about it that says something positive about the human spirit, that a bunch of people can get together and by following a few simple traffic rules can create art and can entertain an audience and can thrill and exalt each other"***

**DEL CLOSE**



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# INCLUSIVE IMPRO THEATRE

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