

Form Two

Scheme One :

Improvisation

Aims:

- To give students confidence in expressing themselves.
- To encourage understanding of the different ways in which people communicate.
- To promote teamwork and co-operation.
- To develop improvisation technique, particularly trust, spontaneity, focus and concentration.
- To reflect on experiences at a personal level by keeping a journal.

Scheme Length:

- Approximately 10 sessions, 80 minutes each.

NB : The first four sessions of the scheme should be delivered chronologically. Thereafter the material is non-sequential.

Session One: Improvisation Trust and Co-operation

Resources: 8 Blindfolds (+ Spares?)
Chairs/Benches Polycubes For Assault course

1) Warm-up:

- a) Walking warm-up, moving in a constant curve, never a straight line, looking always to move into empty spaces. After a short time...
- b) Shake hands with everyone you pass, then move on. After a short time...
- c) Stop every time you meet someone, and exchange some piece of information - news, something that happened in the holidays, something about yourself. Warn against defamatory statements about classmates...

2) Form standing Circle:

Feedback one or two things that people heard as they moved around. Introduce the idea that they will be doing a lot of work on **improvisation** this term, that this sort of work relies on being open, relaxed and focused. (Ask what is improvisation?) Much of what you do will be **spontaneous**, therefore dependent on your quick-thinking and using what is available to you. A key element of improvisation is **acceptance**: building on what your fellow improvisers give you to work with. To gain acceptance requires **trust**, therefore the first session of the scheme is built around a series of trust exercises.

3) Find a partner. Exercise One - Trust Walk.

In pairs, one partner leads the other on a blindfolded walk, introducing them to sounds, smells, textures: ask them to be aware of all their senses on the walk, and to return at the end of ten minutes. (If neither partner has a watch, ask them to stay within sight of someone who does...) feedback pairs on what the experience was like on their return: how did they feel? Who was in control? Did you notice anything interesting unusual/amusing being blindfolded? etc. assure them that their partner will have a chance shortly, but for now we will try another related activity.

4) Robots

a) Close the curtains so that the stage is in semi-darkness. Whilst the partner who was blindfolded writes up their journal of their experiences in as much detail as possible*, the others together form an assault course/maze using the chairs. The 'blind' partner is the 'robot', the other the 'mad scientist' who must guide them carefully through the maze. First get them to work through the obstacle of chairs one by one - any contact with the chairs means you're out. Then send all the robots at once through a slightly altered maze (Noisy! You might demand scientists speak only in a whisper..) Feedback on responses.

b) Repeat sections 3 and 4 above, with the other half of the class blindfolded. (NB - you might want to insist on a change of partners at each stage to ensure that **the group** builds a sense of trust). For the final session of robots, ask the pairs to create a non-verbal code to work through the maze - What problems did this cause? What did you need to think about? Was it better than everyone trying to talk at once, or harder? Again, 'the blind' should write up their findings each time they are waiting for the maze to be reconstructed.

5) Closing Circle

To end the session, each person in turn should mention 10 things about themselves - try to draw them to go beyond 'I am a boy', 'I go to MaP' etc. Then the rest of the group try to remember each person's 10 facts in turn. NB: if time is short, you may wish to limit this to five points, or the first six students, or whatever. It is a useful memory exercise that you can return to at any stage. Feedback on the purpose of this exercise (memory, concentration, revelation). draw out the fact that it is more interesting/memorable to **think actively** in this exercise, as in all improv. work.

*Prep: Ask students to complete the journal for today's session. Each student should keep a log of each lesson, briefly describing what they do, how they felt, what they thought the purpose was, what they learned, enjoyed, disliked etc. Remind them that this is a personal response.

Form Two

Session Two: Improvisation

Improvisation Using Mime

Resources: Mime Cards: Character Roles
Mime Cards: Double-Glazed Window

1) Warm-up: Red light Green Light:

Teacher acts as 'policeman'. On the command green light, without running students attempt to cross from one side of the stage to the other. Red light means stop - anyone failing to respond immediately is sent back. Be strict or the game ends very quickly. Try it 'straight' first, then using more imaginative, dramatic forms - with a wounded knee, a spy with a bomb, a zombie, an 88-year old woman...

2) Body Warm-up:

Make a circle, everyone facing out - everyone very slowly relax the upper body, like a candle melting, falling forward at the waist - no sound effects please! Hold, then slowly rise again, vertebrae by vertebrae, then shoulders, then neck.

3) Facial Warm-up:

(Still facing out) Scrunch your mouth, eyes, cheeks, whole face into a ball, then mouth and eyes, whole face as wide as possible. Move from scrunch to stretch three times. Sound effects allowed, but they must keep concentration. Everyone find a space..

4) Miming Ideas (1)

Ask class to spread out, and each try to act the following ideas - in mime:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| a) Please go away | e) I want to speak to you. |
| b) About this long | f) I can't believe it! |
| c) I have a stomach ache | g) Stop the car, the police are behind us! |
| d) I really love you | h) He staggered out of the bar and fell in the gutter... |

Once they have tried each idea, get them to pair up and quickly choose one of the lines. Why is the line delivered? Who is it delivered to? Develop a short piece that leaves the audience in no doubt as to who is involved...watch and discuss each.

5) **Miming Ideas (2)**

Give each actor a character mime card, give them a minute to think about the role before they act it out. They should aim to be **detailed** and **specific** in their actions. watch and evaluate.

6) **Feedback**

Mime allows us to forget about words, so we don't worry about projection, memorisation etc. The physical aspects of drama - facial expression, posture, movement - are all vital parts of conveying meaning, however, and we mustn't forget them when come to use dialogue.

NB: The extension work above is quite lengthy. With 10 or 15 minutes left it is probably better to return to the 10 things exercise from last week, and see if they can remember any! Alternatively, this could be tried at the beginning as a useful link back to last week's work. Students should again write their journals for prep.

Notes:

Form Two

Session Three: Improvisation

Towards Spontaneous Improvisation

Resources: Character cards (At least 100!)
 Emotion cards

1) Mental Warm-up.

Spontaneous improvisation requires you to act off-the-cuff, thinking on your feet. We are going to do plenty of that today! First, get yourselves into pairs. We are going to count up to three in pairs, returning to 1 straight away: not as easy as it sounds!

After a short time, replace to '2' with the word 'pink', then 1 with a pat on the head, and 3 with a yelled 'Duck!' This is a variant of a game you played before, but it doesn't get any easier! Now that you're all thoroughly confused...

2) Into Improvisation.

a. **Facial Warm-up:** Scrunch and stretch, just as last week, only this time partners take turns, watching each other. No laughing! (This is called corpsing in the theatre, and has to be avoided in the theatre at all costs, even if the actor thinks something is really funny!) Repeat 3 times.

b. **In The Box...** : An exercise that you should have tried last year. A magic box lies between the two characters. A pulls out objects non-stop, describing what they are, whilst B offers some comment on each one. (Eg - A:It's a grape, the Titanic, my grandmother's false teeth, the complete works of Charles Dickens, a satellite, a satellite dish... whilst B: Pop it in my mouth... watch out for icebergs....yuk!... have you read Oliver Twist? etc.) No profundity expected, the aim is to step up a constant verbal stream... After a while, A and B swap roles.

c. **Presents...** : Similar to the box, but this time involving greater interaction. A presents B with an imaginary present, the only clue being the size, weight and shape of the object. B opens it, uses the object and if necessary explains what it is. Thanks A, then gives A a present in turn. Repeat several times.

3) Householder.

One student takes the role of a householder: maid, househusband, granny-at-home or perhaps a businesswoman with a home-office. Using character cards, each student takes on a role and, in turn, comes to the householder's door. The two then improvise what happens next. Each student should take five turns as householder, then join the back of the line and the next student take over, until everyone has had a turn. This could mean eighty knocks on the door, so keep things moving! Some coaching is probably necessary: is the character visiting on professional grounds, or is it a private matter? A case of mistaken identity? An emergency? You might need to remind them that the person approaching the door may well live there themselves! (Or think they do!) It is probably best to distribute the cards a little in advance of starting, to allow students to think a little about the role - give out a new card as each student finishes. Remind them too, that the householder has some responsibility for making the scene a success, as it is possible that they will just soak up the visitor's actions without developing the scene. (Continued Over leaf)

4) Householder (2)

This time, divide the class into 3 groups (5/6 to a group) - each takes a character card, and again will all come to the door in turn, entering and interacting with those already there. Run this scene for 3 or 4 mins. For this exercise it is important to stress:

- a) Be aware of what others are doing
- b) Don't all talk at once!
- c) Look for ways of focusing activity, events that might move the piece forward...
- d) Don't be afraid to leave, but find a good reason to do so.

This work can be further extended in one of several ways:

- i) Take a group and create 'forum theatre', with members of the class asking questions and suggesting alternatives when the work flags.
- ii) Ask the class to provide **motives**/provide your own motives/allocate an **emotion** card to each character....

This session should be used to draw out ways of maintaining and developing improvisation work:

- i) Develop relationships - who knows who and how?
- ii) Develop attitudes (How did the plumber feel about being called out in the middle of the night? What was the photographer's reaction to finding the bride-to-be was his ex-wife?)
 - ii) Accept other actor's ideas and look to develop them. (look for actors who constantly 'block' others and alert them to ways round this - they probably are not aware they are doing it. Usually it stems from fear of new directions, or playing a role in the drama that doesn't appeal, or having too preset an idea of what they want to happen in the drama.)

It is always worth persevering with these sort of exercises, even though many students will produce bland or obvious, or no reactions at first! Stress that silence often works wonders in gaining an audience's attention, and in this work, the performers

should be given time to develop the action. Beware groups who try to plan out their scenes - that ceases to be spontaneous improvisation.

If the session is really flagging, try running the scene using gobbledygook, or get them to use dialogue but mime nouns/adjectives/verbs... However, this session should primarily be a rigorous and disciplined attempt to tackle challenging improvisation head on. Sometimes wonderful work emerges!

Prep: Write up the lesson assessment (often interesting!)

Form Two Session Four: Rotation Improvisation

1) Extension Rotation

To develop from this piece, choose one or more of the following scenes - the setting will remain constant, students determine who their character is; ascertain a numerical order for entering, though students may later opt to enter spontaneously as the same character returning. No more than two (possibly three) characters in the middle at the same time - as soon as one goes, another enters. Get the students to listen and develop upon what has already been said. Characters must find a motive to leave.

Some possible locations:

- a) Outside a school staffroom at break
- b) On a street corner with a disco a few metres down the road
- c) The kitchen of a busy restaurant
- d) The foyer of an International Hotel

Feel free to locate other settings of your own devising. If there is time, try 2 or 3 of these settings, looking for different sorts of characters each time.

2) Feedback

In feedback, stress the importance of listening, accepting and developing.

Extension work: Hotseating

If you find you have plenty of time in the second part of the session, get the class to hotseat characters from the location improvisations: perhaps the most interesting ones, or conversely those who offered little in terms of character development. When Hotseating a character, you sit them down in front of the group and interview them. Start with factual questions (What's your name? How old are you? Are you married?) to emotional/personal (Why were you so upset when..? How do you feel about young people today?)

The idea is that the interview deepens the character role - all answers given should therefore be plausible and consistent with what has been seen. This should be explained to the students before questioning begins. Begin by asking the questions yourself, then allow students to ask some, either in or out of role.

Prep: Ask students to complete the journal for today's session. Hotseated students should be sure to include an account in their journals.

Session Five: Improvisation - Age Matters!

1) Walking Warm Up

Get students to walk around the room, naturally at first, then on a given signal to imagine they are four years old. How does their movement change. Warn them not to be too young! Experiment with leading movement from the knees, widening arm movements. Now try aged one - you are just learning to walk. Experiment further with fifty, sixty, eighty years old, ironing out misconceptions about fifty year-olds! Get them to think about curving the spine, dropping the shoulders, again walking from knees or even feet as they become aged. At the end of the exercise ask them to find a partner. Explain that today's session is to be about age and how it affects us.

2) Arguments sequence:

Ask the class to avoid violence in these scenes if at all possible.

Begin with improv. of two small children arguing over a toy.

Now two teenagers arguing over a boy/girlfriend

Now two adults arguing over a problem in the office. Try it once, then ask class to form fours: make three actors and one observes, looking for realism and how focus/tension are achieved - at the end of each scene the observer should hotseat one character to find out their attitudes/motives, note down the answers for a report to head-office, then change actors/observers:

With a mean boss and his/her employees

With a kind boss and his/her employees

Where one worker has problems at home

Where the two employees are both after promotion...

3) The Unwelcome Relative

In groups of four, class should finally imagine they are a family at home who receive news (phonecall/letter) that an elderly relative - a great aunt/ mad uncle/ grandmother is coming to stay. The family have differing opinions of this character:

- What are they?
- What sort of people are the family?
- How old is each member? How likeable?
- What decision do the family finally come to?

The groups should create a polished improvisation to answer these questions, to how to the rest of the class, focusing on creating well-rounded characters and a tightly structured scene. Show and discuss.

Feedback

At the end of the session the class might like to discuss views of the elderly in society? Are homes for the elderly good or bad? Why respect your elders? Etc.

Session Six: Improvisation

The Party

1) Warm Up - The Yes/No Game

In pairs, quite simply one asks the questions, the other answers, the aim being for the questioner to force a yes or a no from their partner.

2) Warm Up - 'Sausage'

This time split the class into three: one person being interrogated by the others, the only thing they can say is sausage - they have to keep a straight face while doing so.

3) Improvisation: The Party

What has connected the two warm-ups? Persuasion. Today we are going to look at an improvisation that deals with the theme of peer pressure. We will work in groups of five/six. Mpho is a new kid in the school. His parents are quite well off and have a big house in town. Mpho is finding it hard to make friends in the new school. His parents decide to go off on a trip to Jo'burg for the weekend, leaving Mpho home alone. They make their child promise not to get up to mischief while they are away.

Scene One: 'The Gang' learn that Mpho is home alone, and at school try to force a party. How? What bribes do they use? Eventually Mpho reluctantly agrees.

Scene Two: Before the party starts, Mpho is seen voicing concerns about the night's events to best friend. The Party begins calmly enough but quickly things look like getting out of hand. Freeze at point **before** trouble occurs....

Scene Three: A short scene showing the trouble - a broken vase or window? A fight? A drugs overdose?

- **Scene Four:** The Aftermath. The parents return from Jo'burg to find...

After each scene is shown by one or two groups, some of the lead roles should be hotseated (see lesson four for explanation): in scene one, the gangs motives should be explored; in scene two Mpho's best friend's reactions; in scene three Mpho's feelings; in scene four the parent(s).

Prep should take the form of a diary entry for one of the characters you played.

Session Seven:

Improvisation Miscellany

This session stresses the importance of good observation, spontaneity and working together in improvisation and all drama.

Resources: At least four large objects: traffic cone, cricket bat, plastic piping, hula hoop for 'props improv'.

1)Creating a set

As a class, the group take it in turns to mime and develop a set: eg. first person steps up, mimes opening a door, walks through, turns around and exits through the same door. Person two enters through the door, pulls up a chair, sits on it; person three opens the curtains; person four opens the fridge takes out a coke etc. What is important is that the room remains the same - actors must open the door in the same way, move around tables etc.

When whole group has worked together - probably on two or three sets otherwise the whole thing becomes too congested - then split into groups of four and spend five minutes creating own sets. Encourage them to be creative - but all must work in silent concentration - this is mime. Don't talk, show!

As a group, they should now choose a favourite set and in five minutes max., create a short sketch that takes place in that set, using the objects they have created. Now they can use dialogue, but cannot name the objects they create (ie - say 'Mmm this beer's nice and cold!' rather than 'What's that you took out of the fridge?')

Show scene to class. How clear is it? Is it of interest to the audience? How does it manage to achieve that?

2)Freeze and Justify

Now in pairs, students should try freeze and justify. (Not before an audience at this stage..) A adopts a frozen position, then B enters and says something that justifies the position. Try this four or five times each, developing each until the teacher calls cut!

Returning to whole group, try the same idea with everyone taking a turn to freeze and a turn to justify.

3) Relating To Props Improvisation

Divide class into groups of four. In turn, give each group a prop, and they have to improvise - alone and as a group - as many possible different uses for the object: thus a traffic cone can become a loud-hailer, an ice-cream, a witches hat, a medical device for delivering medicine, a hearing-aid, a trumpet etc., etc. Three minutes is usually long enough for each group. Some groups really get into this and it is as well to have a second round of objects available. As a rule, the more basic the item, the better. Be a little strict on the groups: holding a stick to the eye doesn't make it a telescope, but yelling "Good God Captain! Enemy ships! Hundreds of them!" does!

You could challenge each group at the end to come up with a plausible scene involving all four 'mystery' objects. Treat it as a race, with the first group claiming to be 'ready' getting the first attempt. Stress that the objects have to be used in a way that is central to the drama. They can't just be items in a box hauled out of the attic, mentioned and discarded.

4) Snowball Freeze and Justify

As a finale to the lesson you could try a snowballed freeze and justify: as each person enters the freeze and justify, no-one leaves, so all participants remain involved until fifteen or sixteen characters are involved. This is usually chaotic, sometimes shambolic, but sometimes quite magical if everyone is focused and on the ball...

Prep: Ask students to complete the journal for today's session.

Session eight - Improvisation

Part of the crowd

The work in this session follows on usefully from the snowball improvisation at the end of the previous session. If this work was not completed, then it can provide a useful second warm-up for today's programme.

“Today’s session is all about working together towards a common goal: you are going to be part of a crowd. They say that people lose their identity when they join a crowd. First let’s see how well we can react to each other’s actions...”

1) Warm -up: Moving together

Group walks around the room making eye contact as they pass each other- no-one must look odd, stand out. If one person picks nose, coughs, everyone should. Experiment with everyone slowing down, speeding up, NO LEADERS!! Try to come to a complete stop, then all start simultaneously. All sit down, all stand up, start walking, stop, lie down, sleep. React to each other immediately. Experiment with this group awareness: try using emotions- nervous when at stop, relief when you move again - remember, everyone wants to be the same...

2) Crowd Scenes

Develop some crowd scenes to create **atmosphere**. Consider what sort of sounds and movement will you use? See the work by Michael Theodorou in *Ideas that work in Drama*.

The aim of these exercises is to make the students achieve greater depth in group work, and for students to become more aware of the motivation of characters in role-play. You may choose to develop three or four contrasting scenes in this way.

Further Development: Crowd Scene into theme

If the group seem to be particularly captured by one of the scenes, you could try expanding the work in a ‘filmic’ style, using this ‘Suicide On a Window Ledge’ scenario as a model:

Scene 1:

Suicide writing a letter

Scene 2:

Flashback to cause of whatever led to desire to end his/her life

Scene 3:

Friends/relatives talking about what led to the suicide

Scene 4:

Docors coldly analyse the cause of death

Scene 5:

Neighbours interviewed about the suicide by TV reporters

Scene 6:

Suicide reading letter out loud

Scene 7:
Crowd passing looks up and sees...

Scene 8:
Suicide jumping.

(This approach would work equally well using many of the crowds above: the school strike from different perspectives; the crowd awaiting execution; the Titanic story; the real life of the film star in contrast to the apparent glamour...)

Using the model above divide the class into groups of five or six, and get them to tackle one of the following ideas, using one of the crowd scenes as the starting point:

- Being different from the crowd
- Realising I don't fit in
- I was swept along by my friends

(NB:This project could easily take you into a second session for planning and polishing this improvisation work)

Session Nine Improvisation: Refugees

This project demands a serious and sensitive approach to the material from the students, and as such it is important for the teacher to generate a calm and serious atmosphere at the beginning of the session. Stage lighting could be used effectively- perhaps having one side of the stage, or the centre, lit for sections 2 and 3 and have the children walk off into/enter from the darkness at the beginning/end of these scenes.

Resources 8 Blindfolds
 Whistle (Optional)

1) Blind Walk

Students should pair up, one student blindfolded - A leads B around the space (by voice, not touch), speaking in a whisper, gradually moving further away from partner, but maintaining same low whisper. At a given signal, all the A's leave the B's, moving to a far point in the room. Then B must find A through recognising the voice. When partner is found, wait silently with them for the exercise to end. In feedback, explore feelings of isolation, separation.

2) Saying Goodbye

In pairs, student A is a parent, B is the child. For some reason, (war, famine, politics) the child is forced to leave the country. They must improvise a scene where the

parent tries to tell the child what to remember about the home country (some discussion in advance might be useful here, regarding what things the parent might feel) - all through the scene, the parent must hold and study the 'child's' hands. There is time pressure, because the border will close soon, so the scene should avoid too much melodrama - focus is on the hands and conveying information.

3) Feedback

What emotions might have been experienced? Ask the children: What did your parents ask you to remember?

4) Fifteen Years Later

Fifteen years pass and the border is finally reopened. The parents search for their children amongst the young adults waiting - focus on the hands, which is where the parent's strongest visual memory lies. Only recognising the hands will confirm the child's identity. What is the reunion like? Strained or joyful? What has happened in the intervening time? Is there good news or bad? Allow students time to think through some ideas before the meeting, in order to have a few thoughts to develop.

5) Family reunion

In larger groups of 4-6, using some of the ideas discussed at 4.), enact the homecoming dinner for the returning child. Discuss what might have happened in the years in between. Who is at the dinner? What tensions are there? Suspicion? Shame? Envy? Are there surprises for the characters? Develop the scene with careful consideration for the mood/characters involved. Does the mood change? How? When? These pieces could be shown, or left as private dramas, but the students could write about the meal *in role* or their prep.

Further Development:

If the students are engaged and interested by this work, they could go on to explore the themes in a number of ways:

- Develop the scenes into a short play; what other scenes might be included (growing up in the foreign country, what life was like during the fifteen years for the parents, what happens next...)
- Roleplay as a whole class what happened to the children immediately the border closed. Some take roles of doctors, social workers, aid workers, guards, possibly all using 'invented language': an exercise in exploring alienation.
- What it is like to be different: Stranger in a strange land - improvisations that explore this theme.
- Looking at other reasons why parents and children are separated (foster care, boarding schools, etc). Improvisations on these themes, possibly using **Tableaux**. For instance: (scene one- teenage pregnancy: scene two- baby taken into care: scene three- the reunion) Hotseat the characters involved at each stage. This work has the potential to lead into areas that might be close-to-home and uncomfortable for some

students, and teachers should be aware of this - though it is not necessarily a reason to avoid tackling 'issues'.

- Explore the original story using mime, music, symbolic movement.

Again, there is potentially material here for several sessions should it seem of interest to the group.

Session Ten: Improvisation The Man In The Street

Resources Copies Of 'In The Street' Photo-Cards

This session uses photo-cards, which should be given out to the students in groups of five/six. On the reverse is the following information:

- i) Look closely at the photograph overleaf. What can you work out from
a) the expressions b) the positions of the characters about what might have happened? Create a frozen image (a **tableau**) of the scene. Try to be as accurate as possible.

ii) Discuss in your groups what you think has happened. **Brainstorm.** Was there an accident? A fight? Are the men sick, or injured? Are they responsible for the incident, or was someone else involved? Think carefully about the character you were portraying in the image. What are they thinking/feeling? What were they doing immediately before the photograph was taking. What will they want to do next?

iii) Create two more 'photographs' which show what led up to the incident. They should illustrate clearly what happened and why. (Be warned, this is not as easy as it sounds!)

iv) It is now time to bring the drama to life! Devise a short **polished improvisation** that uses the ideas you have discussed. The incident in the photograph might be the beginning, the middle or the end of the drama - that is up to you!

Extension Work.

a) One of the characters is interviewed by the local newspaper - conduct the interview in pairs, making sure you focus on the character's point of view of events.

b) Imagine the man in sunglasses in the background is 'the controller', capable of taking control of other peoples' minds and bodies. In small groups create a scene where the controller goes to work on a new 'victim'. It could be comic, or serious...

Once again, even without the extension work this project could easily spill into two sessions - it is probably wise to remind students about the improv. skills covered earlier in the course and treat the final polished improv. as something of a 'test exercise'.

<sm@map.ac.bw>