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Spontaneity in acting | Guidelines for the use of improvisation

Lester Harvey Hankinson

The University of Montana

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SPONTANEITY IN ACTING:
GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF IMPROVISATION

by

Lester Harvey Hanshaw

B. A., University of Montana, 1965

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1968

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Date
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PREFACE

In the training of the actor a variety of techniques must be imparted. An actor must be instructed in the use of correct diction, precise movement, emotional development, characterization and the technical demands of the stage. All this can be learned through improvisation. But the development of this complex art is not sufficiently understood to be implemented in many acting programs. The potentialities of improvisation as a means of teaching acting must become known before instructors will include improvisation as part of the acting course. It is the purpose of this study to collect widely scattered information that has been previously written about improvisation and creative dramatics, examine it collectively, and set down some form for teaching the art. Before one can begin teaching improvisation it is necessary to know what improvisation is. This study explains what happens when a student improvises in the group situation. It explains the values and aspects of improvisation. It also offers some theory necessary for beginning and developing a workshop in which improvisation may be practiced. As well, it suggests improvisational exercises which could be used in a workshop session and the results which could be expected from the exercises.

The format for the exercises developed from a workshop session lasting for six weeks (33 sessions) during which ten participants chosen at random from students of drama and a leader met and conducted experiments in improvisation which intended to show that techniques of improvisation can be used to teach college
students to act. The area used for the improvisation sessions was an open room and a two-sided semi-arena theater. From this workshop laboratory guidelines for the use of improvisation grew.

From the exercises the students were able to develop greater awareness, sensitivity, freedom and self-confidence that comes from the knowledge that everyone is a unique individual with a valuable role to play.

Perhaps the realization of the freedom and openness which develops from improvisation is the most important lesson. The movement, freedom and openness which happens during improvisation leaves the student most able to learn from the experience. What the actor masters here is ingested organically and maintained by him in the total acting performance.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am indebted to the students who gave their time and energy to this project. They gave much of themselves and told secrets about themselves they thought would never be known. Without their enthusiasm and initiative and even, at times, their reluctance, there would have been no progress or development. What was learned arose through the group endeavor. The students are Jerry Charlson, Suzanne Cook, Colleen Curry, Terri Doremus, Lynda Eaton, Mike Minor, Frances Morrow, Susan Redfield, Dick Russell, William Shryock and Rick Stokes.
SPONTANEITY

Without direction or force,
Without stimulus external,
Without plan or push,
Without involuntary sensation;
One moves.

In each situation, each event,
In individual happening,
In single incident, single occurrence,
In separate impromptus;
One improvises.

By freeing one's imagination,
By eliminating constraints,
By responding without preconceptions,
By employing internal motivations;
One acts.

Out of intuitive feeling,
Out of instants within,
Out of non-durational moments,
Out of brief thought;
One extemporizes.

And from these unguided human undertakings, quick, natural;
From these volitional, instant reflexes;
From these unfettered, real moments of free action;
From these flashes of unshackled, unconstrained motion;
One practices Spontaneity.

-- William Campbell Wallace

Missoula, Montana
Spring, 1968
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO IMPROVISATION

Even before Scheherazade improvised for a thousand and one nights to save her skin, the techniques she used had been in effect for a long time. Improvisation has a long history, as long as the history of man himself, ranging from primitive ritual to present-day "happenings." All art forms have begun with improvisations, and the early narrative epics like the Odyssey and the Iliad began as improvised story-telling. Song and dance and early dramatic ritual took more formal shape after long periods of improvisation. Improvisation has continued to be employed in comedy and in nomadic entertainment with notable periods, such as Greek and Roman comedy and Italian commedia dell'arte. And today improvisation has found its way into a wide variety of aspects in our lives: it is employed in production in the theater, in training programs for actors, in business and vocational courses, in the training of teachers, in psychotherapy and in many facets of education.

Improvisation is really an extension of human beings. This study will concentrate on improvisation as it applies to acting. But if we see acting as a central activity in the understanding of life, whether this is pursued professionally for the theater or primarily as a means of education, and if we see the central activity of acting as improvisation, then what is learned through improvisation can also be applied to a better understanding of life.
A study of improvisation is important to everyone concerned with education and the lives of young people interested in finding a career in theater. For those interested in theater the examination of the psychology of acting is an area which deserves much more research.

Improvisation teaches that the most important lessons are that the values in human life consist of awareness; sensitivity; freedom; and the self-confidence that comes from the knowledge that every one is a unique individual with a valuable role to play if he can become himself enough to find it and accept it. Sensitivity, awareness, freedom and self-confidence are such an intricate part of the success of improvisation that if they are not developed then the use of improvisation has failed.

Experience is penetration into the environment, total organic involvement with it. This means involvement at all levels; intellectual, physical and intuitive. Of the three, the intuitive, most vital to the learning situation, is neglected.

When compared with many other mental functions, such as intelligence and memory, the sense for spontaneity is seen to be far less developed. This may perhaps be so because, in the civilization of conserves which we have developed, spontaneity is far less used and trained than, for instance, intelligence and memory. The sense of spontaneity, as a cerebral function, shows a more rudimentary development than any other fundamental function of the central nervous system.¹

"It became evident, after testing hundreds of individuals, that the talent for spontaneity is rare and undeveloped; that the spontaneity of an individual was for tasks unknown in advance not dependable and unpredictable as to their adequacy."²


² Ibid., p. 6.
Intuition is often thought to be an endowment of a mystical force enjoyed by the gifted alone. Yet all of us have known moments when the right answer "just came" or we did "exactly the right thing without thinking." Sometimes at such moments usually precipitated by crisis, danger or shock, the average person has been known to transcend the limitation of the familiar, courageously enter the area of the unknown and release momentary genius within himself.

Because there is more freedom there can be an increased amount of self-involvement. In this process the motivation supplies a stimulation that causes the self to respond and set up an inner action that finally results in the individual's unique response. The problem or situation that sets this process in action should be so structured that the boundaries are flexible and the individual is free to respond. Improvisation, if used wisely, can be a valuable means of furthering creative development. The movement activity that follows from improvisation is characterized by a spontaneity that is almost childlike in its naturalness. The imaginative power is at work. Actions go easily and each new action sets off another one, which extends and expands the experience.3

The intuitive can only respond in immediacy —right now. It comes in the moment of spontaneity, the moment when we are freed to relate and act, involve ourselves in the moving changing world around us.

Spontaneity appears to be the oldest phylogenetic factor which enters human behavior, certainly older than memory, intelligence or sensuality. It is an embryonic stage of development but it has unlimited potentialities for training. Because it can be tapped directly by Man himself.4

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Man needs to be educated, but education means here more than mere intellectual enlightenment; it isn't a matter of deficiency or man's intelligence only and it is more than a matter of emotional enlightenment; it isn't a matter of insight only, it is rather a matter of the deficiency of spontaneity to use the available intelligence and to mobilize his enlightened emotions.5

Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it, and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression.

Creativity through improvisation has sometimes been referred to as the "flight into the unknown." It is the time when the creator (sic) draws upon stored images and brings forth new ones. Throughout this experience the creator is selecting, differentiating, contrasting, in the process of achieving integration and unity. From the improvisation experience comes a new awareness of the expressive nature of movement and of the integrity and rightness of the movement when you "let it happen" rather than arrange it. Perhaps the most amazing result of the individual is the realization that he invented and moved in a way that he thought was beyond his capacity. Again and again this type of experience seems to have the power to carry the individual beyond his usual level of performance.6

How does all this apply to acting? First, we must try to decide what acting is.

Acting is an interpretation, an impersonation of aspects of the human situation. It may involve playing the role of another person or it may require the imagined response of one's own person to a mood or set of circumstances. In either case, the qualities needed for the best acting are also those qualities required for the fullest living.7

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5 Ibid., p. 10.


Both involve coming to terms with one's self, coming to terms with one's physical environment, and learning how to manage relationships with other people. In all aspects of his being the actor needs to be sensitively tuned to be able to respond to whomever or whatever he encounters --and his responses must be within his control.

This understanding takes place on a mental and imaginative level, but if his acting is to portray the situation with truth, he will have to understand with his whole being.

True acting may be larger than life, it may be smaller than life, it may be very well rehearsed or may be completely unrehearsed: the important thing always is for it to evoke our acceptance of it as valid at the time of its enactment.

An actor's training, therefore, cannot be confined to the isolated techniques of voice and body, but must give considerable emphasis to the discovery of ways of creating those qualities which can be identified with life and of evoking a true response. His training would also need to include a development of his ability to interpret the life around him and of associating with the life of a given test. All this he will need to learn to coordinate within himself and with the theater group.

Improvisation offers the actor a place where he can learn not only technique but also freedom. Through situations in which we have to improvise we can be made to draw on our own resources --to think out basic principles. We are not able to fall back on other people telling us, nor can we find instructions precise enough to cover a particular set of circumstances.
At every moment throughout our lives we are having to adjust to whatever happens around us. The more unexpected the happening, the more spontaneous and frank the response is likely to be. Because people are less predictable than things, we are more often called upon to adjust to what is said and done by others in a way which we cannot easily plan. If we are open and receptive, we can make discoveries both about ourselves and from these moments. If we are less receptive, the tendency will be to reproduce what we consider to be socially accepted response and these become standardized and stereotyped.

A good improvisation experience is accompanied by satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment that is difficult to put into words. At the end of the experience, or during a fleeting moment within the experience, the creator feels a great sense of joy, a kind of ecstasy. Suddenly everything seems integrated, and he senses a unity that is profoundly satisfying. Fleeting or lasting, such an experience is fulfilling and contributes to the important prospect of self-actualization as well as the development in creativity.8

Improvisation in the education of the actor is an attempt to make the techniques of acting so intuitive that they become the student's own. To achieve this requires an environment in which experiencing can take place, a person free to experience, a leader capable of guiding the experience, and an activity which brings out spontaneity which may lead the actor to new dimensions of existence.

When God created the world in six days he had stopped a day too early. He had given Man a place to live but in order to make it safe for him he also chained him to that place. On the seventh day he should have created for Man a second world, another one, free of the first world and in which he could purge himself from it, but a world which would not chain anyone because it was not real.

It is here where the theater of spontaneity continues God's creation of the world by opening for Man a new dimension of existence.\(^9\)

The end result of this study, then, is to provide a charted course that will provide such an activity. The goal is a creative experience in which the student can find personal freedom, where the intuitive can emerge and experiencing can take place.

CHAPTER II

AIMS AND VALUES OF IMPROVISATION

Once an understanding of improvisation is attained one should also be apprised of the aims and values if the art is to be understood completely. Improvisation is informal drama which exists primarily for the enjoyment and benefit of the players themselves. The precise and objective measurement received by students from participation in this art is a difficult and complex process. At the present there is little in the way of exact research to substantiate the belief in the values received. However, over a period of years creative dramatics teachers and leaders in the field of improvisation have reached certain conclusions about the values of improvisation to the individual. These conclusions have come as the result of having observed students in class and of having considered evaluations of other teachers and the participants themselves.

"In the early stages of dramatic improvisation it is usual to encounter self-consciousness and embarrassment. This is largely because we are overcome with shyness at being asked to respond in an imaginative world."¹ The first aim of improvisation, then, is to release tension and the best way of doing that is to develop powers of concentration. The purpose will be to enable the members of the groups to become absorbed in the activity they are pursuing instead of being concerned with themselves undertaking the activity.

Linked closely with absorption is a sharpening of the powers of observation. This means not only looking with a keener eye but listening with a keener ear and responding with keener sense all round, including feeling with greater sensitivity. "A creative person is one who is sensitive to the world in which he lives. He responds with keen awareness to sights, sounds, textures, scents and the thoughts and feelings of others." Leaders of improvisation and creative dramatics find many opportunities to guide students to develop sensitivity. When students come together in improvised drama, they are called upon to listen and respond sensitively to others. When they study the motivations and feelings of the characters whom they play, they acquire an understanding of people which contributes to their becoming sensitive, sympathetic individuals. Sikis writes concerning creative dramatics and sensitivity: "Creative dramatics stimulates a child's awareness. It causes him to learn, to look, and listen, and from this, to see, hear and feel. It strengthens his sensibilities and builds a receptiveness to the world around him --to the world of people, nature, things-- to moods, beauties, wonderings." This process begun, it is easier to reinstate the work of the imagination. Every one of us has a keen imagination in early childhood, but the structure of our society and relationships tends to make us feel less happy about it. Gradually we become anxious to suppress it or hide it until finally the power is lost altogether.

Yet imagination is a quality more than ever required in this era of increasing activity and advancement.

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3Ibid., p. 37.
Every kind of development must have some imagination. In the home it is desirable for decoration, the buying of furniture, preparation of food; we need it in the purchase of our clothes and even in the organization of our holidays and leisure time. Every development in industry requires some degree of imagination. It is required more and more in building and architecture, technical improvements and throughout community life. Imagination can enrich the existence of all on an industrial, technical, social, and personal plane, and acting aids imaginative growth.4

Teachers of creative dramatics recognize in this art one means of preserving in individuals the creative spark which is their natural endowment. Those who have observed children of preschool and kindergarten age have seen this irrepressible creative spirit which is evident in their freedom to do, to make, to be.

"When a child makes his entrance into the world, he comes with a gift of imagination, with the power to create, and a desire to express himself."5

Too often in older children this power has dwindled into timidity in undertaking a new venture, inhibited expression which is uncomfortable without patterns to follow, self-consciousness which leads to such things as exhibitionism or withdrawing. Ruth Sawyer says,

Midway in childhood something begins to happen. There must be adjustment to a factual material world. Children begin to conform. Adults help the process along, that adjustment may be made as swift and resistless as possible. Children's minds are railroads from this station to that, all plainly marked on the map called Education. That space so boundless in babyhood, that heavenly pasture for play and joy unbounded, becomes narrowed down with each year, each grade, until it becomes no wider than your thumb.6


Opportunities for experience in creative dramatics and improvisation under skilled and sensitive leadership may help overcome some of the narrowing of which Ruth Sawyer speaks.

Winifred Ward says, "There is no school activity which gives better opportunity for creativity than playmaking." She lists as an important value of creative dramatics "to encourage and guide the child's creative imagination," and stresses the point that the imagination must be constantly exercised "if the individual is to become a creative thinker." In a discussion of creative dramatics values Geraldine Siks asserts that creative dramatics "develops confidence and creative expression." Isabel Burger lists "an active creative imagination" as an outgrowth of improvisation. Each of these teachers and many others have recorded moments of true creative expression from students in their classes -- those moments when individuals lost themselves in complete concentration of an idea and experienced the freedom to express without self-consciousness the thoughts, the feelings, the beliefs which come from deep within themselves.

If this can happen in children with their limited experience, then in older students the spontaneity should be even greater because of their greater depth of experience if they can return to the freedom they knew as children. The effect of

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8 Ibid., p. 6


Improvisation on older students and the development of imagination is summed up by Robert G. Newton in his booklet, *Exercise Improvisation*:

The role that improvisation plays in the encouraging and deepening of acting is, amongst other attributes, its ability to lubricate the imagination; thereby enabling it to become creative. This lubrication counteracts the many manifestations of self-consciousness that comes between an actor and his job —the creation of character. The very words on a printed page can, for instance, be a barrier, should their ready association with the chore of learning numb an awareness that words are symbols for what human beings feel and think . . . Improvisation, because it helps to release the promptings of the imagination, can induce in an actor sufficient unself-conscious freedom to enable him to express imagined feelings. From the truthful expression of imagined feeling he can proceed to the expression of imagined character; the difference between the two being roughly that in the first instance he is concerned with his own feelings and in the second with those of another person. It is hardly necessary to add that, if the maximum use is to be made of improvisation, it should be practised with the maximum of relaxation on the part of all concerned. 11

Improvisation trains people to think. It aims at the inculcation of clear mental habits and the training of the expression of these thoughts in a concise and orderly way. Because it places people in a human situation involving other people, it calls for fairly quick thinking and at times for different levels of thought simultaneously. Decisions have to be made by the individual in the situation, but because it is an experimental situation, he can learn by his errors or adjust to the utilization of his mistakes.

"A creative person is flexible in his thinking and doing." This attribute requires a kind of thinking which can adapt to change, can redirect its


course. Spontaneous, improvised drama which comes from a group playing together, taking a basic idea and developing it as they play, demands that they constantly adapt their thinking to the suggestions and direction of other individuals. The agility in thinking --the ability to seize upon a new idea and use it to progress to another-- which can be observed in a group of students playing together this way is amazing and rewarding. They are acquiring a flexibility which Viktor Lowenfeld tells us will contribute toward their being creative people. 13

Thinking can lead to expression of thoughts, but it can also show the wisdom of silence. As understanding develops the students become more aware of the contribution and interest of others, and so they learn the value of listening and of giving themselves through listening. In improvisation another dimension in acting becomes clear. Acting is not only moving or talking and reacting mechanically at a given cue, but also becomes more of a living response arrived at from a continuous thought pattern.

Most of the aims so far mentioned seem desirable in any form of artistic or general training, but improvisation aims to combine these with a development and training of the emotions. If anyone is to live and respond fully, he needs to

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As a result of a seven-year study, Viktor Lowenfeld and his associates in the Art Education Department, Pennsylvania State University, have determined eight criteria of creativity which significantly differentiate creative from less creative persons. The eight criteria are sensitivity to problems, fluency of ideas, flexibility, originality, redefinition and the ability to rearrange, analysis, or the ability to abstract, synthesis and closure, coherence of organization.
know both how and why his feelings work as they do. Yet the only way we are going to come to any grasp of emotions in the living situation is to be aware of them under experimental and imaginative conditions. Everyone is expected to love and be loved, but there is never any opportunity of preparing yourself to find out about love until you are in the actual situation. You must also know what it is to hate. You need to know what happens when you get angry, what it is like to be sensitive and to show sensitivity. These can be explored in a controlled situation which will help you to understand how this neglected aspect of your being works in relation to the whole person. It is no good leaving this part of your development to chance simply because it is difficult or little known. Improvisation is attempting to provide a training in getting on with other people and gaining some understanding of what happens in a breakdown of relationships.

There is much that creative dramatics and improvisation can do for children in addition to developing creativity. Ward emphasizes the value of controlled emotional outlet\(^\text{14}\) while Sikss speaks of developing emotional stability. Ward says, "Better than any other school experience, the arts offer opportunities for channeling emotions into constructive uses."\(^\text{15}\) The activity may be free rhythmic movement with physical response to varying moods of music and ideas which release tensions otherwise suppressed or expressed by means of irritation and unpleasant actions; or it may be participation in a dramatic conflict through


\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 4.
which the child finds legitimate release for antagonisms or for the vicarious and elevated spirits. Through the emotion of drama he may discover the dignity of sorrow, the strength in power, the warmth in sympathy, and the freedom in joy as well as the degradation in hate and greed.

All creative dramatics authorities assert that participation in improvisation can have a therapeutic effect, and all leaders have seen individuals and groups move toward more stable emotional and mental health through participation in creative drama. Although Lowenfeld was writing specifically on the graphic arts, what he has to say applies equally well to this form of dramatic art. He says, "Because perceiving, thinking, and feeling are equally stressed in any creative process, art may well be the necessary balance for the child's intellect and his emotions."16

All this develops our understanding, helping us not only to experience but to see this experience in relation to other things and other people. Fears and insecurities are the result of, or conditioned by, lacking of understanding, so that the more we can discover why this human situation takes place or how we can deal with another situation, the more we can live confidently. Understanding of this kind involves not only the mind but the whole personality, seeking to bring greater insight into the whole of the human situation.

Understanding is taking place on a dual plane for at the same time as we are finding out about ourselves and our personal relationships with other people we are also learning to understand others so that we can realize more fully in what ways

they are different. Improvisation is a group activity and learning within the group situation leads to a realization both of man's independence and his interdependence.

More specifically, improvised drama helps us to understand the movement of the body in relation to everything else. Part of all self-consciousness is physical, and through improvisation greater freedom and coordination of bodily movement is obtained, because the students are conscious of putting the body into imaginative situations and developing freedom in control. Another benefit is that rhythmic movement involved in every form of improvisation and through the disciplining of his body to express ideas, feeling, characters, the student acquires physical coordination, grace and poise.

Similarly, because much of the work involves us in talking, we gain confidence in a flow of intelligent speech. The use of language is extended, together with dexterity in the manner of expression. It is possible to learn the special subtleties and variations of meaning which the spoken word has over the written. This aids clearer communication and avoidance of misunderstandings. Through improvisation there is a real opportunity to come to an awareness of the difference between written and spoken communication. The use of language varies in different situations, and in the variety of the subjects of improvisation there is a chance to realize how vocabulary, word order and images vary from circumstance to circumstance.

Another value of improvisation is that certain social values are learned as a direct result of improvisational experience. To achieve success an individual must learn to work with the other members of his group. He must learn not only to express his own ideas in communicative fashion, but to listen to and appreciate
the ideas of others. He learns where he fits into a group and how he can best make a contribution. He learns to wait his turn, to share, to lead, and to follow. Peter Slade, leading exponent of creative dramatics in England, points out that through improvisation "a bond of friendship and trust between students and adults may be established." 17

Because drama is the art dealing most directly with the motivations and actions of man, the student who plays many roles gains in understanding others and in his ability to live successfully in his environment. "Experience in drama makes a student more sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others because these are the very essence of his study." 18

Through the material which is used for improvisation a leader may present high ethical and moral standards, and it is a well recognized fact among educators that ideas are deeply impressed when experienced dramatically. Hughes Mearns explains, "The fine playing of even an evil role can be done only by those who are at the same time inwardly repudiating evil. We know, if others do not, that the play better than precept establishes permanently an allegiance to the moral life." 19

Because the response takes place as the situation proceeds in all areas of improvisation, spontaneity is assured. This means that on every level there is a


18 Op. Cit., Sik, Creative Dramatics, p. 27.

freshness and honesty which is often unusual. The conventional learned response very readily leads to a rather jaded reaction, but here there is usually pleasure in the unknown.

Much of the work brings an involvement with an occupation or a concern with a person, leading to a looking beyond one’s self, so that there are great moments of surprise at what one has achieved. Individuals discover their own potential. They find they are capable of things which neither they nor others realized.

None of these values is achieved in isolation, but each one will build together, giving a true sense of security to the individual. This is a certainty which arises from a real sense of knowing, rather than remembered and unapplied facts. In a friendly atmosphere there has been a gradual ridding of tensions which become replaced by a genuine and lasting self-confidence.

Every element of personal development will aid the actor in his art. Conversely, because of the nature of acting and the dramatic experience, each extension of skill and perception in this field can aid the individual in living.

With the greater development by the individual of his observation and understanding of people, his capacity for the interpretation of a character grows and that, together with additional skill in movement and words, will lead to greater dexterity in the building of characterization. Improved concentration and a more lively imagination help him to be able to sustain a role more easily and effectively and give the capacity for retention of the imaginative truth of a situation. The actor learns to draw from himself in relation to an idea or a
dramatic text, and knows himself as a creative artist working as a member of a team.

All this work, both with and without texts, helps the person who is acting to come to an awareness of shape, not just with the intellect, but with the whole person. He comprehends that form and shape can be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways; physically and mentally he responds to rhythm as expressed in sound, in movement and in other aspects of life. From the group sensitivity and the knowledge of subtlety and variety of meaning springs a keener sense of timing and pattern.

Above all, he learns the satisfaction of working as a member of a creative team, and leaves behind any notions of mere self-display he may have had at the beginning. There is a greater sense of achievement in recognizing and developing his own potential as an individual creating with others.
CHAPTER III

ATTRIBUTES OF A LEADER

To train a student to create with others and to grow from the experience requires a leader who knows the potential of improvisational training and is able to apply this knowledge to the individual's needs and the group situation in a way which best contributes to growth.

Improvisation is a complex art. The art of developing its leaders is no less complex for the personality of the leader colors the whole picture in this art involving players, leader, space and an idea from which to create. The leader is the person organizing the session. His function is not an authoritarian one, for he is an agent who sets up conditions in which discovery can be made. It is he who has planned the overall program. He may at times want to aid confidence by taking part with the group and there will be times when he realizes the personal discoveries of the people in the group demand that he make himself particularly inconspicuous.

The leader should consider himself one of the group. In some cases where the leader is already known to everyone this may mean building a new relationship. It will, however, help the group to come to accept him as a fellow explorer, and even the conditions he sometimes sets and the questions he raises will be presented in a manner suggesting that he is interested in what people have derived from the experience or in what they feel about the work of others. He will contribute to the evaluation of exercises just as another member of the group.
Since teaching is an extension of one's own personality, we must allow for individual differences and acknowledge that there is no one way to train future leaders for improvisation. However, there are certain traits which should be evident in every leader of improvisation. First, it seems the leader must understand that the urge to create is universal and the desire to dramatize is a basic human instinct. Moreover, to whatever use improvisation will be put, in whatever situation or by whom, it is an art unique to man and "that every work of art is complete in itself and free of its material is the beginning of understanding of that art."¹

This feeling for and understanding of drama as an art comes through experiencing it as an art. In *Children's Theatre and Creative Dramatics*, Sikks outlines a program for the education of the creative dramatics leader. Her suggestions were taken into consideration in discussing the training of a leader for improvisation.² Any course for students who would be leaders must involve doing, first as a player under a leader—a leader who knows and loves and serves that art well with others whom he knows and loves. Also, training should involve seeing that same leader in action with students—to better know the art and students of all ages.

The first-hand experience can be enriched by reading text and supplementary materials on improvisation. A beginning course should involve lecture and discussion and, whenever possible, observation of formal improvisation and observation of any classes on improvisation at universities throughout the nation.


Ideally, after this period of doing, talking, listening, watching, reading, experiencing and thinking in close association with a practicing teacher, the student should attempt to be a leader, with his own classmates as the players. Thus not only does the student leader have the chance to gain experience and receive evaluation of his leadership by the group and the instructors, but each member of the class is continually experiencing in action a variety of good materials suitable for a wide range of students. This training could require analysis of material to be used, and a written evaluation following each leadership experience. Conference outside of class with individual students and the instructors complete the critique.

When the College Curriculum Survey Committee made a survey of colleges and universities in the United States in an attempt to ascertain the quality, nature and extent of Improvisation and Creative Dramatics, it was found that 220 institutions had programs, partial programs or occasional programs in creative dramatics.

These programs are offered by a variety of schools or departments within the institutions: seventy are under the auspices of speech departments; twenty-nine under drama or theatre departments; fifty-five are under drama and speech departments; fifteen under education departments; eight under departments of English; four under language arts departments; four under English and speech departments; three under schools of fine (or creative arts); three under extension divisions alone; three under language and speech departments; two under English and education departments; two under public relations and communications; two under English and psychology departments; one each under an English, speech and drama division; a theatre and radio school; a department of humanities; graduate school alone; and an education and speech division.

Ninety-three offer graduate courses in the area of creative dramatics. Ninety-eight offer laboratory programs with students for observation and/or practice teaching experience.
During this third quarter the student continues... his required reading and watching of faculty leadership. Throughout the year the student has been assembling a valuable notebook of... material, class notes, observation reports, lesson plans, and evaluations and impressions of his own... experiences and current responses to keep alive within himself that very rare, human quality he is attempting to keep alive, to stimulate, and to channel... creative energy and awareness.  

Next the serious student is advised to take a background of courses in the humanities and such courses as dance, psychology, rhythms, music, family relationships, race relations. A sound knowledge of drama in its many aspects is foremost.

The School of Drama at the University of Washington established a basic academic field of Creative Dramatics. In addition to the work in creative dramatics and the special projects work, the program includes: two quarters of Introduction to the Theater, two quarters of Theatre speech, two quarters of acting, two quarters of Children's Theatre, and two courses in the technical side of theatre. The result is a total of forty credit hours in drama.  

In addition to academic requirements the improvisation leader should be endowed with other attributes. The leader must know and love and serve drama and people, and students in particular. This is necessary because creative teaching is a sharing of mind with mind and heart with heart. The latter can come only when there is a respect for the leader, the subject and the process. There must be a feeling of trust in the leader. To trust we must feel secure and wanted and liked. He must be one whose own vibrant, creative, positive spirit sets

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4 Ibid., (Siks and Dunnington), p. 203

5 Ibid., p. 204.
fire to our own and helps us to express our best selves while understanding our present shortcomings -- one who enjoys and keeps up with and channels our human energies.

With the truly great teacher there is that indefinable quality as though he had been endowed with just a little more of everything of life: energy, compassion, humor, imagination, perception, humility, patience, wisdom, taste and judgement, joy and sorrow. He is one whose continual labor of love transforms technique into intuition and spontaneity.

This deeper dimension plus knowledge and love and the will to serve an art in company with others would seem to sum up the ideal to seek in the training of the improvisation and creative dramatics leader. It is an ideal that will keep him learning in the process of doing and empower him to take into account the particular abilities, interests, aspirations, limitations of his players while at the same time seeing beyond the handicapped, the delinquent, the disturbed, the natural, to the human being with his deep urge to create and his instinct to dramatize, and his capacity to do grow.

It is the ideal that will make it possible for the teacher to guide with firm kindness the more realistic channels, the awakened energies of those who may not be wise enough or strong enough to assume the responsibilities of leadership. And it is the ideal that will motivate and enable us to discover and encourage and endure and enjoy and guide the rare individual who is truly creative and dramatic.
CHAPTER IV
ASPECTS OF SPONTANEITY

There are several aspects of spontaneity which should be understood before a program in improvisation is attempted. These general concepts will especially be an aid when the use of specific exercises are begun.

Games

Viola Spolin in her book, Improvisation for the Theater, says, "The game is a natural group form providing the involvement and personal freedom necessary for experiencing."¹ Games develop personal techniques and skills necessary for the game itself, through playing. Skills are developed at the very moment a person is having all the fun and excitement playing a game has to offer—this is the time he is truly open to receive them.

"The game form is useful . . . in learning scene improvisation, and it is equally valuable in exposing newcomers to the theater experience, whether adult or child."² All the techniques and conventions of the theater that the students will need and find for themselves are given to them through playing theater games.

¹ Spolin, p. 4.
² Ibid., p. 5
Playing a game is psychologically different in degree but not in kind from dramatic acting. The ability to create a situation imaginatively and to play a role in it is a tremendous experience, a sort of vacation from one's everyday self and the routine of everyday living. We observe that this psychological freedom creates a condition in which strain and conflict are dissolved and potentialities are released in the spontaneous effort to meet the demands of the situation. 3

"Any game worth playing is highly social and has a problem that needs solving within it --an objective point in which each individual must become involved. 4 There must be a group agreement on the rules of the game and group interaction moving towards the objective if the game is to be played.

Players grow agile and alert, ready and eager for any unusual play as they respond to the many random happenings simultaneously. "The personal capacity to involve one's self in the problem of the game and the effort put forth to handle the multiple stimuli the game provokes determine the extent of growth." 5

Growth will occur without difficulty in the student because the very game he plays will aid him. The objective upon which the player must constantly focus and towards which every action must be directed provokes spontaneity. In this spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually and intuitively, is awakened. This causes enough excitation for the student to transcend himself—he is freed to go out into the environment, to explore, adventure, and face all dangers he meets unafraid.


5Ibid., p. 5.
The energy released to solve the problem, being restricted by the rules of the game and bound by group decision, creates an explosion—or spontaneity—and as is the nature of explosions, everything is torn apart, rearranged, unblocked. The ear alerts the feet, and the eye throws the ball.\(^6\)

Every part of the person functions together as a working unit, one small organic whole within the larger organic whole of the agreed environment which is the game structure.

With no outside authority imposing itself upon the players, telling them what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, each player freely chooses self-discipline by accepting the rules of the game and enters into the group decisions with enthusiasm and trust. With no one to please or appease, the player can then focus full energy directly on the problem and learn what he has come to learn.

\textbf{Approval/Disapproval}\(^7\)

The first step towards playing is feeling personal freedom.

Before we can play (experience), we must be free to do so. It is necessary to become part of the world around us and make it real by touching it, seeing it, feeling it, tasting it and smelling it—direct contact with the environment is what we seek. It must be investigated, questioned, accepted or rejected. The personal freedom to do so leads us to experiencing and thus to self-awareness (self-identity) and

\(^6\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 6.

\(^7\)Approval/Disapproval is a term coined by Spolin and used in this study to explain the need of students for acceptance or rejection of their actions by an established authority. Such a need stifles freedom and creativity.
self-expression. The hunger for self-identity and self-expression, while basic to all of us, is also necessary for theater expression.\(^8\)

Very few of us are able to make this direct contact with reality. Our simplest move out into the environment is interrupted by our need for favorable comment or interpretation by established authority. We either fear that we will not get approval, or we accept comment and interpretation unquestionably.

Having to look to others to tell us where we are, who we are, and what is happening results in a serious loss of personal experiencing. We lost the ability to be organically involved in a problem, and in a disconnected way, we function with only parts of our total selves. In the attempt to live through the eyes of others, self-identity is obscured, our bodies become misshapened, natural grace is gone, and learning is affected. Both the individual and the art form are distorted and deprived, and insight is lost to us.\(^9\)

The language and attitudes of authoritarianism must be constantly scourged if the total personality is to emerge as a working unit. All words which shut doors, have emotional content or implication, attacking the student's personality, or keeping a student slavishly dependent on a teacher's judgment are to be avoided. Since most of us were brought up by the approval-disapproval method, constant self-surveillance is necessary on the part of the leader to eradicate it in himself so that it will not enter the teacher-student relationship.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 6.

The expectancy of judgment prevents free relationships within the acting workshops. Moreover, the teacher cannot truly judge good or bad for another, for there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem.

Authoritarianism is more difficult to recognize in approval than in disapproval—particularly when a student begs for approval. It gives him a sense of himself, for a teacher's approval usually indicates progress has been made, but it remains progress in the teacher's terms, not his own. In wishing to avoid approving, therefore, we must be careful not to detach ourselves in such a way that the student feels lost, feels that he is learning nothing.

True personal freedom and self-expression can flow only in an atmosphere where attitudes permit equality between student and teacher and the dependencies of teacher for student and student for teacher are eliminated.

The problem-solving games and exercises discussed later will help clear the air of authoritarianism, and as the training continues, it should disappear.

Group Expression

A healthy group relationship demands a number of individuals working interdependently to complete a given project with full individual participation and personal contribution. If one person dominates, the other members have little growth or pleasure in the activity; a true group relationship does not exist.

Without this interaction there is no place for the single actor, for without group functioning, who would he play for, what materials would he use, and what effects could he produce? A student must learn that "how to
act, like the game is inextricably bound up with every other person in the complexity of the art"form. "Improvisational theater requires very close group relationships because it is from group agreement and group playing that material evolves for scenes and plays."10

For the student first entering the theater experience, working closely with a group gives him a great security on one hand becomes a threat on the other. When working with a group, however, playing and experiencing things together, the student integrates and finds himself within the whole activity. The differences as well as the similarities within the group are accepted.

The cue for the leader is basically simple: he must see that each student is participating freely at every moment. The challenge to the teacher or leader is to activate each student in the group while respecting each one's immediate capacity for participation. The student cannot always do what the teacher thinks he should do, but as he progresses, his capacities will enlarge. The teacher must learn to work with the student where he is, and not where the teacher thinks he should be.

Group participation and agreement remove all the imposed tensions and exhaustions of the competitiveness and open the way for harmony. A highly competitive atmosphere creates artificial tensions, and when competition replaces participation, compulsive action is the result. Sharp competition connotes to even the youngest the idea that he has to be better than someone else. When a player feels this, his energy is spent on this alone; he becomes anxious and driven, and his fellow players become a threat to him. Should competition be mistaken for a teaching tool, the whole meaning of playing and games is distorted. Playing allows a person to respond with his total

10Spolin, pp. 9-10.
organism with a total environment. Imposed competition makes this harmony impossible; for it destroys the basic nature of playing by obscuring self-identity and by separating player from player.

When competition and comparisons run high within an activity, there is an immediate effect on the student which is patent in his behavior.

Natural competition, on the other hand, is an organic part of every group activity and gives both tension and release in such a way as to keep the player intact while playing. It is the growing excitement as each problem is solved and more challenging ones appear. Fellow players are needed and welcomed. It can become a process for greater penetration into the environment.

If we are to keep playing, then natural competition must exist wherein each individual strives to solve consecutively more complicated problems. These can be solved then, not at the expense of another person and not with the terrible personal emotional loss that comes with compulsive behavior, but by working harmoniously together with others to enhance the group effort or project.

Therefore, in diverting competitiveness to group endeavor, remembering that process comes from end-result, we free the student to trust the scheme and help him to solve the problems of the activity. Both the gifted student who would have success even under high tensions and the student who has little chance to succeed under pressure show a great creative release and the artistic standards within the workshop rise higher when free, healthy energy moves

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 10-11.}\]
unfettered into the theater activity. Since the acting problems are cumulative, all are deepened and enriched by each successive experience.

**Audience**

The role of the audience must become a concrete part of theater training. Time and thought are given to the place of the actor, set designer, director, technicians, house manager, but the large group without whom their efforts would be for nothing is rarely given the least consideration. The audience is regarded either as a cluster of "peeping toms" to be tolerated by actors and directors or as a many-headed monster sitting in judgment.

The audience is an important member of the theater. Without an audience there is no theater. Every technique learned by the actor is for the enjoyment of the audience. They are the guests, the evaluators, and they make the performance meaningful.

When there is understanding of the role of the audience, complete release and freedom come to the player. Exhibitionism withers away when the student begins to see members of the audience not as judges or censors or even as delighted friends but as a group with whom he is sharing an experience. When the audience is understood to be an organic part of the theater experience, the student is immediately given a host's sense of responsibility toward them which has in it no nervous tension. The fourth wall disappears and the lonely looker-in becomes part of the game, part of the experience, and is welcome.

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12 Ibid., p. 12
The problems of present-day theater are only now being formulated into questions. When our theater training can enable the future playwrights, directors and actors to think through the role of the audience as individuals and as a part of the process called theater, each one with a right to a thoughtful and personal experience, is it not possible that a whole new form of theater presentation will emerge?

**Physicalization**

The term "physicalization" as used here describes the means by which material is presented to the student or a physical, non-verbal level as opposed to an intellectual or psychological approach. Physicalization provides the student with a personal concrete experience on which his further development depends; and it gives the teacher and student a working vocabulary necessary to an objective relationship.

"The first concern with students is to encourage freedom of physical expression, because the physical and sensory relationship with the art form opens the door for insight. Why this is so is hard to say, but be certain that it is so. It keeps the actor in an evolving world of direct perception—an open self in relation to the world around him."  

Reality as far as we know can only be physical, in that it is received and communicated through the sensory equipment. The physical is the known, and through it we may find our way to the unknown, the intuitive and perhaps beyond to man's spirit itself.

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13*ibid.*, p. 15
A player can dissect, analyze, intellectualize, or develop a valuable case history for his part, but if he is unable to assimilate it and communicate it physically, it is useless to the theater form.

When a player learns he can communicate directly to the audience only through the physical language of the stage, it alerts his whole organism. He lends himself to the scheme and lets this physical expression carry him wherever it will. It is his creating this reality out of nothing that makes it possible for him to take his first step into the beyond. For the formal theater where sets and props are used, dungeon walls are but painted canvas and treasurer chests empty boxes. Here, too, the player can create the theater reality only by making it physical. Whether with prop, costume or strong emotion, the actor can only show us.
CHAPTER V

WORKSHOP PROCEDURES

By following a plan or a system of work enough data and experience could be gathered to emerge with a new understanding of improvisation. It is the goal of this study to present the material that was gathered and observed in such a way that a simple procedure evolves with one exercise or acting problem leading into another and each exercise building from the previous exercise. A system of work becomes apparent with the use of the material but in a study of improvisation there should be freedom or these aims will be defeated. The problem is to find a planned way of action while trying to find a free way.

The answer became clear after a few workshop sessions. The art form demands shaping and regulating of the work all the time. What was happening at the moment became important. Whenever there was a workshop session, that was the moment of process. By meeting and acting upon the changing, moving present improvisation is born. The end results appear by accident out of the core of what is being allowed to happen. It was out of willingness to understand organic process that the work became alive.

The material and substance of scene improvisation are not the work of any one person or any one writer but came out of the cohesion of play acting upon player. The quality, range, vitality and life of this material is in direct reaction to the process the individual student is going through and what he is actually experiencing in spontaneity, organic growth and intuitive response.

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This chapter is to clarify workshop procedures which are important as
the large general framework from which the improvisation exercise evolves.

Problem Solving

The problem-solving technique used in the workshop gives mutual
objective focus to teacher and student. In its simplest terms it is giving
problems to solve problems. It does away with the need for the teacher or
leader to analyze, intellectualize or dissect a student's work on a personal
basis. The problem-solving technique eliminates having to go through the
teacher or the teacher having to go through the student to learn. It gives
both of them direct contact with the material, thereby developing relations-
ships rather than dependencies between them. It makes experiencing possible
and smooths the way for people of unequal background to work together.

"When one has to go through another to learn something,
his learning is colored both by his and the teacher's subjective
needs, often creating personality difficulties and the whole
experience is altered in such a way that direct experiencing
is not possible."  

Problem-solving generates great excitement by constantly provoking
the question of procedures at the moment of crisis, and in this way keeping all
participating members open for experiencing.

Since there is no right or wrong way to solve a problem, continuous
work and the solving of these problems opens everyone to his own source and
power. How a student solves a problem is personal to him, as in a game, he
can run, shout, climb or turn somersaults as long as he stays with the problem.

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\2Ibid., p. 20.
All distortions of character and personality slowly fade away, for true self-identity is far more exciting than the falseness of withdrawal, egocentricity, exhibitionism and need for social approval.

That includes the teacher and group leader as well. He must constantly be alerted to bring in fresh acting problems to solve any difficulties that may come up. He becomes the diagnostician, developing his personal skill, first, in finding what the student needs or is lacking for his work and, second, finding the exact problem that will work for the student.

Problems to solve problems, voice projection, characterization, stage business, developing material for scene improvisation—all are manageable through this way of working. Dogmatism is avoided by not giving lectures on acting; language is used for the purpose of clarification of the problem. This can be considered a non-verbal system of teaching insofar as the student gathers his own data within a first-hand experience. This mutual involvement with the problem instead of each other frees the air of personalities, judgment values, recriminations and fawning, and is replaced by trust and relationships making artistic detachment a strong probability.

This is the challenge for all members of the workshop. Each from his own point of view mutually focused on the problem at hand. In time the last vestiges of authoritarianism leave as all work to solve the problems of the theater. When the least experienced students are told they will never be asked a question they cannot answer or given a problem they cannot solve, they can well believe it.
The Point of Concentration

Concentration is the most important problem to be solved in improvisation. During the workshop sessions the phrase "point of concentration" was borrowed from Spolin's book and used as part of the experiment. The point of concentration is the focal point for the system of exercises discussed later.

The point of concentration releases group power and individual genius. It frees everyone to enter into an exciting creative adventure, making theater meaningful to all.

The point of concentration is the ball with which to play the game. While its uses may be manifold, the four following points outlined by Spolin help clarify it for use in workshops.

1) It helps to isolate segments of complex and overlapping theater techniques (necessary to performance) so as to explore them thoroughly.

2) It gives the control, the artistic discipline in improvisation where otherwise unchanneled creativity might become a destructive rather than a stabilizing force.

3) It provides the student with a focus on a changing moving single point within the acting problem, and this develops his capacity for involvement with the problem and relationship with his fellow players in solving it. Both are necessary to scene improvisation. It acts as a catalyst between player and problem.

4) This singleness of focus on a moving point used in solving the problem frees the student for spontaneous action and provides the vehicle for an organic rather than a cerebral experience. It makes perceiving rather than preconception possible and acts as a springboard into the intuitive.³

³Ibid., p. 22.
To explain Point One above more fully, presenting material in a segmented way frees a player for action at every stage of his development. It sorts theater experience into such minute bits of itself that each detail is easily recognizable and does not overwhelm or frighten anyone away. This focusing of a detail in the over-all complexity of the art form, as in a game, gives everyone something to do on stage, creates playing by totally absorbing the players and shutting off fear of disapproval. Out of this "something to do" acting technique arrives.

With each acting problem intrinsically interrelated to another, the teacher keeps two, three and sometimes more guidepoints in mind simultaneously. Many stage techniques may never be brought up as separate exercises but will develop along with the others. Thus rendering of character, for example, grows stronger with each exercise, even though the main focus is on something else. That avoids cerebral activity around an acting problem and makes it organic.

The point of concentration mentioned in Point Two above acts as an additional boundary within which the player must work and within which constant crises must be met. The control in the focus provides the theme and unblocks the student to act upon each crisis as it arrives. As the student need work only on his point of concentration, it permits him to direct his full sensory equipment on a single problem so he is not befuddled with more than one thing at a time while actually he is doing many. Occupied with the point of concentration, the student moves unhesitatingly to anything that presents itself.
He is caught unaware and functions without fear or resistance. Because each problem is solvable and is also a focus outside the student which he can see and grasp, each successive point of concentration acts as a stabilizing force and soon frees everyone to trust the scheme and let go, giving themselves over to the art form.

To clarify the third point that Spolin makes, it should be understood that all players, while individually working on the point of concentration, must at the same time play together to solve the problem, acting upon the point of concentration and interrelating. This total individual involvement with the object makes relationship with others possible. Without this object involvement, it would be necessary to become involved with one’s self or one another. Involving ourselves in the point of concentration absorbs our subjective needs and frees us for relationship.

To explain further the fourth point that Spolin is making, the point of concentration is the magical focus that preoccupies and blanks the mind, breaking through the walls that keep us from the unknown, ourselves and each other. With singleness of focus, everyone is intent on observing the solving of the problem.

This combination of individuals mutually focusing and mutually involved creates a true relationship, a sharing of fresh experience. Individual energy is released, trust is generated, inspiration and creativity appear as all the players play the game and solve the problem together.
Unfortunately, understanding the point of concentration and letting it work for us is not always the same thing. It takes time and practice for concentration to become a part of ourselves and our work. Many people, while outwardly admitting the value of point of concentration, will continue to resist it in many ways, such as refusal to accept group responsibilities, clowning, playwriting, jokes, immature evaluation, lack of spontaneity and interpretation of everyone else's work to meet a personal frame of reference.

A person with high resistance will try to manipulate those around him to work for him and his ideas alone rather than entering into the group agreement. It often shows itself in resentment of what is considered a limitation imposed by the teacher or sometimes in referring to the game exercise as "kid stuff." Exhibitionism and egocentricity continue as the student ad-libs, "acts," plays "characters," and "emotes" rather than involving himself in the problem at hand.4

The student who refuses to accept the point of concentration will be a constant discipline problem and will never be able to improvise because improvising requires openness to contact with the environment and each other and willingness to play.

Sometimes resistance is hidden to the student himself and shows itself in a great deal of verbalization, erudition, argument, and questioning as to "how to do it" within the workshops. With skilled and clever players this is often difficult to pinpoint and uncover. Lack of discipline and resistance to the point of concentration go hand in hand, for discipline can only grow out of total involvement with the event, object, or project.5

4 Ibid., p. 125.

5 Ibid., p. 25.
Evaluation

Evaluation takes place after each team has finished working on an acting problem. Spolin says, "It is the time to establish objective vocabulary, and direction communication made possible through non-judgmental attitudes, group assistance in solving a problem and clarification of the point of concentration." ^6 Both the leader and the students enter into the evaluation and the group help in solving the problem removes the burden of anxiety and guilt from the player.

Fear of judgments slowly leave the players as good/bad, right/wrong reveal themselves to be the very chains that bind us, and they soon disappear from everyone's vocabulary and thinking. In this loss of fear rests release; in this release rests the abandonment of restrictive self-controls by the student. As he abandons these and lends himself willingly to a new experience, he trusts the scheme and takes a further step into the environment.^7

As the student's trust grows he will more easily be able to accept evaluation. When he is the audience, he evaluates for his fellow actors; when he is the actor, he listens to and allows the student audience to evaluate for him.

The leader must also evaluate objectively. This can best be done by asking questions: Did they solve the problem? Did they communicate or interpret? Did they show or tell? Did they act or react? Did he keep his point of concentration? These sorts of questions will let the student know when he has got away from the problem and not limit the evaluation to a personal prejudice of the teacher. If the student is to have a greater

^6 Ibid., p. 25, 26.
^7 Ibid., p. 26
understanding of his stage work, it is most essential that the leader does not make
the evaluation himself but, rather, asks the questions which all answer. It is also
essential that the students who are evaluating understand the problem and the point
of concentration.

The student audience is not to sit by and be entertained, nor
are they to protect or attack the players. If they are to help one
another, evaluation must be on what was actually communicated,
not what was filled in and not any personal interpretation of how
something should be done. This furthers the whole point of pro­
cess as well, for it keeps the audience busy watching not a play
or story but the solving of a problem. As the student audience
come to understand their role, the communication lines from
audience to actor as well as from actor to audience are strengthened.
Those in the audience change from passive observers to active par­
ticipants in the problem.®

With the realization of audience responsibility there is organic grov/th of
the student. When a scene does evolve, it is added pleasure for all.

The most difficult problem is to get the student audience not to interpret
what they see on stage but instead accept it as a direct communication from the actor.
A player on stage either communicates or does not. The simplicity in receiving the
communication is what confounds most students. If the player is told he did not
make a direct communication, the next time on stage he will try that much harder.

Side Coaching

Side coaching is a term used to denote instructions given by the leader to
help guide the student as the leader observes from the audience what is happening
within the scene. Side coaching is useful in holding the student to the point of

8 Ibid.
concentration. This method gives the student self-identity within the activity and keeps him functioning at a fresh moment of experience and it also gives the teacher his place and makes him a part of the group as well.

The stage reality is kept alive for the student through side coaching. It is the voice of the director seeing the needs of the overall presentation and at the same time seeing the needs of the individual actor within the group.

Side coaching reaches the total organism, for it arises spontaneously out of what is happening on stage and is given at the time a player is in action.

A simple, direct calling out seemed to work best. "Share the stage picture!" "If you break, use it." "See the buttons on his coat." "Share your voice with the audience." Such comments help the student more than hours of lecture because they are given as a part of the process, and the student effortlessly moves out of a huddled position, sees his fellow actor, increases the volume of his voice. The voice of the teacher reaches the student's total self and he moves accordingly. It keeps him aware of the group and himself within the group.

**Group Size and Selection of Teams**

All the exercises are done with teams chosen at random. Students must learn to relate with everyone and anyone. Dependencies in the smallest ways of one person upon another must be observed and broken.

Counting off is a simple device to use when dividing up for teams. If the teams fall into the same groupings too often, then alter the method of selection, so that the students are never quite certain where to sit to fall in with their friends.
This method works better than having two team leaders pick the rest of their team because it does not leave the slower students the last ones to be chosen.

There is no ideal size for a group, "fifteen to twenty people has been found a convenient number, giving opportunity for adequate individual knowledge and sufficient experience with larger number." At times it is best to divide the group into halves so that part of the group is improvising and the other half is the audience. Sometimes the exercise will call for individuals, pairs, threes or small groups of five or six. During the workshop it was found that group work in threes is particularly convenient, since in threes the responsibility is not resting so obviously on one person and yet there is encouragement derived from being in the group. Work in pairs has definite advantages for some kinds of work, but it is a disadvantage at other times, while work in fours tends to divide itself into two pairs.

Presentation of the problem

The problem to be solved should be presented as quickly and simply as possible. If explanations are necessary, a long and detailed description is not advised. It is better to emphasize the point of concentration. It also worked better if the students did not completely understand the problem to let them work it out for themselves rather than show them what you wanted. The teacher should not be concerned if all the students do not seem to understand the problem immediately. The exercises done before will usually let the students know what they are trying to accomplish. If there is still confusion the evaluation will offer clarification.

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Do not tell the students why a problem is given to them. A verbalized predetermination places the student in a defensive position, or he will try (make it his point of concentration) to give the teacher what he wants rather than working on the problem.

**Preparation for the Acting Problem**

The students make their own decisions and set their own reality around the problems given them.

Once the leader has introduced the acting problem, he retires and becomes part of the group. From this position he may side coach or if there is more than one group he may move from group to group giving advice and clarification of the problem.

The simple group agreement of the first exercises will open the way to far more complicated situations in later exercises. If the groundwork is carefully laid, agreement on later problems --such as place, character, and problem-- will come more easily with each successive exercise.

As soon as the problem is given, the students should immediately start to improvise. If discussion or preplanning is allowed then spontaneity is destroyed. Once the students are allowed to decide what will happen they no longer improvise but follow the outline for a scene.

**Timing**

An acting problem must be ended when the action has stopped and the players are simply ad-libbing, making jokes or playwriting. This is the
result of not working on the problem or not working with one another. Side coaching, "One minute!" will let students know they must finish their scene and will usually increase concentration, bringing a quicker solution to the problem. When this does not happen, it may be necessary to call, "Half-minute!" and sometimes it will be necessary to stop the improvisation immediately. Calling "One minute!" develops an intuitive sense of pace and timing in players.

Timing is perceiving (sensing); it is an organic response which cannot be taught by lecture. It is the ability to handle the multiple stimuli occurring within a setting. It is the host attuned to the individual needs of his many guests. It is the cook putting a dash of this and a flick of that into a stew. It is the children playing a game, alerted to each other and to the environment around them. It is to know objective reality and to be free to respond to it. 10

At all times an improvisation should be stopped as soon as the problem is solved and evaluation allowed. Improvisation may be allowed to go on only after the problem is solved if the leader can tell that further and deeper understanding of the problem will develop if the action is allowed to continue.

An hour-long daily session was used for the workshop and is the time suggested by Spolin. Within an hour, warm-up exercises can be given, exercises on a certain problem may be explored and improvisations attempted which employ what was learned during the exercises. At times the students so enjoyed what they were doing that they were allowed to improvise longer than the hour-long period. If the leader knows that advancement is being

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made and several problems are being overcome it is sometimes better to con-
tinue longer than the one-hour session, rather than try to re-establish what
was learned during the next session.

A daily session is desireable but if conditions do not permit, a meet-
ing every other day or even once a week would be successful if the leader is
careful in his selection of warm-up exercises and uses those which most
quickly sharpen concentration.

Time spent on each part of the work will vary from week to
week. Sometimes preliminary work may involve more emphasis
than the others. In later sessions there may be occasions when
the whole time would be used in preparing a united effort.
Leaders will try to ensure that each meeting of the group
develops its own rhythms of strenuous activity and quieter
periods and a good leader will contain some periods of total
relaxation. 11

The overall period for the laboratory workshop for this study was 33
sessions. During this time the students were pushed rapidly to cover as much
improvisation material as possible. During this short time concentration was
developed and the sense of a group working together was established. This
workshop period was an experiment. A regular workshop in improvisation
should be allowed a much longer time to develop. Spolin suggests a period
lasting for 130 sessions. Hodgson and Richards suggest a course lasting from
three months to a year. The length of time the leader decides to use the
workshop depends on what he wants to accomplish. His goal will determine
the length of the workshop. It should be understood that a workshop in
improvisation could easily be sectioned for a quarter or semester study or
for a full year.

The aim should be to view the work over a definite period. The length of the period will depend upon conditions, but should be long enough for a clear development to take place. There is a need for a clear conception of aims, both long term and immediate, but, of course, we have to be prepared to modify the plan in the light of session by session experience.  

Labels

The improvisation workshop is concerned with relationships, not information. This requires the leader to avoid using labels and technical terms such as "blocking" or "projection." Instead, phrases such as "share the stage picture" or "share your voice" should be used. The avoiding of labels will allow the student to share in his own unique way. If a label is imposed before the statement is organically understood it will prevent direct experiencing. For example, only when "share your voice" is understood by the actor organically and dynamically after months of use as his responsibility to his audience, should the term "projection" be introduced to him. A label is static and prevents process.  

In some cases, students will be in a workshop who have had previous theater experience and will naturally use conventional theater terms. These terms will gradually disappear as the leader establishes the general vocabulary to be used throughout the training. Because the workshop in improvisation is based on self-discovery, the undesireability of labels should be clear to the leader from the beginning.

\[^{12}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 32, 33.}\]

\[^{13}\text{Op. cit.}, \text{Spolin, p. 39.}\]
Beginning and Developing Improvisation

There is no set formula for approaching improvisation. There are many different approaches, applications and points of emphasis, and because it can be used with people of all ages and people of differing backgrounds, it is vital for the leader to regard the first session as an opportunity to tune in to the group. From this he can gain some idea of the needs, the rate of development and the kind of material which is most likely to prove profitable.

Given a group, all that is essential is space. The size of the space will depend on the group and the extent of the activity the leader has planned for them. If a theater can be used it is all the better for the student.

... whenever possible workshop sessions should be held in a well-equipped theater. While "well-equipped" does not mean an elaborate stage, the workshop area should have at least one lighting dimmer and a simple sound system. If such a physical set-up is provided, then students are given full opportunity to develop skills which add up to the total theater experience: acting, developing scene material, and creating technical effects... The elements needed to achieve these effects should be readily available to your students as they prepare situations. Large wooden set blocks are extremely useful, since they can be quickly transformed into counters, thrones, altars, sofas, or whatever called for. A costume rack with specially selected costume parts should be close at hand, loaded with hats of all types.\(^\text{14}\)

Learning to use sets, costumes and lights with no more time for planning than the actors have for structuring their scenes is simply a way of stirring up action in another area of the theater--another road to the intuitive. However, it was found during the workshop that the addition of lighting

\(^{14}\text{ibid., pp. 31, 32.}\)
and costumes worked better for more advanced students. Such additions tend to confuse and disrupt concentration in the beginning sessions.

Where to Begin

When thinking about the early improvisation sessions, the leader has to bear in mind the need to overcome self-consciousness in the groups so that he will need to go for ideas which will readily lead to absorption. It helps to start with something which is familiar to the group.

The leader needs to go to the first meeting prepared to be flexible in his approach, with material that offers ample variety. If the group is obviously physically self-conscious when they first meet each other and the leader, a beginning might be made with everyone sitting down. When people seem vocally self-conscious, they might respond better to silent improvisation from which words, phrases and sentences can gradually be built.  

Sources of Material

The material for improvisation can come from many sources. For the first sessions the leader should have a definite idea of what direction the workshop will take and the material he uses during these opening sessions should be well planned. Much of the material can be made up by the leader once he sees the type of exercises necessary for the development of the students. Suggestions can also be offered by the students, especially

\[15\text{Op. cit., Hodgson & Richards, p. 32.}\]
when they are audience members. An improvisation can be devised around anything. "Because drama is dealing with living, there is, in fact, no aspect of man's experience which does not have the possibility of exploration in improvisation." 16 Several texts on acting contain exercises which can be used for material for improvisation. Some of the newer books have sections on improvisation with sample exercises. Few books have been written specifically about improvisation. Many of the games and recreation books have exercises involving improvisation. All can be used by the leader if he needs more material than he alone can create. See Annotated Bibliography for a listing of sources for possible improvisational material.

The main task of the leader is to look around and decide upon a theme or set of themes. Each session, depending on its length, can take one or more threads of experience which can be explored in a variety of ways: through movement, sound, speech, or a combination of any or all of these. These may be worked on as an end in themselves or as a preparation for building a more complex scene. Towards the end of the session this sense of achievement can be aided by the drawing together of these strands in some unified improvisation.

Arrangement of Material in Workshop Sessions

The arrangement of each session can have variety because of the variety of materials and approach. There are, however, certain elements

16 Ibid., p. 33.
which each session needs to embody. Unless this work flows naturally out
of other activity of a similar kind, it will be important to recognize that some
preparation or introduction is necessary if people are to respond easily and get
the most out of what is being done. The first part should be designed to help
free the body, the mind and the imagination, so that activities would include
the loosening up of each of these aspects of the person. Sometimes the use
of percussion or recorded music may be found to stimulate the work.

The introductory work should lead naturally into the improvisations
planned for the rest of the session. The main section of any particular session
may be built around the specific aim and can involve a variety of approaches
to the aspect of the work being emphasized.

It is helpful if the last part of each improvisation period can
gather together the main aspects which have been explored. Usually, this
will mean building a scene, either in small groups or the various groups
coming together in one main improvisation. Adequate time would have to
be allowed not only for the preparation and development of this scene but
also for the final playing through, giving expression to a culmination and
assessment of the overall experience.
CONCLUSION

It is necessary for a person planning to conduct a class in improvisation to have an understanding of the art form. To have an understanding of improvisation requires knowledge of the aspects, aims, and values of the art. It is also necessary that he be familiar with a tried procedure before he attempts to lead or teach an improvisation class.

Once a person planning to lead an improvisation class becomes familiar with what the art can offer and what the techniques of improvisation can offer a student he is better prepared to conduct a class in improvisation.

The preliminary study of improvisation set down in the preceding chapters should help prepare a person who wants to lead such a class on the college level.
Orientation must be given to each student. The first exercise in exposure and the subsequent exercises of involvement provide the foundations upon which all following problems are laid.

Appendix A contains an outline for four orientation sessions. It should be noted that the material may be covered in fewer sessions or may require additional sessions, depending upon the size of the group and the response. The leader should take time in covering the material, no matter how many sessions it entails.

Orientation should not be thought of as a mere introductory process. It is, instead, the first step in creating reality set before the student.

**First Orientation Session**

If the following outline is understood when going through this study, there should be no trouble for a leader to apply the exercises to a workshop session. The exercises are described as though being written for a workshop leader. Below are the components of each exercise. Not all points will be explained for each exercise because they will be either obvious or do not apply.

1. Introduction to the exercise.
2. Point of concentration.
3. Side coaching.
4. Example.
5. Evaluation of exercise as applied to this workshop.

6. Points of observation.

**Exposure**

Divide the group in half. Send one-half to stand in a single line across the stage, while the other remains in the audience. Each group—audience and on stage—is to observe the other. The leader might side coach, "You look at us. We'll look at you." Those on stage will soon appear uncomfortable. Some will giggle and most will shift from foot to foot; others will freeze in position or try to look nonchalant. If the audience starts to laugh, stop them. Just keep side coaching: "You look at us. We'll look at you."

After each person on stage has shown some degree of discomfort, give the group on stage a task to do. Counting is useful activity because it requires focus: Tell them to count the aisles or the seats in the theater. They are to keep counting until you tell them to stop, even if they have to count the same things over. Keep them counting until their discomfort is gone and they show bodily relaxation.

When the initial discomfort has disappeared and they have become absorbed in what they are doing, reverse the groups: the audience is now on stage, and the actors have become the audience. Handle the second group just as you did the first. Do not tell them that you will give them anything to do. The direction to count should be given only after they too have become uncomfortable.

When both groups have been on stage, instruct all the students to return to the audience. Now question the whole group about the experience they have just had. Be careful not to put words into their mouths. Let them discover for
themselves how they felt. Discuss each part of the exercise separately.

Below are the questions that were asked after the exercise was given to the workshop session and the students' replies.

How did you feel when you were first standing on stage?

There were few answers at first. One student said, "I felt self-conscious," or "I wondered what we were supposed to be doing up there." Such answers are generalities which indicate the student's resistance to the exposure he has just experienced. The leader should try to break down the resistance. For example, ask the audience:

How did the actors look when they first stood on stage?

The members of the audience will be quick to respond, since they quickly forget they also were the actors themselves. Although they may use generalities, they will speak more freely when talking about the others.

Encourage the actors to describe their physical responses to their first experience on stage. It is far easier for them to say, "The calves of my legs were tight," or "My hands felt bloated," or "I felt out of breath," or "I felt tired" than it is to admit "I was afraid." But you may not get even this physical description until you ask directly:

How did your stomach feel?

When the physical descriptions are flowing freely, then allow all the students to speak in as much detail as they want. You will find that the student who previously covered up and insisted he was comfortable when first standing on stage will suddenly remember that his lips were dry or the palms of his hands were
moist. As the concern about self-exposure subsides the students will talk about their muscular tension almost with relief. There will be a few students who will remain resistant; but they will be influenced by the group's freedom in time and should not be singled out at the beginning.

Keep the discussion brief and on the group level. Steer them away from emotional responses and generalities. If a student says, "I felt self-conscious," just reply, "I don't know what you mean--how did your shoulders feel?"

After the first part of the exercises has been fully discussed then move on to the second part.

How did you feel when you were counting the seats?

Be careful not to refer to it as "when you had something to do." Let this realization come to each student in his own way.

What about the fluttering in your stomach? What happened to your watery eyes? Did the stiffness leave your neck?

The answer will be, "It went away" and why it went away will soon become evident: "Because I had something to do."

Explain to the students that "something to do" will be called the point of concentration. Quickly explain that the exercise of counting the seats will be replaced by a different acting problem each time they do an exercise and that they will always have a point of concentration.¹

Sensory Awareness

Concentration is the key to overcoming nervousness and anxiety about other people and what they will think. With this development we train interest

¹Op. cit., Spolin, p. 51
and absorption, both of which are essential for creativity at its fullest. At this point in the Orientation session the group should be greatly released and receptive. Along with the development of concentration the development of sensory awareness can be introduced. The two areas work well together and the exercises in the orientation suggest exercises which develop both concentration and sensory awareness.

Throughout this training, concentration needs to be developed both with the whole person and with the focus being placed from time to time on concentration with specific senses. A planned approach to concentration might develop on these lines:

(i) Looking—concentration on what we see, and observation of detail.

(ii) Listening—concentration on what is heard and qualities of meaning in sound.

(iii) Touching—concentration on feeling things: size, texture, and so on.

(iv) Smelling—concentration on kinds and qualities.

(v) Tasting—concentration on kinds and qualities.

Throughout, the aim should be to train concentration and observation in relation to meaning and not just isolated memory. When some kind of understanding of shape is discernible the rote memory factor is reduced and observation is seen to have a purpose. ²

When it is pointed out that, in stage life, mashed potatoes are often served as ice cream and stone walls are actually made of wood and muslin, students will begin to understand how an actor through his sensory equipment must make real for an audience what is not real.

This physical or sensory involvement with objects should be firmly established in the student in the beginning sessions. It is the first step toward building more complex stage relationships. The object agreed upon is the one reality between the players around which they gather. This is the first step in group agreement. The following exercises provide the basis for developing this sensory awareness and concentration.

Seeing a Sport

Two teams, players divide by counting off in twos. By group agreement, the team decides what sport they are going to watch. When group agreement has been reached, the team goes on stage. Players themselves are to call "Curtain!" when they are ready.

Point of concentration: on seeing.

Side coaching: See with your feet! See with your neck! See with your whole body! See it 100 times larger! Show us, don't tell us! See with your ears!

Points of Observation:

1) Tell the students beforehand that the event they are going to watch is taking place some distance away from them (so that they must concentrate on watching closely).

Listening to the Environment

The full group is to sit quietly for one minute and listen to the sounds of

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the immediate environment. They then compare the sounds they heard.

Point of concentration: on hearing the sounds around them.

Point of observation: Assign this exercise as homework, to be done a few minutes each day.

What Am I Listening to?

Two teams. Each team decides by group agreement what they will listen to. They are to choose either a lecture or a musical program and should decide specifically what type of lecture or concert it is to be.

Point of concentration: on listening.

Side coaching: See Seeing a Sport, page 60, for side coaching.

Feeling Self With Self

Group remains seated in audience.

Beginning with the bottoms of their feet, they are to feel what is against their bodies at each point. The feet feel the stockings, the shoes and the floor beneath them; the legs feel the trousers or the stockings; the waist feels the belt; the finger feels the ring; the teeth feel the lips.

Point of concentration: on feeling self with self.

Side coaching: Feel your feet in your shoes! Your legs in your trousers! Feel the atmosphere around you! Reach out into space!

When they have felt all the parts of their body, then coach them to stand up and push their way through the room.

Side coaching: Penetrate the atmosphere. Make the air heavy!
air is lighter and lighter!

Points of observation.

1) Warn the students not to touch the parts with their hands but to feel continuously with the various parts of their bodies.

2) Coach continually throughout the exercise.

Group Touch Exercise

Have the group feel a single object that they all have used many times, such as soap.

Ask the players: Do you think your hand remembers the feel of soap?

Point of concentration: On feeling the object.

Side coaching: Let your hand remember?

Group Touch Exercise 2

Two teams. Each group is to select some familiar object to substance through group agreement. When group agreement has been reached, team goes on stage. All members use the same objects or substance simultaneously.

Point of concentration: to focus all energy on the object -- its size, shape, texture, temperature.

Side coaching: Feel the texture! Feel its temperature! Feel its weight! Feel its shape!

Points of observation: Tell the students to take a few minutes out of

4 Ibid., p. 57.

5 Ibid.
every day to pick up and handle an object, then put the object down and try to recall how it felt.

Taste and Smell

Two teams. Each group is to select something very simple to eat. When group agreement has been reached, first team goes on stage and proceeds to eat, smelling and tasting the food as they go along.

Point of concentration: to taste and smell the food.

Side coaching: Chew the food! Feel its texture in your mouth!

Taste the food! Let it go down your throats!

Point of observation: While eating at home, students are to take a few minutes to concentrate on the taste and smell of their food.

Hodgson and Richards suggest the following exercises to strengthen concentration and observation:6

LOOKING

Finding Straight Lines

Full group. Look around the room at straight lines.

Point of concentration: Finding the straight lines.

Side coaching: Find all the straight lines! Count the straight lines!

Point of observation: Have the students notice ways in which these are combined in different objects. Try the same exercise looking around the room for squares, for circles.

Looking and Observing 1

Two or three students. Look at a photograph or picture of a scene for about a minute, then build an improvisation, using as much of the detail as you can.

Point of concentration: To observe the detail.

Side coaching: What color were the objects? Where were the objects in the scene?

Looking and Observing 2

One student. Have him look at the clothing someone is wearing, then have him imagine he is packing a suitcase with all these items in it.

Point of concentration: To observe the clothing.

LISTENING

Hearing and Re-creating a Tune

Singly and then together. Have the students hear a short tune or musical phrase whistled, sung or played, and attempt to re-create it: try again with longer and more complicated pieces: build a scene around a repeated tune or a scene where a snatch of tune is an important part of the plot.

Point of concentration: Listening to and repeating a musical phrase.

Listen to a Sound

One player. Listen and respond to a conversation on the telephone.

Point of concentration: On hearing the voice on the telephone.

Side coaching: Listen to his voice. Don't plan your action. Act, don't react.
Listen to a Fight

Singly or as a group. Listen to the nagging of a mother, father, husband or wife and respond to what you hear.

Point of concentration: Letting what you hear guide your action.

Side coaching: The leader may narrate the fight as it progresses to keep the students hearing different sounds.

TOUCHING

Identifying Objects Game

One player. Have the student go on stage and face the audience with his hands behind his back. The leader will place an object in his hand and the player will identify it by touch. Leader may show the object to the audience before placing it in the player’s hand if he wants. Objects could include: a spoon, a pencil, comb case, apple, poker chip, belt buckle, shoe string, ash tray, tissue paper. It is best to choose objects that are fairly recognizable, although not well known or used every day.

Touching Liquids

One player. Touch liquids of varying viscosity, when applied to the skin face, hands, feet.

Point of concentration: Noticing the different sensations.

Touch of Things on the Skin

Singly or in a group. Have the students feel the different feeling of various kinds of gloves, those with fingers, without fingers, different materials:
leather, wool, lace, cotton; gloves which end at the wrist, continue up the arm, gauntlets.

Then have the students feel different types of footwear—slippers, low-heeled shoes, high-heeled shoes, sandals, boots, thigh boots—feel footwear from different periods and countries. Build some of these as the focal point of a scene.

Point of concentration: Feeling the touch of things on the skin.

Knowing the Feeling of Heat and Cold

Singly and then as a team. Feel the objects that are hot, then objects that are cold, both extreme and more temperate: develop this into severity of heat or cold to one part of the body and have them experience the pain resulting. Improvise a scene in a cold and then a hot climate.

Point of concentration: Heat and cold on the entire body and then separate parts of the body.

Side coaching: Feel the cold on your nose! Feel the heat on your back!

Point of observation: Do not let this become an entirely external sensation such as violent shivering or mopping the sweat off the head.

Pleasure from Touch

Singly or in a group. Explore sensations of pleasure arising from clean sheets, a warm muff, a hot-water bottle, the sun, the rain.

Point of concentration: Feeling pleasureable sensations of touch.
SMELLING

Actual Smells

As a group. Let the students smell actual odors or fragrances either bottled or produced on the spot.

Pleasant Smells

Singly, then in a group. Have the students identify perfumes, roses, hay, dinner cooking. Then improvise a scene in, say, a park involving the various perfumes which are about. Next, take the opposite and improvise a scene in a dank underground area where they can identify rotting vegetation and various gases. These may be explored in relation not only to their unpleasantness but also to their choking quality and their effect on health.

TASTING

Actual Tastes

Concentrate on actual tastes—small pieces of different kinds of chocolate to be identified, different drinks, different brands of tea and coffee—and devise scenes to employ some of these.

Point of concentration: Tasting actual tastes.

Classifying Tastes

Singly or as a group. Imagine other tastes and attempt some kind of classification—bitter, sour, sweet, dry, wet, hot, cold.
EVALUATION OF SENSORY EXERCISES

Was concentration complete or incomplete? Stress that when concentration on the problem was complete the audience could see.

What were they handling, seeing, listening to? Keep this discussion centered on the whole group effort, not individuals.

Did they show or tell us? Even if they did not speak but used very obvious physical actions rather than focusing energy on the problem, they were telling rather than showing.

POINTS OF OBSERVATION FOR SENSORY EXERCISES

1) Each team must come to group agreement before going on stage. There should be no interplay or dialogue on stage between players during these exercises.

2) When "Curtain!" must be called by a team ready to start an exercise, do not appoint anyone to do this, but let them--as individuals or a group--step spontaneously into the theater experience by calling for their curtain. As simple as it seems, it is most important. The call for "Curtain!" is, in effect, the actual rising of the theater curtain, even though "theater" may be nothing more than a row of chairs and an open space.

3) Do not begin an evaluation until all the students have had their chance on stage.

4) Do not dwell on the problem too long. These exercises are the first step in helping the student to recognize that physical memory exists only with him
and can be called up intuitively whenever he needs it. They show him that he need not withdraw into a subjective world—that he need not move into a cloud of past memories—when working in the theater.

5) Side coaching during these exercises should help to free bodily response in the student. If an individual resists this side coaching, call out: "Don't think about what I'm saying!" "Let your body listen."

6) It is advisable for the leader to end the exercises at this early stage, rather than waiting for the students to end them.

7) Avoid the parlor-game attitude which these exercises might provoke. The audience is not to guess—the audience must know through what the actors show.

8) Although sensory awareness will be a part of every evaluation from now on, it will rarely be the main point of concentration. Instead, it will be considered a secondary part of every problem, to be developed along with other skills.

SECOND ORIENTATION SESSION

Observation Game

A dozen or more real objects are placed on a tray which is set in the center of the circle of players. After ten or fifteen seconds, the tray is covered. The players then write individual lists of the names of as many of the objects as possible.

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they can remember. The lists are then compared with the tray of objects.

Mirror Exercise

Two players. A faces B. A is the mirror, and B initiates all movement. A reflects all B's activities and facial expressions. While looking into the mirror, B takes a simple activity such as washing or dressing. After a time, reverse the roles with B playing the mirror and A initiating the movement.

Side coaching: Follow the movements exactly! Keep your actions exact! Be a mirror!

Points of observation: This exercise can give the leader a quick index into each student's natural sense of play, clowning, inventiveness, ability to create tension, and timing.

Have the students use this exercise without telling their audience which of the two is the mirror. This effort to confound the audience demands a heightened concentration and produces a more intense involvement with the problem and each other. This is an early step in breaking down the walls between the actor and actor, actor and audience.

Tug-of-War

Two players and then the entire group. The players must play tug-of-war with an imaginary rope. The rope is the object between them.

Point of concentration: To give the imaginary rope reality.

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8During the session when this exercise was first offered, of a tray containing 15 objects, the average number recalled was eight. By the 23rd session, the average number recalled from a tray of 15 objects was 12.
Side coaching: Feel the rope! Feel its texture! Its thickness! Make it real!

Points of observation:

1) Body action should come out of the rope's reality. If full concentration is put on the object between the players, they will use as much energy as they would use if pulling an actual rope.

2) This is a very important exercise, since it shows both actors and audience that—as in a game—almost all the problems they will work on can be solved only through interaction with another player. No player can do the exercise alone. It also points up the need to give the object reality for the interaction to take place.

Orientation Game #1

One person goes on stage, picks a simple activity and begins doing it. Other plays come on stage one at a time and join him in this activity.

Point of concentration: On showing the activity.

Points of observation:

1) The simple activity might consist of painting a fence, scrubbing a floor, raking leaves.

2) Players are not to know ahead of time what the first player is doing.

3) This group interaction should create flow and/or energy.

Name Six Game

All the players except one, who stands in the center, sit or stand in a circle. The center player closes his eyes, holds an object and turns in a circle. When the player in the center feels like it, he stops turning and places the object in his hand in the hands of the person he is nearest, at the same time he gives that person a letter of the alphabet. The player who receives the object starts it on its way immediately so that it passes through the hands of everyone in the circle. By the time it returns to him, he must have named six objects, the name of each beginning with the letter suggested by the center player.

If the player does not succeed in naming objects in the time that the object makes the round of the circle, that player must change places with the one in the center. If their circle is small, the object should be passed around two or more times.

Point of observation: A good exercise for increasing verbal skill and will also create a great deal of excitement in the players.

**Play Ball**

The group first decides on the size of a ball; and then the members toss the ball among themselves on stage. Once the game is in motion, the leader calls out that the ball is becoming various weights.

Point of concentration: On the weight and size of the ball.

Side coaching: The ball is 100 times lighter! The ball is 100 times heavier! The ball is normal again!

Points of observation: Many students will act out lightness or heaviness
rather than keeping with the point of concentration. In conjunction with the exercise, have the group play a game together.

**Involvement in Twos**

Two players. Players agree on an object between them and begin an activity with it. In this case the object they select determines the activity.

Point of concentration: On the object between them.

**Involvement in Threes or More**

Three or more players. Group agrees on an object which cannot be used without involving all of them. They participate in a joint action in which all move the same thing.

Point of concentration: To make the object real.

Examples: Pulling a fishnet, tugging a boat, pushing a stalled car.

Evaluation: Did they work together? If three people pushed a car and the fourth sat behind the wheel, the problem was not solved, for all did not physically move the car.

Did they need each other to solve the problem, or could one of them have managed the problem alone? Did they work together or separately.

Points of observation: Involvement with two's will usually keep players involved together. Involvement in three's or more may tend to confuse them.

**Involvement Without Hands**

Two or more players. Players agree on an animate or inanimate object between them. Players are to set object between them in motion without using...
their hands.

Point of concentration: To show and manipulate the object between them without using their hands.

Example: Pushing a rock, raising a board to shoulder.

Evaluation: Did they show us the object or tell us?

Point of observation: Do not let the students take a built-in no-hands object such as mashing grapes with the feet, for this is resistance to point of concentration.

**Mirror Exercise**

Four players on a team. Team divides into sub-teams. Sub-teams reflect each other. Sub-team A, mirrors. sub-team B initiates all movement. Sub-team that initiates movement must agree on an activity involving both players. After a time reverse the teams.

Point of concentration: Mirror sub-team is to reflect all movements exactly.

Example: Barber shaving a customer. Sub-team A then becomes the reflection of the barber and customer and must follow the shaving activity exactly.

**Orientation Game**

One player goes on stage and starts an activity. Other players join him one at a time, as definite characters, and begin an action related to his activity.

Example: First player is a surgeon. Other players are interns, nurses, anesthetist.
Points of Observation:

1) Players are not to know ahead of time what the first player is doing or who he is.

2) At each session, play the Orientation Game until your students are entering into the problem with excitement and fun. This releases a flow of energy that results in group interest and brings a natural quality in speech and movement.

THIRD ORIENTATION SESSION

Who Started the Motion

Players are seated in a circle. One player is sent from the room while the others select a leader to start the motion. The player is then called back. He stands in the center of the circle and tries to discover the leader, whose function it is to make a motion—tapping foot, nodding head, moving hands—and to change motions whenever he wishes. The other players copy these motions and try to keep the center player from guessing the leader's identity.

When the center player discovers the leader, two other players are chosen to take their place.

Difficulty with Small Objects

Single player. Player becomes involved with small object.

Point of concentration: Having difficulty with object.

Example: Opening a gum wrapper, forcing a drawer open, opening a bottle.

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Point of Observation: Resistance to the point of concentration will show itself in a player who intellectualizes the problem.

How Old Am I?

Single player. Leader sets up a simple place of action such as a corner bus stop. Player writes down age on slip of paper and hands it to the leader before going on stage. Player comes on stage and waits for bus.

Point of concentration: On the age chosen.

Side coaching: The bus is half a block down! It's coming closer; it's here! Sometimes adding, It's held up in traffic! gives added insight to the character.

Points of Observation:

1) At this early stage a student will usually give some bodily rhythm and a good deal of activity to help clarify age.

2) Discourage "acting" and/or "performing" during this exercise by stopping the action whenever necessary.

3) Coach "held up in traffic" only when you want to explore the student's work further.

Object Moving Players

Any number of players. Players agree on object which is to move them. They are to be an interrelated group.

Point of concentration: On the object that is moving them.
Side coaching: Feel the object! Let the object move you! You're in it together!

Examples: sailboat, car, merry-go-round, ferris wheel.

Points of observation:

1) Watch to see whether the players feel the object between them. This sometimes occurs to an extraordinary degree when the students have played together for some time or when they are concentrating deeply on the problem.

It's Heavier When It's Full

Three or more players. Players agree on an activity in which receptacles must be filled, empties and filled again.

Point of concentration: On showing the variations in weight when things are full or empty.

Orientation Game

One player goes on stage and starts an activity. Other players come on, one at a time. This time they know who they are as they enter the scene; and the first player (who does not know who they are) must accept them and relate to them.

Point of concentration: On the activity, with the character as an addition but not as the main focus.

Example: Man hanging drapes. Woman enters. Woman: "Now dear, you know that's not the way I want them hung!" Man accepts the woman who is playing his wife; and he plays accordingly. Actors continue to enter, playing the couple's children, the next door neighbor, the family minister.

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Evaluation: Did she show or tell us that she was the wife, neighbor?

Did they all stay with the activity?

Points of observation:

1) By this time, Orientation Game should show the primitive beginnings of a scene growing out of the point of concentration as well as the first sign of relationship rather than mere simultaneous activity.

2) Let the players enjoy orientation game even if the stage is somewhat chaotic because of the large group of characters in the scene, with everyone moving and talking at once as all very earnestly play the game. This childlike stage behavior releases pleasure and excitement and is essential to the social growth of the group. Refrain from trying to get an orderly scene. Subsequent exercises will slowly do this for the student.

Part of a Whole

One player goes on stage and becomes part of a large animate or inanimate moving object. As soon as the nature of the object becomes clear to another player, he joins the player on stage and becomes another part of the whole. This continues until all the audience have participated and are working together to form the complete object.

Point of concentration: On being a part of a larger object.

Example: One person goes on stage and curls up with arm moving from the shoulder like a piston. Another player lines up with first player and assumes similar position. Two other players join and four wheels are now moving. Other
players quickly become whistles, engines and finally a semaphore which stops
the train.

Points of observation:
1) This exercise generates a great deal of spontaneity and fun.
2) Other examples which came out of the workshop are a statue grouping, a flower, an animal, and the inside of a clock. Give no examples to the
group. If the game is presented clearly, players will come up with most
delightful objects.

FOURTH ORIENTATION SESSION

Three Changes

Two rows of players facing each other. Each player is to observe the
person opposite him and note his dress, hair and general attire. Players then
turn their backs on each other. Each player changes three things on his person.
Players then face each other again. Each player must now identify what changes
his opposite has made. Change partners and increase the number of changes.

Point of observation: Do not let the players know that you plan to
increase the changes until after the first playing. Many are worried how to find
the three changes. Four or more will create a great deal of excitement. This is
an excellent exercise for players, taxing their powers of making do (improvisation)
on a simple physical level. Players are forced to look at a barren land and find
things to use for the game their eye did not see at first glance.

What Do I Do For A Living?
Same setting and procedure as in How Old Am I?

Point of concentration: On showing what he does for a living.

Evaluation: Is it only through activity that we can show age? Is it only through activity that we can show what we do for a living? Does the body structure alter in some professions? Is there a difference between a salesman and a teacher? Would 20 years as a laborer make a man look and act differently than 20 years as a doctor? Is it an attitude that creates change? Is it the work environment?

Points of observation:

1) This questioning in evaluation should provoke the first insight into physicalizing character aspects. It should be most casual. Because these exercises are done early in the work, do not belabor the point of character.

Mirror Exercise #3

Two players. Players are seated facing each other. They agree on a simple relationship (employee-employer, teacher-student, doctor-patient, lawyer-client) and choose a topic for discussion or argument.

After they have begun the discussion, the leader calls one of them by name. The player called then assumes the facial structure of the player opposite him while, at the same time, continuing the conversation. He is not to reflect movement and expression, as in the earlier mirror exercises, but is to try to make his face look like the opposite player's.

Point of concentration: Player called is to concentrate on remolding

his own face inside out to look like the other player's

Example: A's mouth is thin, his chin recedes, his eyes are small. B's lips are full, his jaw juts out, he has large eye sockets. When A's name is called, he is to concentrate on restructuring his own face to look like B's. While continuing the discussion, he must work to get his jaw out, his lips full, much like a sculptor.

Side coaching: Rebuild your nose like his! Jawbone! Forehead! Change your chin line! Eyeballs! Concentrate on him. On upper lip! As you are! (Bring players back and forth and to their own faces throughout the exercise.)

Points of observation:

1) Keep changing the "mirror." Do not let the students know when their names will be called. Coach to see that the discussion or argument never stops while players rebuild their faces. Remind them to keep away from superficial expressions.

2) In selecting teams, ask players to pair off with faces of dissimilar structure. Short noses with long noses, heavy faces with thin ones. Ask students to exaggerate the opposite face.

3) Some players may be apprehensive about seeing how they look to another person. Handle this by stressing the solving of the problem and pointing out that exaggeration was asked for.
Conversation with Involvement

Two or more players. Players agree on a simple discussion topic. They then proceed to eat and drink a large meal while keeping up a continuous discussion.

Point of concentration: Giving life to the object through the smelling, seeing, tasting.

Side coaching: Taste the food! Feel the texture of the napkin! What is the temperature of the drinking water! Chew your food! Smell the food!

Evaluation: Did the players give sensory reality to the objects? Did they show us or tell us? What kind of soup were they drinking? Was the meat hot?

Points of observation:
1) See that the players show relationships (who).
2) If resistance to the point of concentration is high then the group is not yet ready. Leave this problem and come back to it another time.
3) Use all senses together.

Involvement with Large Objects

Single player. Player becomes involved with entangling object.

Point of concentration: On the selected object.

Examples: Spider web, boa constrictor, tree branches in forest, octopus, parachute, man-eating plant.

Point of observation: Watch the wording when stating the point of concentration to be certain that the player’s concentration is on the object and not on disentangling himself from the object. This is an important difference and
one that comes up continuously throughout the work.

Trapped

Single player. Player chooses a place from where he is trying to escape.

Examples: Caught in bear trap, tree trunk, elevator.

Drawing Objects Game

Two teams. (To be used first in the orientation sessions) Players divide into two teams. Each team sets up a table with plenty of paper and pencils at an equal distance from the group leader. The group leader has a prepared list of objects such as tree, window, cow, train, airplane, cat, house—any object that has an outstanding characteristic. One player from each team comes to the center. The group leader exposes only one of the objects to the team members, who then quickly run back to their team and draw the object for their team who are all gathered around trying to identify it. As soon as any member of a team recognizes the object drawn, it is called out by name. The team winning the most objects first wins the game. The game continues until each member of each team has had a chance of drawing the object.

The ability to draw has nothing to do with the game, for it is a game of selectivity that shows which students can quickly pick from their file to make a communication. This game can be repeated at intervals making the objects more and more difficult. A variation of this game, using abstractions, can be found in Neva L. Boyd's Handbook of Games.\(^{11}\)

Space Substance

After the preliminary exercises in object involvement have been used, Space Substance should be introduced and repeated for at least eight more sessions as a warm-up. It is valuable for freshening up groups at all times. Since there are many possible variations of this exercise, what to use in subsequent sessions should be determined by the leader. The more often it is used, the more perfect the students will become in creating, finding, and building objects out of thin air and letting things happen.

A. Exploration

Large group (no audience necessary). Ask students to move around the stage giving substance to space as they go. They are not to feel or present space as though it were a known material but are to explore it as a totally new and unknown substance.

Side coaching: Move through the substance and make contact with it! Don't give it a name—it is what it is! Use your whole body to make contact! Feel it against your cheeks! Your nose! Your knees! Your hips! If players tend to use hands only, have them keep their arms close to their bodies so as to move as a single mass. Keep side coaching: Push the substance around, explore it! You never felt it before. Make a tunnel! Move back into the space your body has shaped! Shake it up! Make the substance fly! Stir it up! Make it ripple!

B. Support and Effort

Large group with audience. Start players walking around stage,
pushing through the space substance.

Side coaching: Let the space substance support you. Lean on it. Rest on it. Let it hold your head. Your chin. Your eyeballs. Your upperlip. After the players are in motion and responding to the problem, give a new understanding to the space substance they are contacting.

Side coaching: You are holding yourself up. You would fly into a thousand pieces if you quit holding yourself up. You are hanging on to your arms. Your mouth. Your forehead. Call out the parts of the body that are being held rigid. While calling out parts of the body, help the students to release muscle holds.

Evaluation: To players: How did you feel when the space was supporting you? When you were your own support?

To audience: Did you notice a difference between support and no support in the way players walked and looked?

Point of observation: When players hold themselves together, they are their own gravity life, so to speak; some shrink up, some seem to be afraid of falling, while others appear anxious, lonely and still others look aggressive. When, on the other hand, the players lean on space, an expansion and fullness can be noted as they move through the environment. Smiling faces, peacefulness, and an air of gentleness appear. It is as if they know the environment will support them if they allow it.

C. Shaping Space

Single players. As players one by one to make any object they wish out
of the space substance. In some cases, they can be told to "find" the object rather than make it.

Point of concentration: To build an object from space substance.

Point of observation: Most players gather the space substance and handle it as they would any other pliable mass. With confidence and certainty the student builds his object with incredible exactness and reality. Next, ask each player to pull the space substance around as though it could not be separated from itself. This sometimes results in the presentation of elastic or ribbony material. Side coach to the players to experiment with it.

D. Ensemble Space Shaping

Two or more players. Ask players to build one object animate or inanimate together out of space substance and then use it. Then have the players pull the space substance about, keeping it attached in space, swing on it, let it pull them up, wind it around each other.

Point of observation: Players move out of the immediate environment with ease after this exercise.

E. Transformation of Objects

Large group of players. First person creates an object and passes it on to the next player. This next player is to handle the object until it changes shape and then pass it on. If nothing happens, he is to pass it on to the next player and so on down the line. When the problem is being solved there should be a continuous flow of changing objects.
This is a tricky exercise and must be clearly understood by the players. They are not to change the object—it either transforms itself or they do nothing about it. No associations should be used to lead to a story. If a player is handed a comb, for example, he is not to make a mirror and use the comb.

Point of observation: A great deal of excitement is felt if an object seems to transform itself. When a student has this experience, it should be pointed out to him that his is exactly what point of concentration must do for the players.

F. Space as Another Element

Any number of players. Do not use this exercise until space substance has been fully explored. Tell players the space they are moving through is wind, water, mud, jello.

Side coaching: Your hair is floating! Your ankles are floating! Your spine is floating! Use side coaching appropriate for any suggested substance.

Point of observation: All these exercises help the student feel the impact of space upon his body. They help him penetrate space, mold it, define it and move freely about.

SUMMARY OF ORIENTATION SESSIONS

Continue to urge students to make a close conscious study of the physical world around them. Encourage them to observe how things taste, feel, smell and look. Open observation of the world around him as a necessary tool for the improvisational actor.

12Space substance exercises suggested by Spolin, pp. 77-84.
Should students lose detail and generalize objects and relationships at any time during their training, it would be well to stop the class for a moment and interject one of the exercises previously covered in orientation. Almost every one of them are useful for warm-ups at all times.

The leader may also suggest that students take the sense games home. While the exercises should not be done outside the workshop, the games can provide much fun and fulfillment for the student.

Pleasure and enthusiasm must set the tone throughout these exercises. If students are apprehensive, anxious and constantly looking to see if they are doing "right," then there has been some error in presentation.

Try to always begin sessions with a game and to end them with an exercise which will give the players a non-verbal summation of the earlier problems. Orientation Game and Part of the Whole are just such exercises. They quickly show the teacher to what extent the earlier exercises have been organically integrated by the students.
APPENDIX B

DEVELOPING THE IMAGINATION

While we have been working to gain increased concentration, we have also been involving and extending the imagination. Now we will work more specifically on ways of developing still further the many aspects of imagination. The work will go easier if a good deal of concentration can be sustained by the students.

From an outline suggested by Hodgson and Richards, exercises were devised which would help stimulate the imagination. The overall pattern of the work followed this kind of progression:

1) Imaginative work building from observation of real things and people.

2) Go on to adding insight and experience to discover further ways of using the real and imaginary elements.

3) Build something new from the imagination based on insight into, and experience of the old leading on to --

4) Realizing the limitless bounds of the imagination. ¹

Building from Observation

The students look at and handle a football, a hat, a guitar; in turn, remove the object and look at, and handle, each in the imagination.

Point of concentration: On actually experiencing the objects and then in the imagination.

Side coaching: Side coach during the imagining only.

Give the students one or more imaginary objects, such as a telescope, a bird cage, a book or trading stamps, or give a place, such as a deserted house, an underground railway station and use them to build a scene.

Point of concentration: On using the imaginary objects.

Take a chair and have the students sit on it as many ways as they can devise. Then explore other possibilities, such as ways of standing on it, or moving round it.

Point of concentration: To imaginatively use the chair as many ways as possible.

Point of observation: Allow the students to use the chair however they want. They are exploring and need not be practical. The experience will allow the imagination growth.

Take the chair again and have the students look at it from different points of view. Then have the students turn it on its side, upside down, and let it become something else: a car, a window, a counter, an umbrella, a cow.

Point of concentration: On letting an object imaginatively evolve into something else.

Take many objects such as a shoe, book, pen, ring and have the students find as many ways as they can of using each.

Point of concentration: To use things not as they were meant to be used.

Imagine an object, such as a vacuum cleaner, use it; then endow it with another quality, such as the ability to light a fire, or an electric fire which talks or a standard lamp which has certain human attributes.
Point of concentration: On using the imagination with no background material.

Have the students imagine a character with an oversensitive sense of smell and a strong imagination, or strong senses of taste and imaginations which run away with them; develop scenes and situations from these.

Point of concentration: On imagining the senses stronger than they are.

Devise scenes in which all the characters except one are: 1) deaf, 2) unable to speak, 3) without taste, 4) blind.

Point of concentration: To imagine handicaps and how they affect the whole way of living.

Imagine a world in which everyone is 1) very small, 2) tall, 3) heavy.

Point of concentration: To imaginatively explore this change of situation.

Work out scenes in which characters from one period of history find themselves in another period, or people from one country or civilization find themselves suddenly placed in another.

Point of concentration: Seeing their normal world as something new.

Have the students imagine a world in which language has been lost and a new one has to be invented.

Point of concentration: To imaginatively use the voice and body.

Build a scene in a world where everything is the opposite of what it is in this world. Where men are punished for being ill and put into a hospital for committing a crime.
Relating an Incident

Two players. Players are on stage. A relates a story to B, who then repeats the same story, this time putting color into it.

Point of observation: Players are not to embellish the retelling of the story. They simply relate what they have heard, bringing color to it.

The purpose of this exercise is for the listener to see the incident in full color at the moment of listening to it.

Throwing Conversation Game

Four or more players. Two players secretly decide upon a topic of conversation. They then begin discussing the topic in the presence of the other players. Their point of concentration is to mislead the others as to the identity of the topic they are discussing.

The other players may not ask questions nor guess the topic aloud. But when a player thinks he knows what the topic is, he is to join in the conversation. At any time after he has joined in the conversation, he may be challenged. When this occurs, he must whisper what he thinks the topic is to one of the two conversation leaders. If he has guessed correctly, he continues to participate in the conversation. If he is incorrect, he is one-third out of the game and must become an observer again until he has a new guess and rejoins the conversation. A player may join in the conversation for some time without arousing suspicion and being challenged.

The game goes on until all the players have either guessed correctly and joined the conversation or have made three wrong guesses and are out of the game.


**Story-Building**

Four or more players. The first player starts a story about anything he wishes. As the game progresses, the leader points out various players who must immediately step in and continue the story from the point where the last player left off. This is continued until the story has been completed or until the leader calls a halt.

**Building Stories with Particular Lines**

Two teams with four or more players. Each team is given a particular line or phrase which they must work into the story that is being told. The story line jumps from team to team with about thirty seconds per player. After all team members have had a chance the game is stopped and each team tries to guess what the other team's particular phrase was. The team which fooled the other team is the winner.

**Point of concentration:** Story building with a particular goal.

**Scene from a Picture**

One player. Player goes on stage and is quickly shown a picture with a single character. He then tells the audience about himself becoming the character in the picture. The audience may ask him questions about himself, which he must immediately answer.

**Point of concentration:** On quickly collecting thoughts and making the character believable.

**Point of observation:** Pictures may be torn from magazines, advertisements work well.
Connecting Words

Single player. The student is given three words and told to connect them in a story which he will tell to the audience and at the same time act it out.

Point of concentration: To use three words in a story and act it out.

Example: Suggested list of words to start:

- sea
- cabin
- duchess
- ash tray
- window
- lollipop
- candle
- sardine
- comb
- necktie
- nutcracker
- rocking chair
- pine tree
- ostrich
- violin
- elevator
- plumber
- electric bulb
- Africa
- mermaid
- deck of cards
- catalog
- wine glass
- lampshade
- gold mine
- cough drop
- pagoda
- bracelet
- pistol
- streetcar
- ski
- sea gull
- cigarette
- glove
- roof garden
- davenport
- magazine
- Mexico
- umbrella
- balloon
- zebra
- raincoat

Point of observation: The story can go in any direction. It may be real or fantastic.

The leader should invent new games to stimulate the imagination.

Fantasy plays such an important part in the theater that considerable time should be devoted to it.
The actor must know that he is one unified organism, that his whole body, from head to toe, functions as one unit in a life response. His whole body must be a vehicle of expression and must develop as a sensitive instrument for perceiving, making contact and communicating. The phrase, "See it with your elbow!" is a way to help the student transcend his cerebral concept of a feeling and restore it where it belongs—within his total organism.

This chapter contains exercises which help the student physicalize for himself the side coaching used throughout the workshop: Feel with your anger in the small of your back! Hear that sound in your finger tips! Taste the food all the way down to your toes!

Ideally, however, all improvisation workshops should be implemented with regular bodywork and exercises in movement by a specialist in the field. An improvisation workshop in acting should include also some of the aspects of dance improvisation. In this area body release, not body control, is learned. The release that is needed for natural grace to emerge as opposed to artificial movement.¹

EXERCISES FOR PARTS OF THE BODY

Feet and Legs Alone

These exercises are designed to develop more organic use of the feet and legs and to awaken the student to the realization that his feet and legs are

integral parts of his body.

A stage curtain is needed for the exercise, a curtain raised just high enough to show the feet and legs of the actors. If the curtain cannot be raised up and down, a cloth can easily be hung at knee-height. Just be certain the upper part of the body is concealed.

Exercise 1

Single players. Each player is to show one of the following through the use of his feet and legs alone: Who you are. What you are doing. A state of being.

Point of concentration: On showing who, what or a state of being with the feet alone.

Exercise 2

Two players. Where, who and what agreed upon. No dialogue is to be used.

Point of concentration: All focus on legs and feet alone. Relationships, laughter, sadness are to be communicated by the feet alone.

Points of observation:

1) Once the problem is solved with twos, any number of players can be effectively used.

2) Actors should also do this exercise barefooted. Knowing their feet are exposed, they will work with greater understanding of the problem to show the audience how they feel.
Hands Alone

Many actors who do use their hands along with their faces and voices are oblivious to their full value. Others wave them about not using them well, some just use them to hold a cigarette. In the following exercise, the student learns to show relationship through the use of his hands.

In preparation for the exercise, the leader must see that a small stage is available, a stage which hides the student's body from view. An oblong table, curtained off, was used in this workshop. A light may be needed to illuminate the miniature playing area.

Teams of two. Players agree on where, who and what. Speech is not to be used, nor are the players to use any part of their bodies except their hands and forearms.

Point of concentration: To show where, who and what by means of the hands alone.

Example from the workshop: At first we saw the hands of someone writing on a piece of paper. They laid the paper aside and made a gesture for someone off-stage to come in and sit down on the other side of the desk. The second pair of hands entered. They were tense and seemed gnarled and twisted, as if they belonged to a paralytic. They tried to hide themselves, to become composed. The first hands smoothly reassured them and proffered the paper for the paralyzed hands to sign. They pushed over a pen, which the latter picked up with great difficulty. While the paralyzed ones struggled to sign the paper, the first ones made smoothing, confident, friendly gestures. The scene went on for
some time; with all our attention focused on these hands alone, the scene became intensely emotional and exciting.

Side coaching: Laugh with your fingertips! Shrug your hands, not your shoulders! Remember we can't see your face! Put all that energy into your fingertips!

Points of observation:

1) Exercise can also be done as Feet and Legs Alone, with single players. They are to show: who they are, what they are doing, state of being.
2) Avoid discussing over-use of hands.
3) Finger exercises are useful for hand development.

Exercise of Back

Any number of players. Through this exercise the student learns to communicate with his whole body. The student should understand that there are parts of his back side which can be used in acting but that the movement is limited. The head, shoulder, torso, arms and hands, buttocks and heels, ankles and backs of legs can all be brought into play.

Have the students sit as though at a piano with their backs to the audience. They are to show how they feel through their manner of playing. Let them find their own attitudes.

Students agree on where, who and what. Scenes must be played with their backs to the audience. They should choose a setting where dialogue is not suitable.

Point of concentration: Using their backs to show the audience their
inner action—what they are feeling.

Side coaching: Don't show us in your face, show it in your back!

Point of observation: Variations of this exercise can be done using single players.

Parts of the Body: Full Scene

After each individual exercise or series of exercises concentrating on parts of the body, divide the group into teams. Where, who and what agreed upon.

Scene is done in regular way, with students in full view of audience.

Point of concentration: On the specific part of the body previously covered.

Point of observation: Note that many mannerisms have disappeared.

Exercises for Total Body Involvement

Two or more players. Where, who and what agreed upon. Must choose scene which involves head-to-toe action.

Point of concentration: Head-to-toe involvement.

Example: Revival meeting; deep sea divers hunting treasures underwater; non-gravity space ship.

Rhythmic Movement

Full group. Have players sit or stand in large area. Leader calls out an object (train, airplane, space ship, washing machine). Players are instantly, without reflection, to make some motion that the object suggests to them.

Have them continue the movements until they become rhythmical and easy. When this has occurred, side coach to group to move around the area,
keeping their movement going.

Set up a scene for the students as they are moving around.

**Tense Muscle**

Two or more players. Where, who and what agreed upon. Each player is to tense up some part of his body and is to keep it tense throughout the scene. However, this is not to be part of the scene—it is not to be a personal thing. Although the tenseness will almost always be noticed by the audience, the actor should not attempt to show it to the audience or to justify it in any way.

Point of concentration: On tensing up some part of the body.

Points of observation:

1) On the initial presentation of this exercise, note that many players will tense up what is already a personal muscular problem for them. Do not point this out to the student until he has completed the exercise for the first time and then have him repeat the exercise tensing another part of his body.

2) This exercise keeps the actor intensely preoccupied as he moves through the scene.
CONCLUSION

The improvisation exercises described in Appendix A, B and C were used in an experimental workshop. It is believed the results observed in that workshop would apply to any similar class or workshop on the college level. The acting and improvisational ability of the students improved in every case. All of the students became more free and spontaneous in their actions during the workshop sessions. The area of greatest improvement was in concentration and the building of self-confidence. Beginning with the orientation exercises the students became more aware of their sensory perception and how concentration on seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching can make the action real for the audience. The orientation exercises strengthened their imaginations as did the special exercises designed to develop imagination. With the employment of the exercises designed to make the students aware of the entire body the students began to bring the whole body into their acting.

With constant use of the exercises the students began to function organically. The exercises and games they had played in the workshop sessions were ingested so that they were able to bring all their mental, physical and intuitive faculties together and respond to the moment while keeping in mind the demands of the theater and the skills required to present that art. When this happened the techniques and spontaneity necessary for work in the theater became theirs forever.
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A recent publication which covers improvisation in England and explains how improvisation can be used with scripted drama.

A discussion of Happenings which includes scripts or outlines of some recent productions of Happenings.

A guide for the development of creative dramatics with emphasis on the school program. The chapter entitled "The Leader" gives a good explanation of the qualities necessary to a leader.


The two volumes cover the development of Moreno's New York Theater for Psychodrama and discuss the principles of spontaneity.


A description of the development of Moreno's theater and theory of spontaneity. The discussion of the mental processes of spontaneity is a valuable section for anyone interested in improvisation.


Lists many exercises involving improvisation for clearly defined and specific purposes. It is divided into general improvisation exercises, improvisation exercises to develop feeling and improvisation exercises to develop character.


A good manual of the acting process with many exercises helpful in developing elementary skills in improvisation.


An approach to creative dramatics stated in such a way that the child is given a good moral and religious up-bringing. The chapters on developing creative dramatics courses in colleges is helpful.


Covers the development of improvisation and suggestions for establishing a class. Lists several valuable exercises. Has a good section on children and improvisation.


The book contains excellent exercises for body conditioning. The chapter on improvisation in dance gives valuable insight into another aspect of improvisation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


