

From Berk, Treiber 2009

When improvisation is reformatted into small-group collaborative learning activities in a learner-centered environment, it can be a powerful teaching tool. Research evidence demonstrates that it can promote spontaneity, intuition, interactivity, inductive discovery, attentive listening, nonverbal communication, ad-libbing, role-playing, risk-taking, team building, creativity, and critical thinking (Crossan, 1998; Moshavi, 2001; Sawyer, 2004; Spolin, 1999). These features are all about the students

Crossan, M. M. (1998). Improvisation in action. *Organization Science*, 9 (5), 593-599.

Crossan, M. M., Cunha, M. P., Vera, D., & Cunha, O. (2005). Time and organizational improvisation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 30 (1), 129-145.

Crossan, M. M., & Sorrenti, M. (1997). Making sense of improvisation. *Advances in Strategic Management*, 14, 155-180.

Moshavi, D. (2001). Yes and . . . : Introducing improvisational theatre techniques to the management classroom. *Journal of Management Education*, 25(4), 437-449.

Sawyer, R. K. (2004). Creative teaching: Collaborative discussion as disciplined improvisation. *Educational Researcher*, 33 (2), 12-20.

Spolin, V. (1999). *Improvisation for the theatre: A handbook of teaching and directing techniques* (3rd ed.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Hoffman, A., Utley, B., & Ciccarone, D. (2008). Improving medical student communication skills through improvisational theatre. *Medical Education*, 35, 225-231.

Bergren, M., Cox, M., & Detmar, J. (2002). *Improvise this! How to think on your feet so you don't fall on your face*. New York: Hyperion

Keefe, J. A. (2002). *Improv yourself: Business spontaneity at the speed of thought*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Koppett, K. (2001). *Training to imagine: Practical improvisational theatre techniques to enhance creativity, teamwork, leadership, and learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Leigh, A. (2004). *Dramatic success at work: Using theatre skills to improve your performance and transform your business life*. London: Nicholas Brealey.

Lowe, R. (2000). *Improvisation, inc.: Harnessing spontaneity to engage people and groups*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

It has been used to teach communication skills for physician-patient interaction with first-year medical students (Hoffman, Utley, & Ciccarone, 2008). Perhaps its best-known use in academe is in The Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, which has been offering a course and intensive workshops on business/managerial improvisation for MBA students for several years. The course and workshops were developed in 1999 by adjunct professor Robert Kulhan and Craig Fox (the latter now at UCLA). The course is designed for students to

- build trust,
- foster teamwork and better brainstorming,
- improve communication and presentation skills,
- promote creative problem solving,
- respond quickly and decisively to unanticipated challenges,

- think on their feet and recognize opportunities as they arise,
- increase their comfort level with change and willingness to take risks, and
- manage change and promote a supportive, improvisational corporate culture.

In the world of business, the metaphor of

However, the application of the numerous improvisational exercises and games developed over the past 30 years has extended far beyond the formal theatre setting to management and business training (Bergren, Cox, & Detmar, 2002; Crossan, 1998; Crossan & Sorrenti, 1997; Keefe, 2002; Koppett, 2001; Leigh, 2004; Lowe, 2000; Moshavi, 2001) and to everyday, real-life challenges (Madson, 2005). A wide range of theatrical techniques, including, most recently, improvisation, are also not new to teaching and have been shown to be extremely effective in the live classroom (Baerhaim & Alraek, 2005; Berk, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Diamond & Christensen, 2005; Jackson, 1993; Jacobsen, Baerheim, Lepp, & Schei, 2006; James & Williams, 1981; Millbower, 2003; Newton, 1998; Patterson, McKenna-Cook, & Swick, 2006; Shapiro & Hunt, 2003; Spolin, 1986; Timpson, Burgoyne, Jones, & Jones, 1997).

Baerheim, A., & Alraek, T. J. (2005). Utilizing theatrical tools in consultation training: A way to facilitate students' reflection on action? *Medical Teacher*, 27 (7), 652-654.

Berk, R. A. (2001). Using music with demonstrations to trigger laughter and facilitate learning in multiple intelligences. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 12 (1), 97-107.

Berk, R. A. (2002). *Humor as an instructional defibrillator: Evidence-based techniques in teaching and assessment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Berk, R. A. (2003). *Professors are from Mars®, Students are from Snickers®*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Berk, R. A. (2005). Laughterpiece theatre: Humor as a systematic teaching tool. *Teaching Excellence*, 17 (2). (Available from [www.ronberk.com](http://www.ronberk.com))

Berk, R. A. (2008a). Humor and the net generation. *Thriving in Academe*, 25 (4), 5-8.

Berk, R. A. (2008b). Music and music technology in college teaching: Classical to hip hop across the curriculum. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*, 4 (1), 45-67.

Diamond, M. R., & Christensen, M. H. (2005). Bravo! Do acting games promote learning in the college classroom? *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 16 (2), 55-67.

Jackson, T. (1993). *Learning through theatre: New perspectives on theatre in education*. London: Routledge.

Jacobsen, T., Baerheim, A., Lepp, M. R., & Schei, E. (2006). Analysis of role-play in medical communication training using a theatrical device—the fourth wall. *BMC Medical Education*, 6 (51). (Available from [www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6920/6/51](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6920/6/51))

James, R., & Williams, P. (1981). *A guide to improvisation: A handbook for teachers*. Oxon, UK: Kemble Press.

Millbower, L. (2003). *Show biz training*. New York: American Management Association (AMACOM).

Newton, B. (1998). *Improvisation: Use what you know—make up what you don't!: Improvisation activities for the classroom*. Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press.

Patterson, J., McKenna-Cook, D., & Swick, M. (2006). *Theatre in the secondary school classroom: Methods and strategies for the beginning teacher*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Drama.

Shapiro, J., & Hunt, L. (2003). All the world's a stage: The use of theatrical performance in medical education. *Medical Education*, 37, 922-927.

Timpson, W. M., Burgoyne, S., Jones, C. S., & Jones, W. (1997). *Teaching and performing*. Madison, WI: Magna.