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Learning by Playing: A Curriculum Utilizing Improvisational Theater to Develop Prosocial Behavior Skills and Self-efficacy in Young Adolescents

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by

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Abstract

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Prosocial behavior requires competency in social-emotional skills including interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation. During the developmental stage of early adolescence, youth are learning these skills and are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior if they feel efficacious in them. However, most social-emotional learning programs focus on conceptual knowledge in these areas without providing sufficient opportunities for practice, which does not allow students to develop sufficient procedural knowledge and self-efficacy. Improvisational theater offers a solution to this problem; used in concert with social-emotional lessons, it provides practice scenarios and procedural learning opportunities. This project consists of a curriculum built on these principles intended for use in a Montessori middle school environment. Its structure aligns with both Montessori secondary best practices and the fluid nature of interpersonal skills, allowing the teacher to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the class. It contains notes on implementation, lesson plans, and supplemental documents. In the discussion, students describe the perceived benefits of the program, including improved self-efficacy and a sense of community. Future directions include peer review, curriculum expansion, and research on efficacy.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Adolescence is an age of rapid social and emotional development (Siegel, 2015) which lends a unique importance to the developmental task of learning social interactions. Educator Maria Montessori described young adolescents as "social newborns" (qtd. in Laurie Ewert-Krocker, 2013), referring to the newly developing social skills of the adolescent. This age group is beginning the monumental task of learning where they fit into adult society and how adult social interactions work, often via trial and error. Young- to mid-adolescents (roughly 12-15 years old) require special educational considerations to learn how to positively engage in social interactions.

These types of interactions can be termed "prosocial behavior," meaning behavior which benefits other people or could be seen as socially positive, such as helping others (Penner et al., 2005). The primary factor in whether adolescents pursue prosocial behavior is if they generate goals to do so, and these goals are influenced by several contextual cues and internal processes (Wentzel et al., 2007). One significant internal factor is the adolescent's perception of their own competence in the skills the behavior requires (Wentzel et al., 2007). That is, for adolescents to behave in socially positive ways, they need to perceive themselves as having developed certain skills.

The "perceived competence" factor is especially significant because prosocial behavior does, indeed, require competence in many skillsets. First, interpersonal skills factor into prosocial behavior. Interpersonal skills can be likened to social skills and involve behaviors that facilitate communication (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). For example, to offer help, one needs to take someone else's perspective to realize that they require assistance. That is, "perspective taking" is

both an interpersonal skill (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011) and an element of prosocial goal pursuit (Wentzel et al., 2007). In essence, interpersonal communication skills lay the groundwork for prosocial behavior.

Conflict is a particularly challenging theatre for interpersonal skills and prosocial behavior. After all, it is one thing to behave positively when things are going well, but it is another to do so when one might need to compromise or cooperate. Most conflict resolution strategies build on existing interpersonal skills. For example, active listening is a crucial element for conflict resolution (Harris & Sherblom, 2010) and is also a general interpersonal skill (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). In addition, conflict resolution also requires its own set of strategies, such as the use of "I" statements (Harris & Sherblom, 2010). Together, interpersonal skills and conflict resolution strategies make up many of the competencies required to motivate adolescent prosocial behavior.

The final competency required to develop these skills is emotional regulation. Emotional regulation can be conceptualized as a bundle of strategies people use to manage their emotions and emotion-driven behavior (American Psychological Association, 2022). These strategies are particularly salient when it comes to conflict. This is because strong emotional activation can make it more difficult to reason, especially for adolescents (Siegel, 2015) and therefore might pose a barrier to utilizing conflict resolution strategies and choosing to pursue prosocial goals.

In addition, emotional regulation is a special developmental consideration of adolescence. Adolescents experience both swift and intense emotional development (Siegel, 2015) and a decline in emotional regulation strategies as they approach middle adolescence (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). Essentially, emotional regulation becomes a more complex beast in adolescence. This development can be especially frustrating in terms of prosocial behavior. For adolescents,

managing emotions is a salient aspect of prosocial behavior (Bergin et al., 2003). Emotional regulation strategies, then, are an important ingredient in addition to interpersonal and conflict resolution skills.

As mentioned, early adolescents are in the beginning stages of developing these bundles of skills, and so they could use instruction. After all, people who develop sufficient interpersonal skills tend to have more rewarding relationships and are more successful than those who do not, and the latter often become trapped in a negative spiral where social harms and poor mental health outcomes reinforce one another (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks and programs assist in the development of these skills and therefore positive social behavior, along with academic performance (CASEL, n.d.). Schools often adopt SEL programs to support these outcomes. However, not all these programs are sufficient.

The structure of most SEL programs is not optimal for lasting outcomes because they approach these skills in a similar manner to other academic subjects. For example, Second Step teaches skills such as emotion management and navigating conflicts using discussion, videos, and some roleplay (Committee for Children, 2022a, 2022b). These approaches can be effective to an extent (Moy & Hazen, 2018). However, recall that prosocial behavior (especially in conflict settings) becomes more difficult when one is emotionally dysregulated. If a program such as Second Step teaches such skills when students are emotionally regulated in the classroom, these skills might be useful in similar situations. However, if students become emotionally dysregulated (in conflict or otherwise), it will be more difficult for them to access the necessary skills and strategies for prosocial behavior. Repeated failure to access and use these skills could lead students to doubt their personal competency with these skills or the merits of the strategies. This is important because a sense of personal competence is an important

prerequisite for adolescents to aim for prosocial behavior (Wentzel et al., 2007). Basically, it is important for students to receive practice in interpersonal, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills beyond the traditional classroom setting so they can feel successful.

Improvisational theater, wherein actors create scenes spontaneously without scripts, might be a useful tool for providing this sort of practice for several reasons. First, improvisation allows the teacher to generate many new scenarios, providing practice in flexibly executing interpersonal skills and conflict strategies. It also allows for repeated practice, which is helpful because learning occurs with repeated activity (Lillard & Erisir, 2011). Second, many students feel nervous about participating in improvisational theater; this apparent barrier can be a strength, as it provides practice during heightened emotional struggle. Finally, movement is helpful for learning, especially in areas such as social skills (Lillard, 2007), and improvisational theater would allow for movement and physical interaction between participants. These elements can greatly contribute to learning-related cognition. Essentially, improvisational theater can help to fill in the gaps of many SEL programs, building the relevant skills into habits.

There are three promising programs that use theatrical strategies to assist with social-emotional skill-building. First, The Improv Project uses improvisation to work on social-emotional skills in a structured ten-week program (Detroit Creativity Project, 2020a; Felsman et al., 2019). Second, social worker Shawn Amador's Social Theatre program utilizes sketch comedy and, to a lesser extent, improvisation to teach social skills to adolescents (Amador, 2018). This program is geared toward adolescents with ADHD, ASD, and anxiety, helping them to build social skills and work through strong emotions (Amador, 2018). It mostly uses concrete lessons in social skills paired with light improvisation games and collaborative sketch-writing

sessions to give students a chance to practice (Amador, 2018). Both programs explicitly use improvisation to foster SEL outcomes.

Finally, Michael Rohd's Hope is Vital takes a distinct approach toward a slightly different goal. The Hope is Vital model utilizes improvisation to help participants build trust, explore conflict in a safe space, and discuss difficult situations (Rohd, 1998). It is geared toward a more general population and applicable to a wide variety of age ranges and social issues (Rohd, 1998). Essentially, Hope is Vital uses improvisation as a tool for dialogue and community-building.

Combining these approaches would provide a promising curriculum for helping young adolescents develop and practice interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation to the point of self-efficacy. The Improv Project and Amador's work could serve as a model for creating a foundation of social skills using improvisation and explicit lessons in interpersonal skills. At the same time, Rohd's approach could help to build trust within the class so it becomes a safe space for practice. Once the group develops the safety and skills necessary to proceed, an instructor could deliver lessons in emotional regulation and conflict resolution strategies. Again, Amador's work acts as an anchor for developing concrete skills while Rohd's approach provides flexible improvisational exercises to facilitate practicing these skills. The goal would be for the program to provide sufficient instruction and practice in these skill sets so that students feel motivated and capable to engage in prosocial behavior.

I have developed such a program for use in my middle school at St. Vrain Community Montessori School. I work with a mixed population of seventh- and eighth-grade students, both neurotypical and neurodivergent. Within this population, I teach a weekly improvisation class of thirteen self-selected students, who elected to participate knowing that the class would focus

more on using improvisation for community-building and interpersonal skills than for stage performance. This class represents the nascent version of the program.

In this project, I write a curriculum for an SEL program that utilizes improvisational theater to teach interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, along with emotional regulation strategies. To provide sufficient practice to allow these skills to become habit, I incorporate strategies from both Social Theatre and Hope is Vital, along with research on interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation strategies in adolescents. I also draw on my previous experiences using improvisation with students and observations of my students as the program progresses to inform the direction the curriculum will take. Finally, as a Montessorian, I utilize Montessori principles such as a focus on movement and flexible, student-responsive instruction to design my program. My hope is that this curriculum will be an accessible program to public schools, Montessori or not. I believe that a teacher with background in improvisation and an elective slot would be able to use this program with any adolescent population, provided that class sizes could be modified appropriately.

In combination, these elements should produce a program that allows students to both learn the building blocks of prosocial behavior and practice enough for these behaviors to become habit. In the process, it should also build the students' confidence in their abilities to do so. Our culture and communities can only benefit from widely and effectively helping young adolescents feel capable of positive social behavior.

Chapter 2

Prosocial Behavior & Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a pedagogical model that aims to educate general populations of students on social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness (CASEL, 2020). It addresses the need for educators to teach not only academics but also skills required for human growth and development, including social, emotional, and even mental health. SEL programs have been shown to improve outcomes in short-term behavior and academic performance and seem to contribute to positive long-term outcomes in both realms as well (Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2018). Essentially, the research clearly demonstrates that teaching social-emotional skills in a school setting contributes to student well-being across the lifespan.

There are many ways to conceptualize social skills or social-emotional skills (Jurevičienė et al., 2012; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). One leading organization in SEL programming, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning—or CASEL—have created the CASEL 5, a framework categorizing social-emotional competencies into five categories: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). Similarly, Jurevičienė et al. (2012) grouped previously-identified skills into five categories: communication (e.g. verbal and nonverbal expression), interaction, participation, social cognition, and emotional. Examining the literature from an interpersonal communication perspective, Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) instead determined six criteria by which skills could be evaluated (e.g. satisfaction, appropriateness, and ethics), then created a catalog of said skills.

These frameworks overlap and yet demonstrate different ways of thinking about social skills. On one hand, Jurevičienė et al. (2012) and Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) focus on communication contexts while CASEL's (2020) framework makes an extra effort to be applicable across the developmental spectrum. Despite their differences in framing, all three build heavily on existing research. These equally viable and helpful frameworks demonstrate the complexity and nuance of categorizing and explaining what is meant by "social skills." So, this project will focus on the ones which can be directly applied to prosocial behavior.

Prosocial Behavior's Place in Social-Emotional Education

For adolescents, prosocial behavior can be understood as a skill-based construct. Wentzel et al. (2007) found that the primary factor preceding prosocial behavior in adolescents was prosocial goal pursuit. That is, if an adolescent decided to try to engage in positive social behavior, they were likely to do so. Meanwhile, several factors influenced this goal pursuit. Some of these included contextual cues, i.e. what nearby adults and peers expect of the adolescent. Others included self-processes, the most relevant of which are empathy, perspective taking, and perceived competence. These self-processes are closely tied to SEL skills.

In fact, increasing the likelihood of prosocial behavior is a significant (direct or indirect) aim of many social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. Empathy and perspective-taking, for example, are both social-emotional skills listed in the CASEL framework (CASEL, 2020) along with being precursors to prosocial goal pursuit (Wentzel et al., 2007). In addition, CASEL often emphasizes student outcomes such as "demonstrating empathy and compassion" (2020) and positive classroom behavior (n.d.). The former are often elements of prosocial behavior, while the latter benefits other people such as classmates and teachers. Therefore, while prosocial

behavior is not the singular goal of most SEL programs, the ideas of prosocial behavior and social-emotional skills are inextricably intertwined.

Meanwhile, perceived competence provides an interesting impetus for SEL. Perceived competence in the context of Wentzel et al. (2007) refers to whether an adolescent perceives themselves to have the ability to enact a prosocial behavior. We might frame it as a social-emotional-specific form of self-efficacy, which refers to a person's beliefs about their ability to produce specific outcomes (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Imagine a middle school student whose friend appears to be grieving a loss. The student might empathize and imagine her friend would like comfort, both factors that would indicate prosocial goal pursuit. However, she may not do so because she perceives she does not know how to provide comfort. If the student had a stronger sense of self-efficacy, she might be more likely to engage in this positive interaction.

The social-emotional skills chosen for this project, then, have been chosen for their potential to bolster prosocial behavior. Interpersonal skills serve as foundational building blocks for prosocial behavior, while conflict resolution skills facilitate prosocial behavior in difficult situations. Finally, emotional regulation mediates the adolescent's ability and motivation to engage in prosocial behavior at all. The program concentrates on building students' sense of self-efficacy in these areas, increasing the likelihood that they will pursue prosocial goals.

Interpersonal Skills

Though the terms "interpersonal skills" and "social skills" are virtually synonymous in most meaningful contexts (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011), the former skillset is sometimes conceptualized with a focus on navigating interactions between two or more people while the latter can be seen as socially suitable behavior (Jurevičienė et al., 2012). We will use both terms

interchangeably with an understanding that many interpersonal skills nevertheless require internal processes such as perspective-taking (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011).

Interpersonal skills are numerous and varied. Spitzberg and Cupach (2011) have provided a taxonomy of these skills. According to them, interpersonal skills range from microscopic behavior (e.g., turning away) to more abstract mezzolevel and macroscopic behaviors (e.g., avoidance). These behaviors are difficult to categorize because behavior does not singularly map onto function. To address this difficulty, Spitzberg and Cupach's taxonomy addresses micro- and mezzo-level forms of interpersonal skills (e.g., asking questions to demonstrate attentiveness) along with micro- and mezzo-level functions (e.g. demonstrating the micro-function of concern lends itself to the mezzo-level function of intimacy.) According to this framework, examples of interpersonal skills would vary from concrete skills such as asking follow-up questions to abstract skills such as demonstrating empathy.

Adolescence is a crucial age for the development of interpersonal skills. Given the positive outcomes of social-emotional skills, it is unsurprising that strong interpersonal skills generally demonstrate better mental health outcomes, relationship quality, and life achievement (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Conversely, a failure to develop robust interpersonal skills can lead to a self-fulfilling spiral of poor relationships and poor outcomes for well-being (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Adolescence is a sensitive period for the development of the social brain (Blakemore, 2008) and interpersonal skills, and proper development of interpersonal skills in this period is linked to several positive life outcomes (Zahra et al., 2021).

However, teaching interpersonal skills at this age is complicated. First, adolescent interpersonal skills are strongly influenced by culture, peers, teachers, and parents (Gardiner, 2018; Zahra et al., 2021). Second, as stated above, interpersonal skills are varied and complex.

Ideally, an SEL program would focus on explicitly teaching some of these skills while indirectly teaching other skills so that students can explore cultural and social expectations. This project will focus on concrete interpersonal skills such as reading body language and taking turns talking to facilitate smooth social interactions, followed by practice with navigating micro- and mezzo-forms and functions. The importance of practice will be discussed later in this literature review.

Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict resolution skills can be seen as specific applications of interpersonal skills alongside conflict-specific strategies. For example, making follow-up comments/inquiries is an interpersonal skill (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). However, doing so is also an important element of participating in collaborative conflict resolution (Hocker & Wilmot, 2017). In addition, conflict resolution often requires conflict-specific skills such as learning one's own conflict style and how to navigate others' conflict styles (Hocker & Wilmot, 2017).

Addressing conflict in this program is important because prosocial behavior is often harder in conflict contexts. After all, one is usually invested in their own outcome and managing emotions, as discussed below. Furthermore, adolescents often struggle to apply strategies across different social contexts (McKone et al., 2021), so learning to apply interpersonal skills in conflict can help adolescents to navigate prosocial behavior across contexts.

Emotional Regulation Strategies

"Emotional regulation" skills refer to strategies used to navigate emotions and related behaviors (American Psychological Association, 2022). These skills are a crucial element in successful use of interpersonal and conflict skills (CASEL, 2020; Jurevičienė et al., 2012). For example, most of us have struggled to manage anger or anxiety during conflict. When we

experience heightened emotional activation, the parts of the brain which control rational thought become more difficult to access (Siegel, 2015). Therefore, learning emotional regulation strategies will better allow for successful implementation of prosocial behavior skills. In fact, adolescents tend to view emotional regulation skills as a category of prosocial behavior themselves (Bergin et al., 2003).

In addition, emotional regulation is an important part of early adolescent development. Young adolescents are in the middle of many biological, social, and cognitive changes which result in strong emotionality and more complex ways of understanding emotions (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). However, they also experience a decline in emotional regulation skills as they approach middle adolescence (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). Furthermore, adolescent emotional regulation develops in an emotion-specific manner (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014) and regulation strategies are also emotion-specific (Theurel & Gentaz, 2018). This complexity is especially concerning because unsuccessful development of emotional regulation strategies can have negative effects in areas such as depression (Theurel & Gentaz, 2018).

Clearly, teaching emotional regulation skills is important both for its own sake and to propel prosocial behavior. Theurel and Gentaz (2018) recommend providing adolescents with many regulatory options to account for the emotion-dependent nature of these strategies' effectiveness. They also recommend focusing on distinguishing adaptive strategies (i.e. "healthy" strategies) from maladaptive strategies (i.e. strategies which can worsen situations) and helping adolescents to build self-efficacy beliefs around emotional regulation. This program, then, will include lessons on a variety of emotional regulation strategies.

Taught together, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, and emotional regulation skills can serve as building blocks toward prosocial behavior. It is crucial that adolescents have a

variety of strategies to utilize in a variety of contexts. However, it is also important that adolescents feel skilled in the use of these strategies, both to increase their sense of self-efficacy and to improve the likelihood of using the tools at their disposal. Teaching content is one matter, but building skill in these areas requires special considerations.

Building Social Skills and Knowledge

Learning content that applies to prosocial behavior and becoming skilled in said behavior require different types of knowledge. Due to their developmental stage, adolescents are just beginning to develop the cognitive structures to house these types of knowledge. These needs reveal a flaw in many SEL programs that makes them less effective than they could be.

Procedural Knowledge & Conceptual Knowledge

In an educational context, we can often separate knowledge into "what" and "how." The former has been called conceptual knowledge (e.g. Schneider et al., 2011) or content knowledge (e.g. Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Within the context of this project, most relevant content knowledge refers to concrete knowledge about social skills, communication skills, and emotions. Meanwhile, procedural knowledge refers to understanding how to use the tools at one's disposal to solve problems (Schneider et al., 2011) or to navigate social situations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). For a relevant example, concept knowledge might include awareness of how facial expressions map onto emotions, while procedural knowledge might involve inferring a peer's emotional state from their facial expression and the situational context. One involves understanding the content, and the other involves applying this understanding.

Additionally, some researchers view the ability to apply social skills to the appropriate context as a sign of competence or skilled behavior, as opposed to mere ability (Jurevičienė et

al., 2012). That is, applying knowledge across contexts—selecting for additional criteria such as appropriateness and ethics—moves beyond procedural knowledge. It is possible to have both types of knowledge and still fumble in a social situation; there is more to the equation.

Action Assembly Theory and Adolescence

Action assembly theory helps to explain why one might not perform social fluency even with the motivation and knowledge to do so. This theory posits that people create "procedural records," which are long-term memory structures that form networks of links between behavior, outcomes, and other factors such as context (Greene & Geddes, 1993). Essentially, we form associations between communication behaviors and their consequences through experiences and observations. Over time, these associations link together to form networks of knowledge about social situations: the aforementioned procedural records. These networks include not only which behaviors are likely to cause certain outcomes, but also finer details such as situational considerations. The strength of these pathways is relative to use; frequent and/or recent pathway activation leads to stronger pathways (Greene & Geddes, 1993). Therefore, a lack of practice or experience is a significant factor in unskilled social behavior in cases where knowledge and motivation are both present.

We can infer that young adolescents are unlikely to have developed strong procedural records because their dearth of social experiences has not allowed for the appropriate pathways to form. In fact, adolescence is when the social brain undergoes massive restructuring (Blakemore, 2008). This means that adolescents are still in the stage of experimenting and forming associations between behavior and outcome. Most people who have worked or lived with adolescents have likely experienced this experimentation in the form of misjudged social

behavior and testing boundaries. People in this age group are in the process of weaving together different types of social knowledge into procedural records, likely via trial and error.

Adolescents' lack of experience and procedural records have several consequences for their social behavior. First, the speed at which the appropriate behavior can be retrieved relative to the context and desired outcome is directly related to the strength of the pathway (Greene & Geddes, 1993). Given that adolescents have not yet developed strong pathways, their retrieval is likely to be slow. Second, the processes by which the brain decides on a behavior are far more nuanced and abstract than this paper has detailed. Developmentally, adolescents undergo rapid and environmentally-influenced changes in cognition (Gardiner, 2018), meaning they may be at different ability levels in terms of choosing the correct behavior for a situation. Third, recall that adolescents are in the process of learning to adapt their behavior to context (McKone et al., 2021). Action assembly theory would suggest that this lack of familiarity with context is a likely reason for unskilled social behavior.

The Trouble with SEL Programs

There are many SEL programs available in the United States. One prominent program is *Second Step*, which boasts a research-based curriculum designed around brief lessons and a wealth of supplementary material (Committee for Children, 2022b). The program's topics cover many important aspects of SEL learning such as managing emotions, conflict, and perspective-taking (Committee for Children, 2022b). In many ways, *Second Step* is a model SEL program. However, a 2018 meta-analysis of efficacy studies on the program found mixed results (Moy & Hazen). Students who had been through the program could demonstrate improved knowledge of the topics included in the program. However, program effects on prosocial outcomes were mixed and seemed to depend on the study design, and there were no effects on antisocial behavior. It

seems that *Second Step* works to increase content knowledge, but its effects on procedural knowledge and flexibility are limited.

To be clear, many SEL programs seem to promote positive outcomes for prosocial behavior (Durlak et al., 2011). However, SEL programs which assume that their primary target should be conceptual knowledge are missing an important element. They presume that, provided with the correct knowledge and motivation, students will be able to use appropriate social skills for the situation. However, action assembly theory tells us that this assumption "skips" the development of procedural records. To be as effective as possible, SEL programs ought to balance introducing skills with practice to facilitate procedural record development.

Improvisational Theater as a Gateway to Social-Emotional Learning

Improvisational theater has a long history of being used to develop social skills, work through personal experiences, and bolster mental health (Felsman et al., 2019). In particular, improvisation has a rich history of use in the classroom (e.g., Berk & Trieber, 2009). Berk and Trieber (2009) note that improvisation taps into several types of intelligence—most notably emotional and kinesthetic intelligence—along with requiring active, cooperative problem-solving. They argue that it promotes deep learning because of the level of shared motivation, high learner activity, and group interactions. In addition, many improvisation exercises and games require one to imagine oneself in varying social situations and respond appropriately (e.g., Rohd, 1998). Because improvisation requires building the muscle for many different spontaneous social interactions, we can conceptualize improvisation as a training ground for forming procedural records.

Communication skills are closely related to improvisation skills. After all, most face-to-face communication is improvisational by nature, requiring spontaneity in the face of unexpected interactions (Temezhnikova, 2022). Improvisational theater has previously been used to develop a number of communication-based SEL skills, including active listening and nonverbal communication (e.g. Berk & Trieber, 2009; Detroit Creativity Project, 2022c). Perhaps improvisational theater is an enticing tool for social skills because of the connections between movement and cognition. Movement often seems to be a catalyst for learning and cognition, particularly in spatial and social cognition realms (Lillard, 2007). In addition, nonverbal communication gestures, such as hand movements, factor into interpersonal skills (Ekman & Friesen, 2008), and improvisation is a natural forum for practicing this form of communication.

Crucially, students can often recognize the impacts of participating in improvisational programs. One such project improved students' self-perceptions regarding social skills, willingness to make mistakes, and more (Felsman et al., 2019). Felsman et al. (2019) proposed that the improvements in these areas suggested an increase in self-efficacy. These findings indicate that improvisation might be a good tool for not only developing social skills, but also helping students feel more socially competent, which is important both for its own sake and for predicting prosocial behavior (Wentzel et al., 2007).

Finally, many people find improvisation a daunting task and might feel emotions such as anxiety at participating (mentioned in manuals such as Amador, 2018). Improvisation lessons can become a safe space to practice managing these emotions. For example, in students who had initially demonstrated symptoms of social phobia, one improvisational theater program implemented in public schools saw a significant decrease in social anxiety (Felsman et al., 2019). In improvisational trainings for adults, anxiety levels and coping strategies influenced the

spontaneity and techniques of improvisational participants (Temezhnikova, 2022). Similar lessons might be a good space for adolescents to notice how they react in anxiety-inducing situations and learn how to cope.

Improvisational Agreements and Social Skills

Improvisational theater uses a bundle of tools and agreements to promote scene work, though these agreements are not universal. The most common agreement is usually worded as "yes, and…" and refers to the agreement to accept the information provided by others and provide new information (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Detroit Creativity Project, 2020c; Johnstone, 1981). "Yes, and…" promotes collaborative storytelling and teamwork (Amador, 2018; Detroit Creativity Project, 2020c). Furthermore, "yes, and…" inherently requires participants to practice active listening (Detroit Creativity Project, 2020c) and social flexibility (Amador, 2018). Practicing this agreement not only helps improvisational games to function smoothly but also to develop several social and self-regulatory skills (Amador, 2018).

There are many other common agreements, which vary between programs and groups but nevertheless connect to interpersonal, conflict resolution, and emotion management skills. One such agreement is to respond with spontaneity (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Johnstone, 1981). This involves practicing responding to others, working with unexpected situations, and self-regulating when one's ideas are not used (Amador, 2018). Another agreement is to work from a character's point of view (e.g., Detroit Creativity Project, 2020c; Rohd, 1998). This exercise is a natural way to build skill in perspective-taking, an important element of both interpersonal skills (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011) and prosocial behavior (Wentzel et al., 2007). Trying to communicate a character's emotions and ideas through nonverbal communication is another facet to improvisation (Berk & Trieber, 2009) which naturally lends itself to social skills regarding

nonverbal cues (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2011). Essentially, many skills required for prosocial behavior are built naturally into improvisational theater.

Existing Programs

Despite a strong theoretical background, empirical research on improvisation's efficacy is limited (Felsman et al., 2019). However, there are several programs which use improvisational theater to accomplish similar goals.

The Improv Project. As mentioned above, The Improv Project is a program that uses improvisation as a vehicle for SEL education (Detroit Creativity Project, 2020a; Felsman et al., 2019). The curriculum is delivered on a standard ten-week calendar that covers topics such as trust, emotions, and relationships (Detroit Creativity Project, 2020a; Felsman et al., 2019). In a pilot efficacy study, Felsman et al. (2019) found that The Improv Project seemed successful at reducing social anxiety, developing social skills, and improving students' sense of self-efficacy, though there were some limitations such as high attrition.

Social Theatre™. Social worker Shawn Amador (2018) developed the program Social Theatre™, which uses both improvisation and sketch comedy to help neurodiverse youth develop SEL skills. Most activities begin with clearly introducing a social skill, followed by a game that practices the skill. The program focuses more on sketches than on improvisation.

Hope is Vital. Michael Rohd (1998) created Hope is Vital as an HIV prevention education program. Following exercises meant to build trust and improvisational skills, the group participates in improvisational exercises and processing discussions. While this program is not an SEL program *per se*, it inherently encourages deep engagement with social-emotional issues by way of simulating complex social situations and processing them with participants afterwards.

Montessori Considerations

Though the Montessorian aspects of this curriculum design will be further expanded upon in the "Methods" section, there are a few core elements that require brief mention here. Montessori classrooms require that lessons be taught in small mixed-age groups using a flexible calendar that responds to the students' readiness (Association Montessori International, n.d.). In addition, Montessori pedagogy requires that students be able to physically explore materials to develop their own understanding (Association Montessori International, n.d.). Happily, this requirement closely aligns with the use of active improvisational theater to develop procedural records.

Chapter Summary

Social-emotional education is linked with positive outcomes, and yet those outcomes could be stronger if SEL programs aimed to develop procedural knowledge in addition to content knowledge. This practice is especially important for young adolescents, who are in a developmentally sensitive period for social-emotional skills and are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior if they have a sense of self-efficacy in the related areas. Therefore, this program seeks to use improvisational theater's strengths to provide opportunities for practice. In addition, it focuses on interpersonal, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation skills because of their importance to prosocial behavior. The goal of this project is to create a social-emotional learning program using Montessori methodology which leverages the strengths of improvisational theater to help adolescents develop both competence and self-efficacy in prosocial skills.

Chapter 3

Method

This program utilizes the work of Viola Spolin as outlined in her seminal book *Improvisation for the Theater* (1999). Spolin's work is the foundation for most modern improvisation, including Michael Rohd's work with Hope is Vital (Rohd, 1998). For these reasons, Spolin's teaching methods—supplemented by Rohd's insights—serve as the foundation for this curriculum. In addition, because this curriculum is designed for implementation in St. Vrain Community Montessori School's middle school program, it is designed with Montessori best practices in mind. Most Montessori parameters involve the structure of the secondary program as a whole, so only those parameters that apply to designing curriculum for a specific content area will be explored here.

A Note on Vocabulary

Games are the building blocks of improvisational theater. In the theater vernacular, the word "games" refers to activities or exercises that allow the participants to explore relevant concepts or skills related to improvisation (Spolin, 1999). In addition, the participants are called "players" (Spolin, 1999), emphasizing the playful and expressive nature of the medium. Finally, regarding the teacher presenting this curriculum, each theorist mentioned uses their own term: "teacher-director" (Spolin, 1999), "facilitator" (Rohd, 1998), or "guide" (a Montessorian term for a teacher, see e.g., St. Vrain Community Montessori School, 2017). This curriculum will most commonly utilize the term "guide" because that is the favored terminology in the school where it will be implemented.

Structural Considerations

There are two aspects to explore: the structure of individual workshops (lessons) and the global shape of the curriculum. Both aspects of the curriculum will be outlined below.

Individual Workshop Structure

Each class/lesson will take the form of an improvisation workshop, with concrete social-emotional lessons introduced where necessary. Workshops typically begin with a warm-up game, followed by an interplay of improvisation games and processing (Rohd, 1998; Spolin, 1999). The games chosen will center around the workshop's topic or theme, allowing for the workshop to maintain focus on specific concepts.

This strategy closely aligns with the Montessori three-period lesson, in which students are introduced to a concept (first period), practice the concept (second period), and eventually master/apply the concept (third period) (CMStep, 2020). These three periods may occur in the same lesson or over the course of several lessons and work times. Introducing the workshop theme at the beginning of the workshop (e.g. defining the improvisation rule of "yes, and…") makes up the first period. The games and process make up the second period, and each student will arrive at the third period at their own pace with the help of assignments (discussed below).

The warm-up game's purpose is to allow the group to create energy while also encouraging focus (Rohd, 1998). According to Rohd, these games should encourage the players to enter a mindset in which they work together toward a goal. Once the group appears ready to proceed, the guide will introduce the improvisation game(s) that form the bulk of the workshop.

Spolin (1999) outlined several elements to an improvisation game. Games involve a focus, which isolates the primary idea so that students do not get overwhelmed with the overlapping skills needed for successful improvisation. Each game focuses on solving a specific problem, outlined and facilitated by the guide. This problem might be as simple as mirroring the body movements of a partner (Spolin, 1999) or as complex as engaging in a conflict from the perspective of characters (Rohd, 1998). Either way, the guide engages in "side-coaching," calling out reminders and direction during the game (Spolin, 1999). Spolin also typically provides "points of observation," cues that the guide may use to respond to the group and meet their evolving needs.

After the game has ended, the group engages in "evaluation," wherein the guide facilitates a discussion with the players (Spolin, 1999). Evaluation should not focus on what was "right" or "wrong," but should help the group to process their observations during the game (Spolin, 1999). Processing might also lead into discussions about human relationships and issues (Rohd, 1998). After evaluation, the group may begin another game.

In general, the practice of evaluation allows for procedural learning to take place. That is, with proper guidance, the class is likely to verbalize concrete ideas about prosocial behavior based on their experiences and explorations during the games. Some workshops in this curriculum include content-introduction lessons around social skills either to solidify this procedural learning or to introduce skills for the students to intentionally practice.

Curricular Structure

Montessori secondary education requires a curriculum to allow for flexible delivery, situating many lessons within a larger context. Delivering a broad context to students early in the

process invites curiosity and answers the common adolescent question regarding the purpose of studying a topic (Donahoe et al., n.d.). In addition, the syllabus cannot be a strict calendar. Instead, the guide should observe the students and time movement through the curriculum based on their demonstration of readiness (Association Montessori International, 2022).

To fulfill these requirements, this curriculum is structured as a series of "key lessons" with associated "lesson clusters." The guide will move through the key lessons, which build foundations for improvisation skills and introduce broad aspects of prosocial behavior. During key lessons, the guide ought to observe the players' strengths and opportunities for growth. Then, the guide will facilitate supplementary workshops from the related cluster as appropriate until the group is ready for the next key lesson. Each cluster includes both concrete lessons—for students who need more support in social skills—and lessons that allow for higher levels of abstraction and application.

For example, one key lesson might introduce conflict and allow the class to informally "play" with several aspects of conflict. The relevant lesson cluster would include topics such as conflict-resolution strategies, conflict styles, and managing anger. If a group seems familiar with and adept at managing anger during the key lesson, the guide might not deliver the workshop on that topic; it would be unnecessary. Instead, the guide would focus on other workshop topics. If the group was struggling with the conflict-resolution strategy of focusing on problem-solving, the guide might introduce the more concrete workshops on that topic. On the other hand, a group that shows great interest in conflict style might receive an advanced workshop that allows them to explore this topic.

Early key lessons and lesson clusters work to form a sound foundation. They act as an orientation to improvisation techniques (Spolin, 1999), along with building trust and group

cohesion (Rohd, 1998). The key lessons then move on to interpersonal skills and conflict resolution, supported by relevant improvisation games. Because emotional regulation is an integral part of both skills, it is integrated into other lesson clusters. Later key lessons involve "activating material," group-created scenarios which allow players to explore difficult issues in-depth (Rohd, 1998). Activating material might serve as the third period in the three-period lesson, though a group may not reach this final stage.

Additional Considerations

Assignments

Students will receive assignments to complete. Spolin (1999) recommended that work assigned outside of workshops allows for the improvisational skills to be carried into daily life and focus on experiences. This approach serves the desire for students to apply prosocial behavior skills in their lives. In addition, secondary Montessori best practices require that assignments allow for choice in work options, regular self-assessment, and cross-curricular connections (American Montessori Society, 2017; CMStep, 2020). To fulfill these requirements, assignments will generally involve taking actions in daily life or other areas of study followed by activities that require self-reflection and/or self-assessment.

The Role of the Guide

There are many perspectives on the role of the guide in improvisational work. Spolin asserted, "Do not teach. *Expose* students to the theatrical environment through playing, and they will find their own way" (1999, p. 42). However, Amador (2018) pointed out that some students need assistance and differentiation to recognize the social skills at play in improvisation games.

Montessori best practices navigate this dichotomy by stating that the guide should use many teaching methods and invite students to engage in deep critical thinking (Donahoe et al., n.d.).

In this curriculum, all lessons attempt to let the students explore on their own as much as possible while still delivering concrete social-skill lessons where/when needed. They assume that the guide will be encouraging, non-judgmental, open, firm, and committed to listening over explaining (CMStep, 2020; Donahoe et al., n.d.; Rohd, 1998).

Program Evaluation

The time constraints of this project do not allow for a full evaluation of its efficacy. However, there is room for some application of action research ideas to assist with the formation of the curriculum. During its implementation, I will informally use qualitative methods such as observation and student interviews (Mills, 2018) to understand how the program is unfolding thus far. These observations and interviews will not be published in the Results chapter, but they will inform the development of the curriculum and future directions in the Discussion chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter serves as an orientation to the curriculum. It contains justification and notes on the scope and sequence of the curriculum, along with directions and parameters for those who wish to teach this curriculum. The fully written key lessons are included in Appendix B. While the remaining lesson clusters are not drafted in this document, they are outlined in Appendix C so that a prospective guide could still use them.

Scope, Sequence, & Rationale

The curriculum consists of five units and an optional capstone unit, and is structured to begin with a firm foundation in improvisation; one might notice that the improvisation-to-SEL-skills ratio favors improvisation early in the curriculum and SEL skills later. There are three reasons for this structure. First, as students master improvisation skills, we can turn our attention to the higher-level SEL skills. Second, focusing more heavily on improvisation early on allows the group to play together, naturally building a foundation of trust and a strong ensemble. Third, the early skills build physical and sensory awareness, which are often overlooked prerequisites for successful higher-level skills in both improvisation and SEL. The curriculum is designed to focus on foundational skills early on: collaboration, active listening, body awareness, and naming emotions. As it proceeds, students use these skills to explore increasingly abstract and complex concepts. The goal is to meet the students where they are, introduce concepts as needed, and explore with depth.

Unit 1: Foundations of Improvisation

This unit focuses on teaching the basic skills of improvisation while simultaneously providing a foundation for social-emotional skills. It is crucial for the guide to take their time with this unit. There are few key lessons, but this is to allow the guide to customize the unit to the foundational social skills the students will need to succeed later. Students are ready to move on when they demonstrate the abilities of active listening, responding with relevance to one another, social flexibility, and group cooperation. Return to lessons in this unit whenever students are struggling with these skills or need a refresher as they also practice higher-level skills.

Two core elements of improvisation are the focus of this unit: ensemble and "yes, and…" The former term refers to the teamwork of forming an improvisation troupe, while the latter refers to a common improvisation rule of acceptance that allows each participant to contribute to collaborative efforts (Berk & Trieber, 2009). These skills both directly and indirectly work with core interpersonal communication skills. This is because interpersonal communication is an ongoing process wherein people (intentionally or not) send, receive, perceive, and interpret messages (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2010).

Learning to collaborate in an ensemble while building on one another's ideas requires students to engage in several core social skills. Most importantly, they must learn to listen actively, which includes the skills of interpreting and evaluating messages along with responding appropriately (Harris & Sherblom, 2010). Lack of motivation to do so can be a barrier to active listening (Harris & Sherblom, 2010), which is where improvisation comes in. The desire to keep a scene or game running provides intrinsic motivation to listen actively; from there, it is the guide's job to help the students refine the skills for active listening and notice how it feels to be

listened to. In order for students to practice appropriate responses using "yes, and…", they must learn to respond to peers in a way that builds on those peers' comments. This requires a degree of social flexibility, which may be difficult for students who struggle with social-emotional learning (Amador, 2018). Using these skills to learn to collaborate helps students to build ensemble and work as a team. Therefore, focusing on ensemble and "yes, and…" allows the students to practice several core social skills which are both valuable on their own and necessary for teamwork in the coming units.

Unit 2: Body, Senses, & Environment

The purpose of this unit is to increase awareness of the senses, body, and surroundings via work on the improvisational concept of "environment." It largely builds self-awareness skills, which will be necessary for the work that follows. For example, there is a heavy focus on monitoring internal body states and navigating movement safely. This unit also contains very playful exercises, allowing the group to naturally bond and form a greater sense of group cohesion. This unit is often where students struggle to maintain focus on the problem, instead insisting on being funny and clever. Continue to move through workshops in this unit until they are willing and able to collaborate and focus.

This unit integrates teaching theatrical physicality with subtle social-emotional skills necessary for upcoming units. These improvisation concepts require practicing sensory awareness—noticing sights, sensations, sounds, etc. (Spolin, 1999). The curriculum uses this awareness to help students notice sensations, name these sensations, and connect them to emotions, which is a powerful emotional regulation strategy (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015). In addition, adolescents' state of rapid physical growth can lead to clumsiness and awkward physicality, so this work is helpful in allowing students to practice moving around one another's

bodies and the environment with care. It also continues the collaborative work of the previous unit as students co-create pantomimed environments, engage in mirroring exercises, and learn to focus on the workshop activity at hand.

Together, these first two units form a foundation for the complex units to come. It is important to work with the students in these units as long as necessary to help them develop skills in collaboration, flexibility, active listening, and emotional awareness. These units also provide continuous exercises in trust, including the feedback process. As students play and process games, they practice giving and receiving feedback, which requires both active listening and emotional regulation skills (Harris & Sherblom, 2010). The group ought to feel cohesive and willing to share openly with one another before moving on.

Unit 3: Character

The purpose of this unit is to use the development of improvisational characters to explore several aspects of nonverbal communication, emotional regulation, and internal processes. Follow student interest during this unit; it is a valuable opportunity to explore identity and intrapersonal skills. They are ready for the next unit when they can create and sustain characters for several minutes while demonstrating empathy and perspective-taking skills.

This type of character building acts as a lens for exploring perspective, identity, and nonverbal cues. While building characters, students examine the assumptions they make about people based on nonverbal cues such as posture. This might involve differentiating between emotional states and personality traits, along with examining how they can use their bodies to communicate. Students then examine the building blocks of identity and how our identities influence how we interact. Identity work may allow for exploration of stereotypes and

intercultural communication. Finally, students explore perspectives of characters unlike themselves, allowing them to notice what influences their own perspectives. Throughout this unit, students continue to practice emotional awareness and identification both implicitly and explicitly.

The third unit implicitly yet heavily focuses on perception because our interpretations of other people are filtered through our perceptions. We judge nonverbal cues based on cultural and social contexts, influencing both our impressions of others (Ambady et al., 2008) and our interpretations of their nonverbal cues. The communication process involves not only our perceptions of others, but also our perceptions of their perceptions (Langer & Wurf, 2008). Basically, interpersonal communication involves many internal self-processes. This is why this curriculum explores these self-focused concepts before diving into explorations of interpersonal relationships. Understanding a character's motivation and perspective allows students to play that character fully, which is important for examining interpersonal relationships and conflict (see discussion of "pure improv" in Rohd, 1998).

Unit 4: Relationships & Scene Work

This unit uses improvisational scenes to help students explore social context and the actions which affect interpersonal relationships. It is meant to help students explore different kinds of relationships, reflecting on healthy relationships as they progress. This unit also contains more intense trust work, as the students must increasingly rely on one another to keep their scenes going.

Interpersonal relationships are explored in the same unit where students learn to perform improvisation scenes where multiple characters interact with one another. (Games up to this

point usually involve other forms of storytelling and play; characters have had little interaction, and there has been little instruction in sustaining meaningful scenes between characters.) In the process, students identify the characters' perspectives, including their wants, needs, and intentions. Many lessons focus on understanding how actions and choices affect interpersonal relationships, as scenes provide a safe arena for exploring interactions and their consequences. Lesson topics also include how intentions and impacts differ, boundaries in interpersonal relationships, and status.

Exploring relationships also allows students to refine their understanding of nonverbal cues. Some lessons focus on portraying different relational contexts using these cues. (How might students communicate that they are playing friends using body language? Siblings? Acquaintances?) These nonverbal competencies extend to understanding social contexts and how appropriate interpersonal communication differs by context. By the end of this unit, students should be adept in reading interpersonal cues, especially how they differ in social contexts.

Unit 5: Conflict Resolution

This unit builds on the relationship work by introducing the difficulties of conflict. Using improvisation, students can explore many aspects of conflict, including resolution strategies and emotional regulation. The purpose of this unit is to give options for resolving conflict, so mastery might appear as students being able to explore perspectives, contributing factors, and possible outcomes in a conflict situation.

Though conflict has likely appeared throughout the earlier exercises, a strong understanding of relationship and character now allows students to safely explore conflict resolution. The key lessons initially use the "drama triangle" to provide a baseline for

understanding conflict. The “drama triangle” refers to three archetypal roles that people often take in conflicts: the hero, the villain, or the victim (Harper, 2004). Exploring these three perspectives provides scaffolding and a narrowed focus for examining conflict resolution.

From this baseline, the guide can help the students to explore other aspects of conflict, including other conflict roles and styles. Of course, there are lessons regarding emotional regulation strategies differentiated by emotion, along with practice managing emotions in conflict contexts. Students first evaluate how characters’ motivations and actions escalate or deescalate conflict. Then, students explore different conflict resolution and prevention strategies such as “I” statements and focusing on problem-solving. The unit does not aim to teach strict scripts that students should memorize and use in conflict situations. Rather, it introduces tools into improvised conflicts and allows students to examine the effects that these strategies have on the conflicts. This strategy provides students with the agency to navigate the complexities of real-life conflicts.

Optional Capstone Unit: Community

The purpose of this unit is to combine the improvisational and SEL skills used up until now to explore a difficult issue affecting the students’ community. The idea is to use the language of improvisation to explore issues in the community, walking through many ways of handling them. The unit draws from all the other units and Rohd’s (1998) peer education methods to help the students process issues within their own communities. This unit is advanced and requires students to have demonstrated mastery of other core concepts.

This unit might not be introduced. A year-long curriculum could end solidly in the conflict resolution unit—perhaps even only after the relationship unit—and serve its purpose well.

However, if students have fluidly moved through the curriculum up until this point, consistently demonstrating mastery of each concept and with time left in the term, then this unit serves as a valuable capstone on the experience.

Navigating the Curriculum

Key and Supplementary Lessons

Each unit includes several key lessons, along with clusters of supplementary lessons. The key lessons are intended to be delivered in the order written under close observation of the guide. From there, suggestions for follow-up supplementary lessons are provided in Appendices B and C. The curriculum is designed for flexible administration. Instruction would be incomplete if the guide only administered the key lessons chronologically in the name of working through the content. Rather, the guide should commit to observing the students during each lesson and planning the next lesson based on their readiness and needs.

It is also not necessary to teach every supplementary lesson, but only those which will serve the students. Some of the supplementary lessons act as extensions to the key lessons; they build on the key lessons to provide further practice in the key lesson skills. Furthermore, some of these lessons provide advanced extensions to the key lesson concepts for students who demonstrate strengths and interest in these areas. On the other hand, some supplementary lessons are termed “foundational lessons.” These work to build foundations in social-emotional skills that, when absent, form barriers to the key skills. For example, a foundational skill for environment work is body awareness. If the students do not demonstrate adequate body awareness to safely and masterfully proceed during the relevant key lessons, the guide may next explore the supplementary lessons in body awareness to build these skills. It is very important

not to rush the students, especially because the lessons in later units require high degrees of emotional vulnerability, focus, and trust. It would be better to work through half the curriculum with fidelity than to complete it with students who are not ready.

Additionally, there are several situations which may arise in this work that would require a quick mini-lesson before the main lesson can proceed. For example, an excitable student audience who disrupts the performers can be an opportunity to learn about regulating excitement (rather than a forum for discipline). Table 11 in Appendix C contains several micro-lessons and the circumstances under which one might deliver them.

Finally, the units are a helpful framework but not a mandate; there are many situations where one may wish to use lessons from past or future units. This is especially true after school breaks when the group needs to reconnect and reestablish norms. It is not necessary to rigidly remain in a unit when lessons from elsewhere would be of use.

The Structure of Lessons

Lessons typically consist of the following segments: connection, warmup, workshop, playtime, and cooldown.

Connection Activity. Because of the emotionally demanding nature of this work, it is important to begin lessons by connecting person-to-person. If students had an assignment, this is a good place to discuss their thoughts on it. Another common strategy is to perform a quick body scan or similar mindfulness exercise. Otherwise, this step might only consist of the guide asking the students how they are and making sure they have water. It's tempting to skip this step, but showing care at the beginning of the lesson helps the students feel safe and ready to be vulnerable.

Warmup. As in physical activity, the goal of the warmup is to get the blood moving and enter a state of heightened physicality. In addition, this generates energy. However, the goal is not wild, out-of-control energy. Instead, we want to help the students establish *focused* energy. Warmup games are often chosen for their ability to subtly prime the students for the workshop content. For example, "Circle Dash" (found in Rohd, 1998) requires eye contact and body awareness, so it is commonly used in the first two units.

A good warmup requires little explanation, is contagiously fun, and has good replay value. Early on, the guide will need to teach and even process the warmup games. Later on, one can quickly play these for a few minutes without processing.

Workshop. These three elements are interspersed and will rarely follow this exact order.

1. ***Direct Lesson.*** These are content lessons that introduce improvisation or SEL concepts. Early on, these appear early in the lesson and are focused on improvisation. Many lessons will not have them at all, as the hope is that most learning happens during "processing and evaluation," while other lessons will necessitate brief direct lessons.
2. ***Exercises.*** These are the games and activities used to demonstrate and/or practice a concept.
3. ***Processing and Evaluation.*** In this step, the guide helps the students to verbally notice and explore the meaning of the exercise. This is a crucial step where much of the "learning" happens. It is also the difference between a standard improvisational theater class and this social-emotional work, as many of the lessons, without proper processing, are only theatrical workshops. Processing is where the group explicitly identifies social cues, social strategies, body sensations, observations, and other social-emotional elements hidden within the games. Therefore, questions should always aim to help

students identify these elements. “What did you notice?”, “What did you have to do to be successful?”, and “Why did that happen?” are all useful standbys.

When it is time for processing/evaluation, the guide should circle up the students and ask leading questions, which are provided in the key lessons. Try not to direct the conversation or tell students what they should have noticed; ask questions and rephrase student comments to help lead the students to answers. Students will often want to relay stories about their experiences, especially during partner work where everyone engages at the same time. Let the students share these experiences briefly (for 1-2 minutes), then redirect the conversation to the social-emotional content. This might sound like asking curiosity questions (“How did your stomach feel during that scene?”) or using reflective language to help them make discoveries (e.g. “I’m hearing that you had to focus on your partner’s eyes to complete the task”). If they are not able to verbalize social-emotional realizations, either the game needs to be played again with additional focus or the guide needs to retreat to a foundational skill.

Playtime. “Playtime” refers to games which are exciting and fun but not as intensive as the exercises. Oftentimes, students want to be in an improvisation class to learn improvisation. The SEL focus can sometimes lead to frustration or defensive behavior. Placing a fun, traditional improv game at the end of the workshop alleviates this negativity, allows students to practice the SEL skills in a more abstract context, and adds levity to the end of lessons.

Playtime games are best chosen to be compatible with the associated lesson. Except for the first unit (which should teach many games), playtime games should be limited to two or three per unit to avoid spending excessive amounts of time explaining. In addition, playtime will not appear in every lesson; it is not always necessary. Playtime is given more time early on, as

students are learning the games and the guide is building buy-in. Like warmups, playtime requires less focus and time as the curriculum progresses.

Cooldown & Dismissal. It doesn't generally serve students to send them back into the classroom environment or home in the high-energy state that improvisation generates. Instead, take a moment at the end of every workshop to help calm their bodies and minds. This is also a good time to explain the follow-up assignment.

Logistical Considerations

Time and Class Size

This curriculum is designed for weekly administration over the duration of one academic year. While the timing will differ depending on the group, most classes will likely spend the majority of the first semester on the first two to three units, working through the remaining units in the second semester. The curriculum could likely be administered within a single semester if the group meets at least twice per week. If the group is able to meet more often than that, the guide should allow for exploring the concepts in further depth rather than trying to complete the course in a shorter time frame. Allowing the students to practice these concepts over many weeks and months serves their procedural memory development.

Lessons are designed to last roughly an hour for an ideal group of 12-18 students. This work can be done in groups of up to thirty if space allows but may require longer lesson blocks. For populations with many students who will require heavy social-emotional support, it is recommended that class sizes remain smaller. It is not recommended that you do this work in groups smaller than eight, regardless of ability level. A robust class size provides opportunities for students to observe many ways of navigating problems.

While it may be tempting to group by ability, it is not recommended. Instead, allow students of varying skill levels to learn from one another. Students who require more support will learn from observing and imitating the socially fluent; the latter will hone their social-emotional strengths while working with the former.

Finally, while it is not required, this work is easier with an even-numbered class because of the frequent partner work. When an odd number of students are present, there are a few options. At times, the guide can partner with a student. When this is inconvenient, a student can be given the task of "observer." In this case, the guide should provide the student with a prompt related to the evaluation questions, e.g., "Watch for phrases that make the conflict worse." During the evaluation and processing discussions, this student can provide their insights. Observers should rotate regularly.

Space and Materials Needed

A theater or auditorium is not necessary to complete this work. The space merely needs to be open, large enough to accommodate all students' moving bodies at once, and empty of furniture. A large classroom could be prepared by moving the desks, for example. Because the work is often vulnerable, it is recommended that the space be semi-private, i.e., not a place where additional faculty are likely to wander in. If the room has potential hazards such as worn carpeting or sharp corners, invite the students to observe these hazards regularly in the early sessions. They will learn to avoid them.

Materials mostly include texts. It is recommended that guides obtain copies of *Improvisation for the Theater* by Viola Spolin and *Theatre for Community, Conflict, & Dialogue* by Michael Rohd. Though all exercises are outlined in this document, both authors provide

valuable insights on the exercises borrowed from them. No props are necessary for this work, but it could be helpful to have a few chairs available. Guides may occasionally need to craft simple lesson materials such as prompt cards.

Preparation of the Guide

Ideally, a guide engaging in this work has some background in both improvisational theater and social-emotional learning. A guide who is comfortable in both areas will be better equipped to fluently and flexibly alter lessons or address issues as they appear. Additionally, familiarity with mindfulness techniques is a boon because they are often woven into the practice. However, any guide seasoned with working with adolescents could learn to do this work. It is necessary for the guide to be willing to observe the students, even taking notes during or immediately after lessons if necessary. Think of yourself as more of a coach than a teacher; this pedagogy requires letting go of the desire to impart wisdom and instead focus on helping students help themselves.

Practices to Establish

The following are cues and practices best established during the first unit. They provide shared vocabulary and lay foundations for success.

"Freeze!" "Freeze" should be used as a command for students to stop what they are doing and look at the guide. It does not have to mean holding one's body in an uncomfortable position; it means "stop moving, stop talking, and look at me."

Standing in neutral. This means standing with feet shoulder-width apart; knees relaxed and not locked; spine tall; glutes engaged to support the spine; shoulders rolled back; arms and hands hanging comfortably by the side; and head raised, alert but comfortable. This is a helpful starting

position for many activities and is a basic part of body awareness. Yoga practitioners may recognize this posture as “mountain pose.”

Circling up. Over the course of a workshop, students will need to “circle up” quickly and often. A good circle allows everyone to see one another while standing quietly in neutral, with little chatter during the transition. This is worth drilling a few times until they are adept at it. A nonverbal cue works well, e.g. twirling the index finger in a circular motion.

Safety. Students should always be encouraged to be aware of environmental hazards, especially if workshops take place in a classroom or other non-stage environment. It can help to point out sharp corners, breakable items, and the like at the beginning of physical exercises. Invoke safety regularly when working with students.

Audience. Many games will require some of the students to form an “audience” for the other students. Establish audience norms such as full-body listening early on, and be consistent about reminding students to follow these norms. Being in the audience is not only a necessity but also a way to practice many SEL skills such as managing excitement, active listening, and empathy.

A Note about Self-efficacy

Remember that the goal of this curriculum is to promote prosocial behavior, which adolescents are more likely to engage in if they perceive themselves to be competent in the required skills (Wentzel et al., 2007). Therefore, it is important for students to feel efficacious as their competencies grow. Help students to notice when they are getting better at skills and to articulate what actions they would take in certain scenarios.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This project set out to create a social-emotional educational program that used improvisational theater to help students build skills in interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation. The purpose of using improvisation is to provide enough novel practice that students not only possess these skills but also feel efficacious. Because these skills are all elements of prosocial behavior, the ideal outcome is for students' skills and self-efficacy to motivate prosocial behavior both inside and outside the classroom. This discussion will examine how well the program met these objectives and outline future directions for the development of this program.

Efficacy and Feedback

Assessing the efficacy of this program would require an additional study. However, for the purposes of evaluating this project, we will explore both author observations and student feedback to understand the program's outcomes thus far. This program was built on several years of experimentation with related concepts. In addition, I have been using the evolving draft of this program with a group of students. At time of writing, that class is finishing the second unit (Body, Sensations, & Environment.) I interviewed a few students about their experiences with the program, and their comments provided insight into whether the program met its objectives. While some students were experiencing this curriculum for the first time, others also spoke to their experiences with a previous version of the program. It should be noted that these interviews were informal; however, the student feedback provided several insights.

Multiple students expressed feeling like they were learning communication skills, particularly listening, building on what others say, and being responsive. They connected specific games to specific skills, such as playing “Oracle” to taking turns speaking. There were several comments that this class (including the assignments) felt valuable because the skills would clearly transfer to life. Several students articulated that improvisational theater and life are similarly unpredictable. This class, then, helped them to learn to respond intentionally rather than react instinctively. It seems that the improvisational nature of this class does help the students to build their ability to respond to the unknown, which was one of the purposes.

Another theme was focus and stress management. There were several comments that this class requires so much focus that it frequently takes students’ minds off stressful life situations. In addition, the difference in behavioral expectations makes this class a less stressful environment compared to other classes. The post-lesson assignments do not feel like an additional source of stress because, while they require attention, they feel practical, integrated into daily activities, and enjoyable. It sounds like both assignments and lessons provided an acceptable avenue for redirecting attention away from stressors and onto an enjoyable-yet-productive activity.

Acceptance and exploration of self and others was a common sentiment. According to students, this class lets them explore different aspects of both themselves and others without behavior expectations typical to the school environment. One student commented that this class helps them understand how they currently show up in the world and how they could be their best self. Many students indicated that they feel accepted by the group and like they can “be themselves.” Similarly, they feel bonded to their classmates and have learned to accept them even if they are not friends outside of this class. Perhaps this outcome is a result of all the group

bonding and trust work in the curriculum. Whatever the cause, these comments indicate that this curriculum seems to foster a sense of community. This sense of acceptance was not the primary focus of the curriculum, but it is an unquestionably positive outcome. It would be fascinating to see if it is replicated in other spaces.

From a student perspective, the curriculum could be improved with longer lesson blocks and additional choices. These lessons are currently one hour long, and students indicated that they would prefer to have 80-90 minute blocks so they could play more games. On one hand, this request could indicate that these classes are creating an appetite for more exercises, making the short time frame helpful for momentum and motivation. On the other hand, perhaps more time would provide opportunities for further practice and group bonding. Another suggestion included letting students have a voice regarding when to move on. For example, the guide could indicate that the group seems ready to move on to the Relationships unit but could continue receiving Character lessons if they desire, and let the class decide. This element of choice would be welcome and probably work well in a Montessori setting with limitations; in a conventional public education setting, the teacher might be expected to make decisions with more authority.

On the whole, I consider this student feedback an early indicator of success. The justifications for using improvisational theater included: its usefulness for improving social self-efficacy (Felsman et al., 2019); the ability to generate novel scenarios; and the overlap between improvisation skills and communication skills. Students identified many of the curriculum's objectives in their answers when they mentioned strengthening communication skills, providing unscripted practice for real situations, and generalizability to daily life. The fact that students noted these outcomes and perceive themselves to be practicing these skills bodes well for eventual self-efficacy in these skills.

Some of the justifications were not clearly mentioned by students and are also difficult to observe. Utilizing the possible connection between movement and cognition (Lillard, 2007) was one benefit of improvisation. It is unclear whether the movement aspect is as important as the spontaneity aspect of improvisation. In addition, improvisation was chosen in part for its potential to provide implicit emotional regulation practice (e.g., Felsman et al., 2019; Temezhnikova, 2022). It would be interesting to re-interview students after they had completed the entire program and engaged in lessons clearly geared toward emotional regulation (e.g. "Managing Anxiety & Anger").

From a guide-observation perspective, students have improved in several skills. They can engage in exercises with focus and purpose. In addition, they have demonstrated improvement in active listening, turn-taking, and social flexibility. In fact, we have abandoned hand-raising during lessons and processing/evaluation conversations because the group is able to hold on-topic conversations with minimal disruptions. (This is quite impressive for a group of thirteen young adolescents.) The group often provides helpful feedback and helps one another process the meaning of the exercises. There are still students who either display defensiveness or attempt clever performances instead of engaging with the exercises. However, this is to be expected for a group that is still working on the end of Unit 2. Overall, the program seems to be working as hoped in this early stage.

Outcome Evaluation

The goal of this project was to create a curriculum that married improvisational theater with social-emotional learning. First, it needed to address several prosocial-behavior-adjacent social-emotional skills using an iterative model, alternating content and procedural knowledge in response to student needs. Second, it needed to meet the standards of a Montessori curriculum so

it could be implemented in the school for which it was written. Finally, it needed to provide lesson plans and instructions for teachers hoping to implement the curriculum. Overall, what is complete of the program is successful in these regards, and there is more work to be done.

The curriculum integrates all three social-emotional skill categories discussed in the literature review using both explicit content knowledge lessons and implicit practice that strengthens procedural knowledge. First, a variety of interpersonal skills have been mapped to lessons. Though more interpersonal skill lessons could certainly be included, the curriculum provides a variety of opportunities to practice these skills. Every workshop requires students to practice existing skills while developing—or at least exploring—new ones. Second, the topic of conflict resolution not only received its own unit but also appears in subtle ways throughout the curriculum, such as the continuously-practiced skill of receiving feedback. Finally, emotional regulation is practiced throughout the curriculum in both explicit lessons (e.g., "Managing Discomfort") and implicit avenues such as trust games and performing for others. Throughout the program, students develop their procedural knowledge via exercises, elaborate on their experiences in processing/evaluation discussions, and receive clear content lessons when needed.

In addition, the program meets many standards required of a secondary Montessori program. The curriculum's flexible implementation style makes it possible for the curriculum to be adapted to the needs of the students. In addition, it provides ample opportunities for students to explore and come to their own understanding, including assignments that allow for choice. Based on the student feedback, it seems that this program also met an additional requirement. Montessori secondary programs should provide many opportunities for students to collaborate and support one another in their learning (Donahoe et al., n.d.). Students expressed feeling accepted and supported; in addition, I observe them providing gentle feedback and reminders to

one another regularly during lessons. Though there may be confounding factors, these outcomes suggest that this program provides an environment that encourages collaboration.

Finally, the program consists of usable materials for any teacher hoping to implement it. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the necessary elements and logistical considerations to run this program while the appendices provide the key lessons and overviews of supplemental lessons. These elements should serve as a sufficient starting package.

Future Directions & Limitations

The primary limitation was time. Given more time, I could have produced all the supplementary lesson plans; however, the project's scope fell outside of the time allotted. As a result, only the core components of the project were completed.

As such, the clearest future direction is to expand the curriculum. This task would primarily involve writing more detailed instructions for the supplementary lesson plans, "Community" unit, and micro-lessons. It could also consist of adding additional lessons and topics. Finally, it would be useful to implement methods of evaluation for both the students and guide. For example, the Dimensions of Observable Growth is a behavioral rubric created primarily for use in Montessori environments (Grow DOG Grow, 2022). It encompasses many social-emotional skills and is intended to be used for both guide observation and student self-evaluation. This tool would be a useful addition to this curriculum, providing both clearer progress benchmarks for guides and an avenue for students to examine their own social-emotional skills.

Only so much creation and evaluation can happen in a bottle, and the other primary limitation was a limited scope. I wrote this curriculum as one person who had been tinkering with this idea for years, focusing on a few primary resources (e.g., Rohd, 1998) with which I was familiar. As

such, the other prominent next step is execution and collaboration: many teachers testing it out in many environments, making additions and modifications for their populations. Ideally, this wider net would include teachers in both Montessori and non-Montessori environments. For the latter, the curriculum would likely need to be mapped to current SEL standards so that public education administration would see the value in the program. In addition, accountability measures would likely need to be added to track student progress. Assigning social-emotional development a letter grade is a questionable endeavor. However, participation and assignment completion could make up the bulk of graded evaluation, and special education practices (e.g., the structure of special education social skills classes) could likely inform the creation of a grading system.

Finally, the efficacy of this curriculum remains to be seen. A test of its efficacy would measure several aspects of students' social-emotional outcomes including observable behaviors, content knowledge, and perceived self-efficacy. Conducting a study of the program's efficacy in its current form would provide clear directions for the focus of the above next steps.

Conclusion

The value of SEL programs has already been demonstrated, as have the drawbacks to treating SEL as a primarily content-based construct. It is not enough to provide students with scripts and tools to navigate interpersonal interactions; we must also provide students with practice so they can navigate their unpredictable lives. This curriculum and its budding successes demonstrate that SEL program development is far from a finished project. If we want to help adolescents successfully navigate their choices, we can and should provide the proper environment to do so. We can continue working to make SEL programs more valuable to students, to educational systems, and—eventually—to the social systems that the education system is meant to strengthen.

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APPENDIX A: Scope & Sequence Document

Unit 1: Foundations of Improvisation

This unit focuses on teaching the basic skills of improvisation while simultaneously providing a foundation for social-emotional skills. It is crucial for the guide to take their time with this unit. There are few key lessons, but this is to allow the guide to customize the unit to the foundational social skills needed to succeed later. Students are ready to move on when they demonstrate the abilities of active listening, responding with relevance to one another, social flexibility, and group cooperation. Return to lessons in this unit whenever students are struggling with these skills or need a refresher as they practice higher-level skills.

Key Lessons

1. Ensemble
2. Communication
3. Yes, And…

Supplemental Lessons

- Active Listening
- Cooperation & Clear Communication
- Group Mind
- Mindful Play
- Responding with Relevance
- Social Flexibility
- Storytelling

Unit 2: Body, Senses, and Environment

The purpose of this unit is to increase awareness of the senses, body, and surroundings via work on the improvisational concept of "environment." It largely builds self-awareness skills, which will be necessary for the work that follows. For example, there is a heavy focus on monitoring internal body states and navigating movement activities safely. This unit also contains very playful exercises, allowing the group to naturally bond and form a greater sense of group cohesion. This unit is often where students may struggle to maintain focus on the problem, instead insisting on being funny and clever. Continue to move through workshops in this unit until they are willing and able to collaborate and focus.

Key Lessons

1. Sensations
2. Mirrors
3. Building Environment
4. Collaborating in Environments

Supplemental Lessons

- Body Awareness
- Bodies in Space
- Further Mirror Practice
- Managing Discomfort
- Pantomime
- Tableau Work: Shape & Spatial Relationships

Unit 3: Character

The purpose of this unit is to use the development of improvisational characters to explore several aspects of nonverbal communication, emotional regulation, and internal processes. Follow student interest during this unit; it is a valuable opportunity to explore identity and intrapersonal skills. They are ready for the next unit when they can create and sustain characters for several minutes while demonstrating empathy and perspective-taking skills. They should be working on reading social and nonverbal cues but do not need to demonstrate mastery in these areas, as they will be further explored in the next section.

Key Lessons

1. Gibberish
2. Characters via Movement (2 Parts)
3. Identity
4. Perspective

Supplemental Lessons

- Emotion
- Further Gibberish
- Gesture
- Physical Characteristics
- Playing-at: Advanced Character Workshop
- Values
- Vocals & Tone

Unit 4: Relationships & Scene Work

This unit uses improvisational scenes to help students explore social context and the actions which affect interpersonal relationships. It is meant to help students explore different kinds of relationships, reflecting on healthy relationships as they progress. This unit also contains more intense trust work, as the students must increasingly rely on one another to keep their scenes going. By the end, students should be adept in reading interpersonal cues, especially how they differ in social contexts.

Key Lessons

1. Wants, Needs, & Stakes
2. Intentions & Impacts
3. Social Context

Supplemental Lessons

- Being Present
- Boundaries
- Further Intentions
- Leaning In/Leaning Out
- Scene Practice
- Status

Unit 5: Conflict Resolution

This unit builds on the relationship work, introducing the difficulties of conflict. Using improvisation, students can explore many aspects of conflict, including resolution strategies and emotional regulation. The purpose of this unit is to give options for resolving conflict, so mastery might appear as students being able to explore perspectives, contributing factors, and possible outcomes in a conflict situation.

Key Lessons

1. Hero/Villain/Victim
2. Exploring Conflict
3. Strategies

Supplemental Lessons

- Approach/Avoid
- Conflict Styles
- Managing Anger & Anxiety
- Managing Differences
- Problem Solving
- Strategies Practice

Optional Capstone Unit: Community

The purpose of this unit is to combine the improvisational and SEL skills used up until now to explore a difficult issue affecting the students' community. It provides several different

workshop options for exploring issues. In any case, the idea is to use the language of improvisation to explore issues in the community, walking through many ways of handling them.

This unit might not be introduced. A year-long curriculum could end solidly in the conflict resolution unit—perhaps even only after the relationship unit—and serve its purpose well. However, if students have fluidly moved through the curriculum up until this point, consistently demonstrating mastery of each concept and with time left in the term, this unit serves as a valuable capstone on the experience.

Possible Lessons

- Exploring Issues Using Activating Material
- Exploring Issues Using Sculpting
- Exploring Issues Using Machines
- Exploring Perspectives

APPENDIX B: Key Lessons

Note: Connection activities and cooldowns are not described in each lesson, as the same handful of rituals work well and are interchangeable. Generally, briefly discussing the previous assignment (i.e., "How did that go? What did you notice?") works well as a connection activity. Spirit Huddles are described in the first key lesson and make strong cooldowns that allow the students to set their own goals as a group. Brief body scan meditations and stretches work as either connection activities or cooldowns. See Chapter 4 for additional guidance.

Key Lesson 1: Ensemble

Goals

This lesson is a playful first lesson that allows the guide to introduce several norms and observe the students' starting skills while letting the group have fun. The improvisational skill introduced is "ensemble," referring to the need for the group to work together as a team. Though no social-emotional skills are explicitly introduced, the guide should watch for the following: eye contact, body awareness, social flexibility, and cooperation. This lesson will help to quickly identify which skills will need the most support.

Warm-Up: Circle Dash (5-10 minutes)

Source: Unknown, via Rohd (1998; see pp. 10-11 for more detailed instructions)

Have everyone stand in a circle, while one student gets in the middle. (This is a good time to practice the "circle up" norm, explained in Chapter 4.) Explain the following: This is a silent game. Anyone in the circle can switch spots with anyone else in the circle. The person in

the middle will try to "steal" empty spots. If someone's spot is stolen, they must take the place in the middle. Start the game with the word "begin."

Remind the students to keep the game silent as needed. Let them work out disputes; don't let that process last very long. Play the game with the students to model the behavior; if someone gets stuck, help them out. Let it go on for several minutes, then end the game by calling, "freeze."

Process this warmup with them. Ask what they had to do to be successful. They might notice that they had to make eye contact or subtle gestures to indicate they wanted to switch, or that they had to confirm that someone wanted to switch with them. If they notice these things, that's a sign they have some of the foundational skills necessary to proceed. If not, don't point it out; just note that information for planning the next session.

Workshop

Content Lesson (2 minutes). Introduce the idea that improvisation ("improv" from here on out) requires a group that is willing to work together, an *ensemble.* Ask what teamwork usually looks like. Let them call out a few suggestions, then move on.

Exercise: Cover the Space (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd, originally Boal (1998; see pp. 12-14).

Use four objects to set up a rectangle almost as big as the room. Explain that the rectangle forms a boundary, and point out that the objects determine that boundary. When you say "cover the space," all participants will walk forward within the boundary; their goal is to evenly distribute their bodies in the space. This is a silent game, and they should not make contact with others. This is a good place to introduce the "freeze" norm (described in Chapter 4).

Stand outside the boundary. Call out a few rounds of "cover the space" and "freeze," asking them to mentally note how they are doing every time they freeze. Gently give reminders to stay silent, not make contact, and walk forward only when needed. When the group (or most of it) has the hang of it and is focusing, move on to these variations:

- Move the four objects to change the boundary. Make it tighter, bigger, or oddly shaped. Continue the pattern of having them move and freeze.
- Call out "freeze," then ask them to form shapes with their bodies without talking about it: three triangles, five squares, a five-pointed star, etc. Have them continue to cover the space between each one. Give time limits if needed.
- Call out "freeze," then have them get into groups based on their shirt color without talking about it at all. Count down from ten to give them a time limit. When they have done so, explain that you will point to one group at a time, and they have to announce their group name (e.g. "red" or "stripes") all at the same time without prior consultation. If groups have different answers, laugh about it together; it's an implicit lesson that mistakes are not a bad thing in this space. Repeat with shoe type, hair color, favorite music, favorite color, etc., ending with eye color.

Processing. Start with the question, "What did you notice?" Let them discuss, noticing whether they list literal happenings (e.g. "I didn't know how to tell favorite music so I just joined a random group") or talk about the process (e.g. "We had to try to communicate with our hands because we couldn't talk"). Again, this is all information. Try to help them see how they might have worked together in the process and that success probably came from being attentive to the group, but don't force answers at this point.

Playtime: Tableau (10-20 minutes)

Source: Original adaptation of a common theater game

Divide the group into Team A and Team B, and have the groups line up on opposite sides of the room where they can see one another. Explain that a *tableau* is a still image, like a painting made with our bodies; they don't talk or move. Introduce the game by walking the first team through it. Have the first person in line for Team A enter the middle of the room and strike a pose, any pose. Have the next person add to it, then the next, and so on. When all of Team A is in the tableau, ask Team B to title it. Take the first suggestion, clear the stage, and repeat with Team B. Have the teams go back and forth creating and naming tableaus for several minutes.

This game is silly and fun while allowing them to practice collaboration. The guide should observe for willingness to be spontaneous and build on one another's ideas. Watch for students getting frustrated about titles/tableaus not going their way, wiggling and talking while in a tableau, and nervousness about entering tableaus; all of these point to foundational lessons that might be next steps.

Cooldown: Spirit Huddle

Get in a circle. Ask the group what they thought they did well during the workshop and what they could work on for next week. Be open about their answers; the goal is to help them notice how they are functioning as a group in this early phase.

A note: it can be fun to have a post-cooldown ritual to delineate the end of a workshop, such as a group cheer.

Assignment

Students should watch for and record examples of people working together in their daily lives. Extracurricular activities and class projects are great places to look. Ask them to note what seems to help teamwork and what seems to hurt it.

Next Directions

If most of the students were focused, engaged, and able to cooperate during the lesson, move directly to the next key lesson ("Communication").

If they were struggling with focus and engagement, "Mindful Play" is a good next lesson. If they need more work on basic skills such as eye contact, seemed anxious, or do not seem to be "gelling" yet, proceed to "Group Mind". If there was frustrated or rigid behavior during cooperative games, proceed to "Social Flexibility."

Key Lesson 2: Communication

Goals

This lesson specifically introduces several communication norms and lets the students practice them. Students should learn the basics of giving and receiving feedback, along with identifying ways to communicate within exercises. It introduces active listening elements as well.

Warm-Up: Circle Dash (5 minutes)

As previously described. Process again if they had not noticed elements of success like eye contact before.

Workshop

Exercise: Blind (No Contact) (10-15 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 34-36).

Students form two lines facing one another. Let them know that this is a trust game and that one line will close their eyes, but you are watching and nothing will happen to them while their eyes are closed. (Guides should not participate in games where students close their eyes; if there are an odd number of students, employ an observer as described in Chapter 4.) Indicate which line will close their eyes first, and have them indicate where on their arm they are comfortable with their partner touching them. Ask the sighted partner to gently grasp the eyes-closed partner where indicated.

When you tell them to begin, the sighted partner will lead their eyes-closed partner around the room. Their goal is to not let them make any contact with other people or with objects in the room. This is a silent game, so they can only communicate by touch. Once the students seem successful, start introducing variations: move backwards, move sideways, crawl, let go of arms and walk foot-to-foot, etc. After a few minutes, have the partners switch; reset the lines and repeat the arm-consent portion first.

Processing. Ask what they had to do to be successful. Hopefully, students realize they had to form a nonverbal way to communicate to keep their partner safe. It's also interesting to ask whether it was harder to be the sighted or the eyes-closed person and why.

Exercise: Variation on "Storytelling" (15 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 44-45).

Students remain with their same partner from the trust exercise, and each pair finds space to sit facing one another. (The guide can partner with someone if there is an odd number. Otherwise, observe for active listening in body language.) Let them know that they will have a few minutes to tell their partner a story. The story must be true; be full of detail; and have a beginning, middle, and end. You will set a timer, and the storyteller must talk for the entire time. If they cannot think of what to say, they can try to fill in details. The listening partner's whole job is to listen well; they cannot talk at all, except to say, "Tell me more," or, "And then what happened?" (It may help to put these phrases on the board.) After the first round, the partners will switch roles.

Once everyone understands, provide the prompt: tell about a time when you had to communicate with someone. For this exercise, set the timer for 3 minutes. Both partners have the same prompt.

Processing. First ask what it was like to be the storyteller, then the listener. Ask them to say more about brief descriptions such as, "It was weird." See if they express how it felt to be listened to and/or prompted on their own.

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Improvisation is as old as human communication because it *is* communication. Everyone had to improvise a story just now. How can we use improv skills to help us communicate better? Let this be an open discussion.

Playtime: Tableau or Oracle (20 minutes)

If there is time, teach them "Oracle" as laid out in Key Lesson 3: "Yes, And…" If there are fewer than 20 minutes remaining in the lesson, return to "Tableau" from the previous key

lesson. This “playtime” doubles as a quick lesson in giving and receiving feedback, so that is the main purpose.

After the first round of the game, let the students know that we often give feedback after playing stage games. Feedback should be honest but also feel constructive and helpful; it should be used to help the group improve, not to tear anyone down. Ask them to focus on observations, balance positive and negative feedback, and avoid judgmental language such as “bad improv” (advice adapted from Harris & Sherblom, 2011). It can help to phrase feedback as, “It worked when they…” and, “It didn’t work when…” (For example, “It worked when the team tried to make the tableau about one thing; it was funny. It didn’t work when all the team members did random poses.”) When receiving feedback, they should take deep breaths, acknowledge the feedback, and listen attentively (Harris & Sherblom, 2011).

Assignment

Students should think of a storytelling prompt such as, “Tell me about a time you had a big mix-up.” It might be helpful for the guide to provide a list of them. Then, the student should find an elder, someone at least fifty years older than them, and ask them to tell a story with that prompt. During the interaction, the student should act as the listener in “Storytelling,” only prompting the storyteller to keep talking and not adding information. They should journal about what the experience was like.

Next Directions

If the students were able to engage in the exercises with energy and focus, actively listen, find ways to communicate, and cooperate, they can move on to the final key lesson of this unit: “Yes, And…”

If they were struggling to actively listen, move on to "Active Listening." If there was a lot of goofy or even unsafe behavior, "Group Mind" or "Mindful Play" are good next options.

Key Lesson 3: Yes, And...

Goals

This lesson explicitly introduces the idea of "yes, and…," which is the improvisation rule of accepting all offers of information and adding more information. It is a foundational rule of improvisation; most improvisation games require "yes, and…"

This rule involves several interpersonal skills, most notably active listening and responding with relevance. The guide should observe for fluency in these skills during this lesson.

Warm-Up: Zip Zap Zop (3-5 minutes)

Source: Unknown, via Rohd (1998; see pp. 22-23 for more detailed instructions)

Stand in a circle. Each player makes eye contact with another player, indicating an energetic forward motion with their arms (i.e. a "bolt of energy") and says, "Zip!" The receiver sends the bolt to the next person and says, "Zap," The game continues on through the phrase, "Zip, Zap, Zop." I like to add, "Phooey!" for when someone makes a mistake, followed by quickly starting over at "Zip." This warmup implicitly requires the students to listen and respond; move on when they seem to have the rhythm of doing so.

Workshop

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Introduce the idea that Rule #1 of improv is "yes, and…" Ask what that sounds like it means.

During the discussion, introduce the idea of "offers." Every time the other person onstage takes a turn talking, they are *offering* information. An actor's job is to accept the offer and give them an offer back. It's like keeping a ball in the air. For example, if Actor A enters the scene and says, "Mom, I need your help," they are offering two pieces of information: Actor B is Actor A's mother, and they require help. A helpful response would accept that information ("yes") and then add new information ("and"): "I'm busy, kiddo. Can't you ask your father?"

An unhelpful response, called "blocking," consists of not accepting the information or responding with something irrelevant. In the above example, Actor B would be blocking if they responded with, "I don't know you," or "Look, a snake!"

Exercise: Modified "Storyline" (10-20 minutes). Source: Original, based on the popular game "Storyline."

Stay in a circle formation. Using the Zip, Zap, Zop mechanic, the group tells a story together. The guide should start the story and "pass" the opportunity to another player in the circle. Whenever it's someone's turn, they must say, "Yes, [whatever the last thing said was] AND [add new information]." For example: "Yes, Henry saw a spaceship, AND he was so surprised when he saw it that he ran away." After a student has added information, they should sit down. The last person standing will finish the story.

The guide should observe for responding with relevance and the ability to tell a continuous story. Do not steer the students' storytelling, but do gently remind them to say "Yes… and…" if they forget.

Processing. Ask, "What did we do well as a group?" followed by, "What could we do better?" Try to draw out the idea that active listening and being spontaneous are important

elements of "yes, and…" The hope is that the students realize the story is better when they listen to and build on one another's ideas rather than taking the story in random directions. However, don't force this realization; if they do not reach it, that is information for future directions.

Play this game a few times, processing briefly each time.

Playtime: Oracle (10-20 minutes)

Source: Unknown; learned from Angela Mercier at Regis University

This is a fun game to provide "playtime" at the end while building on the same skills. This game requires a "host" and three participants. (It's best for the guide to host at first. All other students form the audience.) The participants form a "creature" by standing in a line: one standing, one kneeling, and one sitting. For extra fun, they should wiggle their arms and speak in a deep voice. This is "The Oracle." The host asks the audience for questions about the future or the nature of the universe. The Oracle must form full-sentence answers; however, each "head" of the Oracle can only speak one word at a time, moving from the tallest (standing) head to the shortest (sitting). This results in the three participants chaining together responses by listening to the previous head and adding on. Let each "Oracle" answer three questions, then shuffle the participants so that many students can have a turn. This game is contagiously fun and is great to return to anytime the group needs some "Yes, And…" practice.

Evaluation. After each round, ask, "What worked? What didn't work?" Again, they are likely to discover that active listening and spontaneity feed success.

Assignment

Students should try using the phrase “yes, and…” in conversations where they need to collaborate with someone else. For example, they might try it during a group project or sport practice. They should journal about what they noticed, e.g. how did their conversation partner respond?

Next Directions

If the students seemed to understand the concept and were successfully listening and responding, move on to the “Storytelling” lesson. If the group is adept, move on to the next unit.

If they were struggling, they likely need practice with active listening, social flexibility, or responding with relevance. Try to identify the problem. (Students getting upset that the story is not going the direction they wanted are likely struggling with social flexibility or responding with relevance. Students who seem distracted are likely struggling with active listening.) If the guide is unsure of the issue, the active listening lesson is a good place to start.

Key Lesson 4: Sensations

Goals

This lesson is meant to help students develop awareness of their senses and bodily sensations. This skill doubles as the improvisational skill and the social-emotional skill. In improvisation, students use the body-sensations work to practice “showing, not telling”; that is, they are working to act as though they are in certain types of environments rather than making statements such as, “It’s hot in here!” Finally, this is a small emotional regulation lesson on

managing discomfort. Essentially, this lesson is an introduction to several emotional regulation and body-awareness lessons to come.

Warm-Up: SIFT & Circle Dash (5 minutes)

SIFT Source: adapted from Siegel (2015; see pp. 47-48)

Ask all students to close their eyes. Let them know you are going to help them notice some things about their minds and bodies. First, talk them through noticing any sensations in their bodies, naming body regions from head to toes. Next, ask them to notice whether any images are floating through their minds; images can be visual or of the other senses, e.g. a song stuck in their heads. Third, identify any feelings or emotions they are experiencing. Finally, they should notice any thoughts that are on their minds right now. This process is called SIFT; it is a tool that will help them get to know their minds and bodies.

Follow with a quick game of Circle Dash.

Workshop

Content Lesson (2 minutes). In improv, we want to call on our knowledge of sensation to create environments. First, we have to get to know our senses. It helps to let the students know that this workshop will look a little different than usual.

Exercise: Spolin's "Orientation" sequence through "Feeling Self with Self" and including "Space Walks" (25-35 minutes). Source: Spolin (1999; see pp. 53-58; p. 80).

This is a sequence taken directly from Spolin's work. Each step is summarized here; it is highly recommended to read Spolin's detailed notes. Process after each step, focusing on the

questions, “What did you notice,” “How did that feel,” and “How did you know?” The goal is to help them observe sensations in their bodies.

- Exposure: Divide into two teams. One group goes onstage (or whatever part of the room is being treated as “onstage.”) The guide sits with the audience and says, “You look at us. We’ll look at you” (Spolin, p. 53). Wait for the onstage team to start displaying signs of discomfort: fidgeting, hardening, giggling, etc. Then, give them a long, tedious task such as counting the objects in the room. Wait for most of them to display signs of relaxing: shoulders and faces soften, giggling subsides, etc. Switch the teams.
- Seeing a Sport: Have one team get onstage, decide on a sport they are “watching,” and show (rather than tell) which sport it is. Repeat with both teams.
- Seeing a Sport, Recall: All students sit and think quietly about a time they saw a sport. (It can be helpful to let them recall other activities as well.) Coach them through noticing all sorts of sensations: colors, temperature, motion, etc.
- Listening to the Environment: All students sit and listen to the sounds of the environment in silence for one minute, then discuss.
- What Am I Listening To?: One team gets onstage and decides together on something they will all be listening to, such as a specific type of concert or lecture. They show through their bodies what they are listening to. Repeat with both teams.
- Feeling Self with Self: Coach the students through noticing minute body sensations, such as feeling their socks on their feet and the air on their skin.
- Space Walks: Students move through space as though it is filled with a substance they can feel; they must move against resistance and imagine feeling with their whole

bodies. This exercise can be adapted by adding specific substances if the group is tired of the abstract work; tell them the room is filled with jelly, honey, cotton, etc.

Processing. Process briefly after each step, focusing on the questions, "What did you notice," "How did that feel," and "How did you know?" The goal is to help them observe sensations in their bodies. Following "Exposure," it is particularly important to help them connect feelings of discomfort with bodily sensations such as queasiness and to notice that those feelings subsided with distraction (Spolin, 1999). Otherwise, this is a rapid-fire sequence focused on helping them notice their bodies and use their bodies to tell stories.

Playtime: Expert (10-20 minutes)

Source: Unknown; learned from Angela Mercier at Regis University

This is a similar game to Oracle but requires more awareness of body language. It requires a host and two players. (As with all host games, it is best for the guide to "host" first.) The two players sit next to one another. They mirror one another's body language as best they can; they are playing one character together. The host introduces them as one character, who is an expert in a topic. They ask the audience for the topic of expertise. Then, they ask the audience a question on that topic. The "expert" must answer the question in a similar manner to Oracle; each player can only say one word at a time, working together to form full sentences. The host should ask the audience for three questions per round.

Evaluation. Ask for feedback about what does and does not work. The humor comes from the players pretending to know about the topic and making up related answers as best they can, and it is delightful to watch them try to play the same character.

Assignment

This assignment is adapted from Spolin (1999). Every day, students should observe sights, sounds, and sensations in their environment for one minute each (one minute of sights, then one of sounds, etc.). They should journal briefly about the experience daily. Communicate that this is a matter of sensory training.

Next Directions

If students are able to focus, make connections, and identify sensations, move directly to the next key lesson, "Mirrors." If they are annoyed or cannot maintain focus, try "Mindful Play" or another exercise from Unit 1. If they struggle to notice body sensations or use their bodies to communicate, try "Body Awareness" or "Bodies in Space."

Key Lesson 5: Mirrors

Goals

These exercises help students with body awareness because they require observation of oneself and others, which is a precursor to reading body language. Essentially, these exercises should help students develop observation skills.

Warm-Up: SIFT; Who Started the Motion (10-15 minutes)

"Who Started the Motion" Source: adapted from Spolin (1999; p. 68)

Start with the SIFT exercise as introduced in the previous lesson. Then, play "Who Started the Motion?" All participants stand in a circle, and one leaves the room. The group chooses a person to be the leader. That person begins a motion such as waving their arms, wiggling their hips, clapping, or any other repetitive motion that can be done in one place. Everyone in the circle copies that person. The person who left the room is called back in. They

stand in the center of the circle and have three guesses to figure out who the "leader" is. The leader can change the motion at any time (and should do so often, as this is the fun). After a successful guess or three unsuccessful guesses, the old leader leaves the room to become the new guesser.

Play this warmup game a few times, then process with the question, "What helped people be successful?"

Workshop

Exercise: Mirror (15-20 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998) and Spolin (1999).

This is a silent game. Have students pair up and find their own space in the room. Each pair should stand facing one another and decide who is "A" and who is "B." The guide should observe and not participate. Have "A" raise their hand. Explain that A should lead movements while B tries to mirror them. Their goal is to match movement so that a spectator would not know who was leading. That is, A should not be trying to trick or mislead B; their goal is to move in sync. After a minute or two, call "switch," explaining that now B is the leader and A is the follower. Continue to call "switch" over several minutes, encouraging them to explore new ranges of motion. Once they are proficient in mirroring, call "freeze" and explain that you will no longer be telling them when to switch; they should switch on their own. Let this go on for a few more minutes.

Periodically, call "freeze" and invite them to observe sensations in their bodies such as heart rate, breath, etc.

Processing. Questions: What did you notice? How did it feel to be the leader? The follower? What was challenging? Did you hit a point where you didn't know who was leading? Did you notice changes in your body as you worked?

Exercise: Mirror Activities (5-10 minutes). Source: Original based on various Spolin (1999) exercises.

Set up the mirror exercise again, except this time, ask B to secretly come up with an activity they are trying to accomplish. It should be specific and have an end point, such as making a quesadilla or building a birdhouse. B begins the activity, and A mirrors them while trying to discern what they are doing. Once the pairs seem in sync, start calling "switch" at random. The pair should try to complete the activity while mirroring one another. When finished, have the partners share what they thought they were doing and whether they felt like they finished it.

Processing. Questions: Did you and your partner agree on what you were doing? Why or why not? How did you know what your partner was doing?

Playtime: Expert (10-15 minutes)

As previously written.

Assignment

Daily, students should surreptitiously mirror someone's body language in conversation. If they get caught, they should try again in a different interaction; the goal is to be subtle. They should journal briefly about their experiences.

Next Directions

If students were able to synchronize their body movements and successfully pantomime activities, they are ready for the next key lesson: "Building Environment." If they struggled to stay synchronized, move to "Body Awareness," "Further Mirror Practice," or "Bodies in Space." If they were able to synchronize but struggled with pantomime, move to "Pantomime." If this was all too silly and they were laughing so much that it disrupted their ability to continue, try "Managing Discomfort." If students seemed to enjoy this practice and want more like it, try "Further Mirror Practice" or "Tableau Work: Shape & Spatial Relationships."

Key Lesson 6: Building Environment

Goals

This lesson ties together several other key lessons. It introduces the improvisation skill of using pantomime and "yes, and…" to create interactable environments. Social-emotionally, it returns to the skills of collaboration, responding with relevance, and social flexibility while adding an element of body awareness.

Warm-Up: Tilt (5-10 minutes)

Source: Unknown, via Rohd (1998; see pp. 15-16 for more detailed instructions)

This is a silent game, and the guide can play if there is an uneven number. Players are assigned pairs, and each pair has a corresponding number to identify them. Have each pair decide which player is A and which is B. Place an object in the center of the room. Explain that this object is the center of a giant plate, and our goal is to keep it balanced. Call pair #1 to step onto the plate to demonstrate as you explain. As in the mirror activities, A leads while B follows.

However, the pairs do not need to mirror every motion; they merely need to stay on opposite sides of the center object, equidistant from the center. As A moves, B tries to balance the "plate." Once they understand, call the other pairs onto the plate one by one.

Occasionally, call "switch" to change the leader, as in Mirror. If needed, remind them that they want to be successful and should not try to trick their partner. Players tend to naturally choose their challenge in this game, varying speeds and types of motion as they feel comfortable. Notice how they handle navigating other players' bodies; this is an exercise in body awareness. Let it go on for a few minutes.

After ending the game, process it briefly with the questions, "What did you have to do to be successful?" and "What did you notice?"

Workshop

Exercise: Tour of a Place (20-30 minutes). Source: Rohd (1998; see pp. 46-47).

Have the group pair up; keep the pairs from "Tilt" if possible. Each pair chooses a partner to go first. They think of somewhere special to them, such as a grandparent's house, imagining all the sensory details of that place. Give them a minute to do so, then tell them to begin a tour where they walk their partner through that space. They should move as though they were really in the space, pantomiming it and trying to communicate the sensations involved. They are both trying to give their partner a tour and share stories from that space. It's helpful for the guide to demonstrate this activity to the group first to show them what this sounds like: "Here's my grandfather's table, with its smooth wooden top all covered in Sharpie. It's like that because he babysat me a lot, and I decided it could use some color one day." The listening partner is welcome to ask questions and should also move through the pantomimed space, accepting their

partner's offered information about what is there. After five to ten minutes, have the partners switch.

Processing. What was it like to move through the space together? How did you remember what was where? What details did you notice? What came up for you?

Exercise: Add a Part (10-20 minutes). Source: adapted from Spolin (1999; p. 85).

Turn on some instrumental music and have the group stand around the perimeter of the room. Explain that this is a silent game except for sound effects and the music. We are going to create an apartment or one-story house together, each adding a part. The goal of this exercise is for all of us to clearly communicate what is present in the environment and accept what is there. The guide starts by introducing a door, clearly delineating where it is, pantomiming opening it a certain direction, walking around the "apartment," and leaving through the door. Invite any member of the group to enter the apartment next, pointing out that they should enter through the same door. Every member of the group should enter the apartment at least once, interact with at least one other object another player has established, and add something new. This is an exercise in not only pantomime and body awareness but also in collaborative storytelling.

Processing. How did people communicate with their bodies? What was challenging?

This workshop has no "playtime" segment; the "add a part" is always fun, engaging, and takes a while

Assignment

Students should choose a time when they are in a busy environment such as a classroom or restaurant. They should observe and write down as many physical activities as possible.

Next Directions

If students were aware of their own and one another's bodies in space and practicing "yes, and…" with physical movement, they are ready to move on to the next key lesson. If they were blocking one another, struggling with body awareness, making unsafe impulsive movements, etc., try to identify the problem and plan the appropriate foundational lesson. It is very important that they demonstrate the ability to use their bodies safely before moving to the next key lesson.

Key Lesson 7: Collaborating in Environments

Goals

This lesson builds on the skills from the previous key lesson. It adds in more trust exercises to continue building the group's sense of trust and vulnerability. In addition, it introduces emotional awareness to the environment-building work, helping the group to transition to the character unit. Finally, there are many cues to help students connect bodily sensations to emotions.

Warm-Up: Circle Dash (5 minutes)

Play Circle Dash for a few minutes to help the group connect and gauge whether they are in a safe headspace. If they are in a goofy, hyperactive mood, skip "Falling" and move straight to "Environment". If they are focused and can control their bodies, continue to Falling.

Workshop

Exercise: Falling (20-25 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; see pp. 42-43)

To play Falling, the group must agree to put safety above all. It is a trust activity. First, ask the group to notice safety hazards in the room. You will ask the group to move as though they were playing Cover the Space. At any point, anyone can stop walking and yell, “Falling!” If they do, they then fall directly backwards toward the middle of the space and stay stiff; this is an important detail so that they are easy to catch. All other group members lunge to catch them. It is important for people who choose to fall to pause for a moment after calling out to give others a chance to catch them. The guide should demonstrate first, both to model the technique and to show the group that it is safe. After that, let the group play for a few minutes. No one has to fall, but anyone can fall at any time.

Processing. First, ask what they noticed and then what they had to do to be safe. There are many beautiful lessons that can come out of this exercise: the importance of clearly communicating one’s needs, of helping one another, of taking responsibility for each other, and more. You can probably point many of these lessons out by rephrasing their observations.

Next, ask how their bodies felt at different moments. How did their stomachs and chests feel if they chose to fall? How about when someone nearby announced that they were falling? Were those feelings manageable? What name would they give those emotions?

Exercise: Environment (20-35 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 51-53).

Have the group line up at one end of the room. Provide the group with an environment with many different possible activities; an easy one is a restaurant. This is a silent game. The first person in line should choose an activity that makes sense to do in the environment (e.g. waiting tables) and go do it. They should focus less on demonstrating perfect pantomime and more on *doing* the action, being in the moment. The next person decides on another activity—perhaps

trying to decide on a menu item—and joins. This continues until every person is involved in the created environment. Once they are all involved, let the scene go on for a moment and then introduce an environmental cue, such as, “It just got really cold in there!” Encourage them to physically react. After a moment, call, “freeze.”

Immediately start a new game in a new environment. Once everyone has joined, start calling out character prompts: “Why are you doing what you’re doing? What character are you playing? How does that character feel right now? How can you show your emotion? Do you feel it in your body?” (You might point out some examples: “Jeff clearly feels frustrated at that customer!”) Let them get swept up in the imagined moment. After a few minutes, call “freeze” and walk them through a quick body scan. If there is time, repeat once more.

Processing. How did it feel to adjust to a new environment? What sensations came up as you got into character? Were you able to feel emotions in your body? Which ones?

Assignment

Students should keep a daily journal trying to connect emotions to body sensations. Where do they feel it in their body when they are excited, nervous, angry, sad?

Next Directions

If students successfully navigated both activities with focus and collaboration, and if they were able to make connections between their sensations and emotions, they are likely ready to move to the character unit. If not, continue this unit with whichever supplemental lessons the group needs until they can work together safely and vulnerably with awareness of their bodily sensations.

Key Lesson 8: Gibberish

Goals

The purpose of gibberish exercises is to help students learn to read and display nonverbal cues. Gibberish removes the content of speech as an avenue of communication, so students rely on their bodies and voices to portray messages.

Warm-Up: Screaming Toes (5 minutes)

Source: Unknown

All students stand in a circle. Everyone looks down. The guide counts out loud: "3… 2… 1… Go." On "go," everyone looks up at someone else in the circle. If two people are looking at one another, they both scream, leave the circle, and are "out." The circle closes, everyone looks down, and the counting starts again. When only one or two people remain, they win and the game starts over. This is an ensemble-building game; the group will typically get better at not getting "out" over time. After a while, the guide may even be able to stop counting down, trusting the group to all look up at once. This game is hilarious and great for inducing a silly, collaborative spirit.

Workshop

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Adapted from Spolin's (1999) suggestions. The guide explains that we are going to play with gibberish work today, which will require us to communicate with our tone and bodies but not our words. Then, the guide should demonstrate: speak a nonsense line to a student. They will not understand. Follow it with the same nonsense line accompanied by an easily-understood gesture; for example, one could lift the hand to get the student to stand

up. Once they comply, cheer and repeat with another student. Ask them to turn to a partner and chatter in gibberish for just a moment, taking turns speaking as they normally would, until everyone has developed a "gibberish voice."

Exercise: Gibberish Teaching (15-20 minutes). Source: adapted from Spolin (1999; p. 116). All student pairs should find their own space in the room. They decide who will be A and who will be B. A will be a teacher, and B will be the student. Ask A to secretly decide on a lesson they will give B and an environment that makes sense; for example, A could give a guitar chord lesson in a music studio. A proceeds to give B the lesson in gibberish while B does their best to follow along, also speaking gibberish. After a few minutes, let the students check whether they were doing the same thing; repeat with switched partners.

Processing. Did you know what you were learning? How did you know? Did you know if your teacher/student was pleased or frustrated? What about their body or voice told you that?

Playtime: Film Translation (20-30 minutes)

Source: unknown; learned in OutRegis! at Regis University.

Four students get onstage. They decide on two actors and two translators. The actors get the following suggestions from the audience: a relationship (not strangers), a location, and an activity. Finally, each actor is assigned a translator. The actors then proceed to put on a "film scene" in gibberish using the suggestions. After each gibberish line, the appropriate translator "translates," i.e. invents a line that makes sense from the body language of the actor. The actors provide offers in the form of actions, environment, body language, and tone, while the translators provide the dialogue.

Evaluation. What did you learn about the characters through their body language and voice? Did the translators correctly interpret what the actors were trying to portray? Why or why not? How do we tell audiences about ourselves with our voices and bodies?

Assignment

Students should keep a journal of body language cues they notice. These lines could be interpreted as "people usually X when they feel Y," etc.

Next Directions

If students are already adept at reading and communicating with body language, move to the next key lesson. If they are still working on reading tone, proceed to the "Vocals & Tone" lesson. If they are working to read body language, proceed to "Gesture." If the group is sometimes unkind around physical characteristics, do the lesson of that name before the key lesson. If they loved the gibberish work, consider proceeding to "Further Gibberish."

Key Lessons 9 & 10: Characters via Movement

Goals

This two-part lesson focuses on physicalizing characters using the body. It is a vehicle for reading and communicating with body language; separating personality traits from emotions; and reflecting on how people perceive physical movements and gestures.

This is a two-part key lesson because it is flexible. The first three workshop exercises can be administered in any order; it's fun to let the students choose which to do first. Watch the clock and end the session when needed. The only mandate is that "Environment" should be last. The same warm-up can be used each time.

Warm-Up: Creative Joint Play (5 minutes)

Source: Unknown; learned from Sara Knickerbocker

Have the students move around the environment, "walking in neutral." This means walking their normal walk—whatever feels comfortable for them. Prompt them to start moving their joints in different ways. Curl their fingers, bend their elbows and knees differently, twist their spines—anything they can do to move *out* of their neutral walk and into a different way of moving. Occasionally, have them reset and try moving in a different way.

Workshop

Exercise: Clown Walks (15-20 minutes). Source: Original, loosely based on workshops attended long ago.

Divide the group into pairs; have the pairs decide between "A" and "B." A walks around the room in neutral. B follows them. Let them know that B is going to start imitating A, but that isn't in mockery of A; it is just because we all have different bodies, so imitating someone else allows us to find different ways of moving. Talk B through imitating different parts of A's walk: how they hold their head, their shoulders. How their spine curves (or doesn't), how high their chest is, whether their hips sway when they walk. How they move their arms. Their stride and how they put down their feet. Once all B's seem to have their A's walk, invite A's to leave the floor while B's continue in the A walk.

Ask B to notice which parts of this walk feel distinctly different from their own—which parts of their bodies feel strange. Instruct B to imagine this walk on a sliding scale, where 1 is what they are doing now and 10 is a cartoon character. Have them turn up the "intensity" of the walk from 1 to 3 to 5 to 7 to 10. As they do so, they exaggerate the parts of the walk that feel very

different and strange. By the time they get to 10, they should be doing big, clownish gestures and walking very strangely indeed. Have the new clowns line up and parade their walk across the room, one at a time. As they do, allow the A's to name each clown some adjective that represents the clown's personality: Happy, Slappy, Mopey, etc.

Have the partners switch and repeat the process.

Processing: How does your body feel after that? What made you choose the names for the clowns? Why do you think we did this exercise?

Exercise: Center of Gravity Work (20-30 minutes). Source: Original, loosely based on workshops attended long ago.

Have all students line up on one side of the room. Introduce the idea that we all carry our weight differently, and we sometimes interpret how our bodies move differently based on the ways we move. One way to explore this is via our center of gravity, which is often the most stable point on the body; anything above the center of gravity does not move much, while anything below moves a lot. We will explore three centers of gravity. For each, the guide should demonstrate the walk first. Then, students will leave the line and move across the room with that center of gravity one at a time. As they do so, the whole class is having an ongoing discussion about what this sort of physicality communicates.

The lowest center of gravity can be at the hips. Demonstrate walking as though you are carrying a full bowl of water at pelvis level. During discussion, ask students how this appears. It tends to be a very masculine, stoic, slow way of walking. Ask them what sort of person they would assume a character with this sort of walk was, and why.

The second center of gravity is at chest height. Again, demonstrate walking with an imaginary bowl of water at chest height. During discussion, it is helpful to compare this physicality to the previous one. The hips sway more, the chest moves forward, etc. It is more confident, more feminine, quicker, etc.

Finally, move the center of gravity to just above the head. The head stays still while the body can move wildly and quickly. This physicality is more childlike, gender-neutral, and silly.

Finally, have students mill about the room experimenting with moving their centers of gravity however they wish. Continue asking, "What sort of person is this? What sort of person moves like this?"

Processing. The processing for this exercise happens during the exercise. It is worth noting that students will often supply words such as "happy" or "sad" when asked about personality traits. It is a good opportunity to ask about the difference between emotional states and personality traits: happy is temporary, while optimistic is long-term, for example. Every person gets sad sometimes, but we do interpret some people as "gloomy" because of how their bodies move. It is worth both identifying these assumptions and asking where they come from.

Exercise: Animal Images (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Spolin (1999; pp. 241-242).

Split the group in half; one group will observe while the other works. Ask participating students to move in "lanes," i.e. along a limited strip of the room where they won't knock into other students. Each should silently choose an animal. Once they have chosen an animal, they should start moving as much like that animal as possible. Coach them through adopting that animal's physicality into different muscle groups, embodying the animal as thoroughly as they

can. Then, instruct them to become 80% animal and 20% human. Notice what changes. Walk them through incrementally becoming more and more human, all the while retaining animal characteristics, until they are 90% human. Point out that they should make intentional choices about what gestures, facial expressions, walks, etc. they retain from their animal.

One at a time, have the participants walk up and down their lane. Ask the audience what personality traits they would ascribe to this character and why. See the note from "Centers of Gravity" regarding separating emotion from personality. After everyone has been observed, switch groups and repeat.

Exercise: Environment Variation (10-20 minutes). Play this last.

Have the students walk in neutral through the environment. Ask them to choose any strategy they wish to create a new walk: imitating someone else, changing their center of gravity, invoking an animal, or something else. Have them reflect on what type of character they are making, what their body is communicating.

Have the characters line up, and play "Environment" as described in Key Lesson 7, diving straight into the character prompts as they interact in an environment. After a moment, call out, "Speech," which allows the characters to begin talking and interacting. Let them play for several minutes.

Processing. What sort of person did you become? What could you tell about yourself by how you moved? Did you make assumptions about others based on how they moved?

The goal here is not to encourage students to make assumptions about others based on physical appearance. However, the goal is to help them become aware of how nonverbal cues communicate states and traits to others; this is a situation where it can be helpful to guide the

conversation in this direction. For example, many students do not think about how it looks to adults when they lower their eyelids, slouch, and let their mouths hang open; they often think they are communicating tiredness while adults read boredom. The point is to help them understand and explore how bodies communicate—clearly or unclearly—to others.

Assignment

Students should pay attention to their own body language, making conscious efforts to adjust their bodies based on the message they want to be sending. They can journal about what they notice about their own comfort and how others respond.

Next Directions

These lessons should happen over two consecutive sessions. If students were able to have thoughtful and observant conversations around body language and perception, they may be ready to move on. If not, they should explore some of the other lessons on nonverbal cues before proceeding. If they kept getting caught up in rigid interpretations of others or were cruel, apply the "Physical Characteristics" lesson.

Key Lesson 11: Identity

Goals

This workshop helps students to identify the components that make up "identity." It includes discussion of creating characters as stereotypes, defined as making one aspect of identity the whole of the character, versus archetypes, defined as using many aspects of identity to create a complex whole. This discussion introduces elements of empathy, respecting differences, and perspective taking into the conversation. Students should finish this lesson with

an understanding of the building blocks of identity and the ability to reflect on their own identities.

Warm-Up: Circle Dash (2-3minutes)

Workshop

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Ask the students what they think of when they hear the word "identity." If needed, clarify and ask what parts of ourselves create identity. List examples on the board as they say them; these might include age, gender, orientation, ethnicity, race, class, favorite things, education, hobbies, family structure, and the like.

Exercise: Who Are You? (10 minutes). Source: Derrick Gay.

Hand out notecards. Give students 3-5 minutes to list as many aspects of their identities on the card as they can. Warn them ahead of time that they will be sharing the content of the card, or a good amount of it. (It might help for the guide to present an example card.)

Once they have done so, ask them to partner up. Explain the following: Partner A repeatedly asks, "Who are you?" while partner B repeatedly answers with items from their notecard. It is a rhythm that sounds like:

"Who are you?"

"Student."

"Who are you?"

"Mexican."

"Who are you?"

"Straight."

Give each pair one minute to do this, then have the partners switch so that B is asking A who they are.

Processing. Ask for additional insights from the exercise. Did students think of additional components of identity? Finally, ask, "Which answer to 'who are you' was the right one?" The goal is to guide them into a conversation about the mosaic quality of identity; the ideal insight here is that we all have many facets to our identities.

Transition from the processing conversation to this exercise by asking the students how they think of a stereotype. Let them give answers, then present the following idea: onstage, our goal is to play characters with many facets of their identities. If we focus on one piece of identity, that often results in stereotyping. For example, attempts to play "a gay character" often result in sibilant S's and other stereotypical qualities. However, letting a full and complete character be gay often helps us avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping.

Note: at this point in the workshop, it is possible to be pressed for time if students were excited about the identity conversation. If this is the case, treat the next two exercises as flexible in delivery. One could move into whichever exercise the group seems more likely to latch onto: archetypes for stage work, or storytelling on a timeline for self-reflective work. From there, one could split this key lesson into two lessons with longer playtime or simply proceed if the group seems ready.

Exercise: Archetypes vs. Stereotypes (15-20 minutes). Source: Original.

Before the lesson, print or create a list of archetypal characters. This list will probably depend on the maturity of the group and could be connected to their English classes if possible. I like to use Carolyn Myss' Archetype Cards (with age-inappropriate cards removed).

Ask the group to stand in a circle. Point out that one way to avoid playing stereotypes is to instead play archetypes: stories and characters that humans love to tell ourselves over and over. These can serve as foundations for experimenting with identity.

Within the circle, introduce an easy archetype; options include the brave hero, the haughty royal, or the innocent child. Ask the group to embody this archetype much as they did in the character movement key lessons. Because the group is standing in a circle, ask what they notice about one another's character postures. Ask them to mentally choose a few aspects of identity they could add to this character and adjust their physicality accordingly. Perhaps some heroes will gain class-based backstories or favorite types of music or countries of origin. The goal is not for students to find ways to literally communicate these things with their bodies, but to add fragments of identity to their archetypal characters to create someone complex; side-coach accordingly. Repeat the exercise with one or two more archetypes.

Finally, hand out the archetype papers or cards. Ask students to move around the room—as they are used to doing in character movement workshops—and work to create that archetype, then add flavors of identity to the character. When they seem to have a sense of the character in their bodies, call "speech!" At this point, characters may approach other characters and interact. Let them play with interaction for a few moments.

Processing. What was it like to create a character from an archetype? What did you notice about your character's identity and interactions? Do you think you could avoid playing stereotypes with this method?

Exercise: Storytelling on a Timeline (10-15 minutes). Source: Unknown; learned from Madison Goering.

Before the lesson, prepare cards with the following numbers on them: 0, 3, 6, 9, 12, and the age of the oldest student. They should be easy to read from a distance, and there should enough cards for groups of two to three to have them.

Demonstrate to show the group how to do this activity. Lay the cards out on the floor in a straight line and in numerical order. Stand behind a card that you would like to start on; the numbers represent age. The idea is to tell little stories and memories about oneself in the present tense from the perspective of the age presented on the card. The speaker may move around the timeline freely, and the stories do not need to be connected. An example might sound like:

"I'm three, and I'm in church with my parents. It's boring and I don't want to be here but it smells nice. And now I am nine and unwrapping birthday presents. Most of them are Barbies and I like them alright. Now I am zero, and I am being named because I was just born. Now I am twelve and I go by a nickname…"

Similarly to "Storytelling" from Rohd, the goal is for the speaker to keep speaking for the entire time, and for the listener to listen with their whole body. It is stream-of-consciousness and beautiful.

Have the class pair up (ideally in the same pairs from "Who Are You?"), and give each pair a set of cards. For this workshop, give each speaker two minutes to move on the timeline. The prompt is, "Tell about your identities." When the first speaker has gone, have the pairs switch.

Processing. What kind of stories and memories came to mind? What experiences form our identities? What stories do we tell about our identities?

Playtime: Party Guests (10-20 minutes)

Source: Unknown; learned from Angela Mercier at Regis University and an iteration of a popular improv game.

Choose a host, who leaves the room. Two to three players get suggestions for characters from the audience. These could be characters from popular culture (e.g. Elsa from *Frozen*), archetypes (e.g. a damsel in distress), or occupations (e.g. a firefighter); it often helps to limit suggestions to one of the three while the group is learning the game. The host is called back in.

Onstage, the host pantomimes setting up for a party. One by one, the players "knock" at a door and are let in. The goal of the game is for the host to guess the identities of the party guests. However, the guests cannot say their (or each others') names. Instead, they drop hints via interactions at the party and with the host. For example, "Elsa" might freeze her drink with ice powers, a "damsel in distress" may cry for help at inopportune times and fan themselves, or a "firefighter" may comment on the danger of having so many candles about. The host guesses by calling characters by name or simply asking.

It is usually helpful to set a time limit on scenes to save the host if they are unable to guess. If the time limit makes the group anxious, it might make sense to set a limit on guesses

per character instead. It is up to the group to decide which hints are too obvious and which are welcome.

Finally, a more advanced variation on this game introduces "quirks," e.g. something different about the character. "Elsa" may have the hiccups, for example.

Evaluation. Was the host able to guess, and did the amount of time feel good to the audience? How can these characters be communicated clearly without giving up the game? Were too many hints verbal—that is, could more hints be introduced with gesture and action?

Note: If the group is short on time, a previously-learned playtime game will do.

Assignment

Students should make an identity portrait. This could take many forms: a literal self-portrait, a collage of identity aspects, a poem incorporating many facets of their identities, etc. Their notecard from "Who Are You?" is a good place to start. They can share their portrait with the group at the beginning of the next lesson.

Next Directions

If students were engaged in the discussion of identity, were able to explore different aspects of characters in the exercises, and took the whole workshop seriously (even as the work was playful), they are likely ready to move on to the next key lesson. If they were enthusiastic about this work, consider moving to the "Values" lesson next to allow them to explore how their values interact with their identities. Similarly, if they were enthusiastic and advanced in their character work, the advanced workshop "Playing At" might be of value to them.

On the other hand, if the students were uncomfortable with the subject matter and resisted conversation, consider working with foundational lessons such as “Physical Characteristics,” “Further Gibberish,” or even a review lesson from a previous unit before proceeding. It’s important that they are able to engage with empathy and perspective-taking before moving on. If they struggled to make connections or have fruitful discussions, they may need more work in reading nonverbal cues; move to “Emotion,” “Gesture,” or “Vocals & Tone,” whichever the group seems to need most.

Key Lesson 12: Perspective

Goals

This is a workshop focused on taking other people’s perspective and empathizing with them. Students will learn to inhabit a character and fully think through their perspective, attitudes, and values. Implicitly, this work also helps with managing differences.

Warm-Up: Storytelling on a Timeline (9-12 minutes)

Return to this exercise, previously described in Key Lesson 11. This time, have students tell stories in groups of three or four. Give them two minutes to speak and do not give them a prompt. Every person should have a chance to go. The goal is to get the students talking, sharing, and in a storytelling mood.

Workshop

Content Lesson (2 minutes). As a primer, briefly explain that we are going to explore “perspective” today. Ask what they think of when they think of that word, and ask whether they

think it is important to understand other people's perspectives. Take them wherever they are, and ask them to keep an open mind today.

Exercise: Monologue Work (30-40 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 68-70)

Before the lesson, come up with an issue for the group to explore and a related question that examines a binary choice. You could draw from other areas of study, current events, or happenings in the classroom. Alternatively, use one of these examples to explore social situations:

1. Why do middle schoolers choose to continue a friendship or to end it?
2. Why do middle schoolers choose to use social media or to not use it?
3. Why do middle schoolers choose to tell a parent about their lives or not to?

Note that all the questions explore reasons behind choices and follow this format: "Why do [group of people] choose to [make one decision] or [make the opposite decision]?" It's best to use questions that are relevant and interesting to the students while avoiding questions that will result in immediate finger-pointing in the classroom; it's a balance.

Write the question at the top of the board. Make two columns: one labeled "YES" and one labeled "NO." The former column refers to the first choice in the question while the latter refers to the opposite choice. Ask the group to brainstorm reasons for either perspective. For example, the first example question might produce results such as:

YES

Been friends for a long time

Like each other

Shared friend group

No reason not to

NO

Got in a big fight

Nothing in common anymore

Started acting mean

Once there are as many results as there are students, publicly have each student choose a reason off the board, and ask each person to find solitary space in the room. Give them five to ten minutes to create a character with that reason/perspective. They should think through their character's point of view and work to create people with full identities. Let them know that they will have the opportunity to tell their story about why they made the choice they did to the group.

When the group comes back, ask for volunteers to come onstage and tell their story. One at at time, players do so. It helps to alternate "YES" and "NO" answers. Each player should keep it brief; they are simply delivering a monologue about their perspective. After each monologue, the group may ask curiosity questions of the player, who answers the questions in character. The point is for the group to thoroughly explore different points of view and how people form their perspectives.

It's unlikely that the group will have time to get through all the monologues. This is fine, especially since this work might feel overwhelming to some students. Move on to playtime when they start getting antsy; if they are absorbed in one another's monologues, skip playtime. If they are very sad that not everyone gets to give their monologues, consider extending this workshop into the next lesson. For a very large class, the guide could have two students do this for the whole group as an example, then split the rest of the class in two so the rest of the monologues can be delivered synchronously. Only use this option if the group is proficient at processing and focusing.

Processing. How do people form their points of view/perspectives? Why do we make the choices that we make? The goal of this conversation is to help them see that everyone has reasons for making their choices, whether we agree with those reasons or not. (This does not mean that all choices are "good" choices, only that it is worth imagining why someone takes their position.)

Playtime: Party Guests (5-10 minutes)

As previously described.

Assignment

Students should watch for opportunities to take someone else's perspective—this could be anywhere they disagree or just don't understand someone's point of view. For two or three of these opportunities, they should list some reasons the person might hold that point of view.

Next Directions

This is a difficult workshop. If students only create very silly characters, this is a cue that they are not ready to move on. Spend time in any foundational lessons from this unit. Then, give the "Values" lesson. If they can engage in that lesson, try returning to this one, explicitly asking them to ground their characters in reality. One could also give the "Values" lesson if students were at mixed levels of engagement or seem like they would benefit from more clarification on perspective. The "Playing At" workshop is also a natural upper-level extension of this lesson. If students were thoroughly engaged, were able to have intellectually curious discussions about perspective, and were able to imagine why people might take different perspectives, then they are likely ready for the "Relationship" unit.

Key Lesson 13: Wants, Needs, and Stakes

Goals

This lesson is a bridge from character work to relationship work. It helps to translate the idea of "perspective" from the previous lesson into "wants and needs" in interpersonal interactions. Though students' characters have interacted in previous lessons, this lesson moves the focus to creating scenes where two believable characters interact with one another. This format of improvisation is a vehicle for exploring interpersonal relationships, and it is worth grounding the students in the delight of non-comedic improvisation before continuing.

One tool for this grounding is introduced in this lesson: Rohd's (1998) feedback questions. Quoted directly from p. 75, they are:

1. Did you stay in it?
2. Did you make it important to you?

3. Did you make strong choices and build the story together?
4. What could we have done differently to make the stakes higher?

These questions are effective ways for students to evaluate their own engagement. I recommend displaying them in the room for the rest of the curriculum. Most lessons will include a direction to, "Ask the students to go over the feedback questions together." Finally, the introduction of these questions necessitates introducing the idea of "high stakes" to the group, which pairs nicely with wants and needs.

Warm-Up: Circle Dash (2-3 minutes) and Minefield (5-10 minutes)

"Minefield" Source: Unknown, via Rohd (1998; see pp. 20-21)

It is likely that the group has already encountered "Minefield" in a supplemental lesson, making it an appropriate and quick warmup. If not, be aware that the first few playthroughs tend to be very exciting, and the group will be likely to want to continue. Use your judgement.

Everyone finds an object in the room that will neither break nor hurt someone if it is thrown or stepped on. The group stands in a circle, and all toss their item into the circle. This creates a sort of obstacle course. A volunteer closes their eyes. Together, the group must verbally lead the volunteer across the circle. Tell the group there are three main rules:

1. No one can say names.
2. Everyone must stay in their current spot.
3. If the volunteer touches any object in the circle or if either of the above rules are broken, KABOOM! The game is over.

The guide is the angel of death and watches for any of the above. Furthermore, the guide can move around and should do so to increase suspense and even strategically block the view of loud participants so that others may have a turn.

Rohd offers several variations on this game. In my experience, adolescents love to modify this game themselves and will happily invent every variation under the sun; it's a great way to keep the game fresh.

Whether or not the group has played "Minefield" before, it is worth processing to bridge this warmup to the workshop. Ask what they had to do to be successful. See if they notice that they had to work out systems of communication, take turns, and use everyone's (literal, physical) perspective. Shouting over one another, giving random suggestions, and insisting on being the only speaker usually lead to confusion.

Workshop

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Revisit the perspective conversation, asking what they remember about it. Introduce the idea that another way to think of perspective is what we bring to social interactions. That is, we tend to approach social interactions with something we want or need. Ask if they can think of examples. Wants and needs can be as simple as having fun and telling stories, or they can be as intense as hard favors or forgiveness. It may be difficult to distinguish wants from needs, sometimes.

Exercise: Activity/Urgency (10-20 minutes). Source: adapted from Spolin via Rohd (1998; pp. 76-77)

The group splits into pairs and finds their own space in the room. Each pair decides which partner is "A" and which is "B". Without telling Partner B, Partner A comes up with an activity

that is physical and would be hard to do by oneself in a few minutes (e.g. baking a cake or building a birdhouse). This partner also imagines a reason that it needs to be done; categorize this as their want or need. For example, is the cake important because it was promised to your little sister for her birthday and you want to show her you care?

This is a silent game. When the guide says "go," A tries to accomplish the activity via pantomime alone while B watches and tries to figure out the activity. Let this go on for a minute or two, then tell B to join in and try to help A finish. After a couple more minutes, stop the scenes. Ask each pair what B thought they were doing and why, then have A say the same. Have the partners switch roles and play once more.

Processing. Move right into the content lesson.

Content Lesson (5 minutes). Introduce the feedback questions. Ask the students to process just the first three. Then, ask what they think "high stakes" are. Define "stakes" as something someone wants or needs to happen in an interaction; the more important the want/need, the higher the stakes are. Some examples include not wanting to look foolish, wanting to be liked, or needing someone to say "yes." Ask them if any of their "Activity/Urgency" motivations felt like high stakes. (Depending on time and whether the group was successful in "Activity/Urgency," consider breaking here to play that game again before moving on.)

High stakes tend to be the core of strong improv scenes. This is why scenes between strangers often get boring; there is little for either party to lose. However, other relationships have natural stakes because we want to maintain the relationship. For example, most people would not instantly resort to yelling at their boss because they risk being fired; scenes with a boss and employee require more creative problem-solving because of the high stakes. The same

is true of damaging a friendship or familial relationship. Take the time to make sure the students understand and can give other examples of high-stakes relationships.

Exercise: Two Revelations (20 minutes). Source: Boal via Rohd (1998; pp. 57-59)

The group breaks into pairs and finds their own space in the room. Tell the group that each pair will be doing an improv scene at the same time. The scene will be about a middle-school-age adolescent and their parent, both with their own wants and needs. Ask the pairs to make the following decisions together and quickly: who is the parent/child, what room of the home the scene will take place in, and who will be partner A/B.

Finally, coach the players through making two more decisions *secretly*, without discussing with their partner. The first decision is a realistic secret. Emphasize *realism*; they should think of a secret that a child would really keep from a parent and vice versa. The secret should matter a great deal—that is, it should be high stakes. Second, they need to decide why they are going to tell the other person this secret. This second decision can be thought of as a real want or need; it's not, "I want you to know," but, "I need you to forgive me," or, "I crashed the car, so you're going to find out sooner or later," or something similar. This requires them to really think about their character's perspective: why would their character reveal this important secret now?

When you tell them to start, Partner A will start pantomiming an activity they would do in the agreed-upon room, such as folding laundry. Partner B enters, joins the activity, and starts a conversation with the goal of revealing their secret sooner or later. Partner A cannot reveal their secret until the guide calls, "Second revelation!" Until then, they must focus on Partner B's secret.

The guide should not participate. Instead, walk through the groups and observe. Are the students keeping the scenes grounded? Do they seem to be exploring the relationship and perspectives? Let them play for a little longer than is comfortable to see how the relationship develops. When the scene is over, ask them to process with the feedback questions before coming together to process as a group.

Processing. What did you notice? How did your characters' wants and needs influence the scene? Were the stakes high? What was the relationship like? Don't steer this processing conversation too much. This is a time to see what they notice about choices in interpersonal relationships and let them explore the ideas inherent in this exercise.

Assignment

Students should observe for times when they feel like they are not getting what they want or need out of a social interaction. (While giving this assignment, perhaps ask how they might recognize that situation. Tightness in the body and feeling frustrated are potential signs.) They should journal about that experience, including about how their wants and needs affect their actions.

Next Directions

This work is abstract and has many possible outcomes. If students were engaged in the processing discussions, stayed focused and present throughout "Two Revelations," and seem to understand the concept of "high stakes," they are ready to move to the next key lesson. Depending on what issues came up in "Two Revelations," "Boundaries" might be a good supplemental lesson to follow; it helps students explore setting, maintaining, and respecting boundaries in interpersonal relationships. If students don't seem to fully understand the concept

of "high stakes" or were struggling during the processing discussions, move on to "Further Intentions." If they struggled to keep the scenes going, move to "Scene Practice" or even any early lesson focusing on "yes, and…" Finally, if students were struggling to stay engaged in the scenes, move on to "Being Present."

Key Lesson 14: Intentions & Impacts

Goals

This workshop extends on the previous key lesson by helping students to explore how their choices affect their interpersonal relationships. It reframes the previously discussed "wants and needs" to "intentions." In improvisation, "intention" often refers to a character's goals in the scene (Rohd, 1998). In life, our intentions do not always match up with our impacts; that is, sometimes our actions have consequences that we did not anticipate. This workshop allows students to openly explore how choices affect relationships via improvisational scenes. The conclusions that the students reach will depend entirely on the group and will be valuable so long as the students understand the difference between intention and impact. Finally, this workshop also starts the process of differentiating behavior based on relationship, which will be further explored in the next key lesson.

Warm-Up: Complete the Image (10 minutes)

Source: adapted from Boal via Rohd (1998; see pp. 60-61 for more detailed instructions)

For this game, the group breaks into pairs, and each pair finds their own space in the room. However, it is easiest for the guide to demonstrate this warmup with two volunteers before breaking up the group. The volunteers/partners first enter a tableau of two people shaking hands. The guide asks the group what they notice about the relationship onstage. Press the students to

name specific nonverbal cues for each observation. If a student says, “They seem like they don’t like each other,” ask what about their bodies and faces makes it seem like they don’t like one another. Students will often help one another to articulate nonverbal cues. After the students make a couple of observations, ask one volunteer to sit down while the other remains. Have a new volunteer come up and take a new pose in relationship to the still-frozen volunteer. Ask the same questions: what do the students see about this relationship? How do they know? Repeat once more, letting the volunteer who has been up there longest sit down.

Then, have the students pair up. (The guide should not play; it is easy for this to work in a group of three.) Have everyone decide who will “unfreeze” first and start in a handshake position. The guide will call “freeze” and “unfreeze” with a few seconds in between. With each “freeze,” both partners should be frozen in a tableau. With each “unfreeze,” only one partner will move; they should quickly find a new posture that changes the relationship and settle into it with “freeze.” This is a silent game. Continuously encourage the students to find new relationships and positions. Let them play, without a prompt, for a few minutes. Then, freeze all partners and move directly into the first workshop exercise.

Workshop

Exercise: Image Alive (10-20 minutes). Source: adapted from Boal via Rohd (1998; pp. 92-93)

Let the group know that they will continue to play Complete the Image. However, you will periodically call out, “Image alive!” When that happens, they should use the frozen position to create an improvised scene. The characters, relationship, environment, and activity are all up to them, but all of the above should come out of the original frozen pose. Have the group continue

"Complete the Image" for a moment, then call "image alive" and let the resulting scenes run for a couple of minutes. This first round is just to get the hang of it.

Call "freeze" and explain that the students are going to return to "Complete the Image," and you are going to start giving prompts for their poses. The idea is for the students to nonverbally explore each idea, eventually letting it influence a scene. With each prompt, let them move through a few rounds of poses before calling "image alive." Let each scene play out for only a minute or two, then call, "Freeze! Complete the image," and give them the next prompt. The prompts are: asking for something; listening and not listening; wants and needs; high stakes. After the last scene, ask the students to quickly process the feedback questions together. (If they are losing focus during this stage, have them process the feedback questions after each scene before returning to "Complete the Image.")

Processing. What sorts of scenes came out of the prompts? What wants and needs appeared in the scenes? The goal is to get students to share examples of intentions that emerged from their scenes and perhaps how those intentions affected the relationships. Students might also critique themselves on their improvisation skills, which is fine; this game is great for re-grounding in improvisation basics such as establishing environment.

Content Lesson (5 minutes). In relationships and social interactions, another word for our wants and needs is "intention." We tend to approach social situations with intentions, consciously or not. You noticed some intentions in your scenes. (Give examples from processing here.) However, do our intentions always work out perfectly? Let the students discuss this question for a moment. They will probably come to this realization on their own, but either way, articulate that the consequences of our actions sometimes don't line up with our intentions. We

can think of this discrepancy as "intention versus impact," i.e., the difference between what we want to happen and what happens.

Exercise: Russel's Soup (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 83-85).

Rohd's version of this game involves players creating their own relationships and intentions. However, I find it helpful to establish a baseline relationship and have pre-written intention cards available for this first playthrough. This way, students have an example of the types of choices that make this game powerful and prevents the workshop from being derailed. You could write your own intention cards based on observations from the classroom; they should be clear, high-stakes, and relatable for this age group.

Otherwise, here are examples:

- I want you to keep the secret I'm about to tell you.
- I want you to accept my apology for something I did to you.
- I want you to help me push someone out of our friend group.
- I want you to make me feel better about something bad I've done.
- I want you to stand up to someone who is spreading rumors about me.
- I want you to join my expensive, high-level recreational sports team.
- I want you to invite my friend (who you don't like) to your birthday party.
- I want you to take over my responsibility (e.g. class meeting facilitator).
- I want you to help me with a large, involved project.
- I want you to teach me how to do a complex thing.
- I want you to let me borrow your phone for an entire week.
- I want you to let me have something precious to you that I need.

- I want you to steal money from your parents for me.
- I want you to let me copy your homework.

For this first playthrough, the same partners from "Image Alive" decide who is A and who is B. Partner B receives an intention card; they should not show Partner A. Tell the students they will all be playing middle school best friends. Remind them that this is a high stakes relationship; both characters should have an intention of preserving the friendship. Partner A should choose an environment and begin an activity in that environment. When you tell them to enter, Partner B enters the scene and starts working their intention card into the conversation. Partner B *cannot* give in; it is up to them to come up with strong, convincing choices about why they cannot give Partner A what they want. Let the scene play out for several minutes. By nature, they cannot reach a conclusion or solve the problem.

If there is time after processing, play the game again with the partners switching roles. This time, let them choose their relationship; remind them that they should choose a relationship with high stakes, and "strangers" never fits that criterion. Ask for and offer examples before they begin: parent/child, significant others, siblings, boss/employee, coworkers, teammates, etc. The partner who enters the scene decides the relationship and must show it by the way they behave, giving the other partner clues about their relationship.

In Rohd's version, intentions should be realistic and come from the relationship. Use your judgement in deciding whether each pair should receive a new intention card or whether they are ready to create their own intentions based on the relationship. I use the cards until all members of the group are able to fully engage in this work without showboating or turning every situation into comedy (which is a natural reaction to the vulnerability this work can bring up.) If using the cards, distribute the cards before asking the card-holding partner to come up with a relationship

that works with the card. (“I want you to keep my secret” works with different relationships than “I want you to let me copy your homework.”)

After each playthrough, the students should process the feedback questions in partners and then have a processing conversation together. Play as many times as possible.

Processing. What happened to the relationship in your scene? What impact did the characters have on one another, and why? Did anyone’s characters seem surprised by the other character’s reaction? Again, let students come to their own conclusions as long as they are talking about intentions and impacts in interpersonal relationships. The guide is helping them practice the ability to make observations about interpersonal relationships; the contents of the scenes and lessons learned are vehicles for practicing that skill.

Assignment

Students should interview an adult in their lives about an experience where intentions and impacts were mismatched. What is the story? How did they handle the situation? Do they feel like they would handle it differently now? Students should journal about the conversation.

Next Directions

This is a very difficult workshop that requires students to be grounded and vulnerable. It is normal for some to avoid engaging with it; this is not a failure of the students or guide, but a sign that more trust work is needed. If this is the case, proceed to “Boundaries” or “Being Present” or retreat to a supplemental lesson from Unit 1 or 2 to provide some safety and re-grounding. If students were struggling to maintain scenes, move to “Further Intentions” or “Scene Practice.” At this point, some students may be very eager to offer their insights and lead their scenes. This is a behavior often praised in classrooms, but it does not allow the quieter

students to provide insights and engage equally; the “Leaning In/Leaning Out” lesson is meant to help students become more self-aware about equal participation.

If the students were engaged, were able to make observations about their improvised relationships, and were participating equally, use that momentum and proceed to the next key lesson.

Key Lesson 15: Social Context

Goals

This session helps students to recognize how people’s behavior changes depending on social context. The improvisation games help them to communicate different relationship qualities onstage. That is, students learn how to show the relationship using actions and body language rather than telling the audience the relationship with dialogue (e.g. “Hi, friend/sister/Dad!”) In this process, they learn to recognize nonverbal cues based on relationship. They explore different behavior based on relational and social context.

Warm-Up: Any (3-5 minutes)

At this point, the students know several warm-up games. Giving choice helps them to take ownership and honors the expertise they have accumulated over this course. Let them choose a game, and just keep it to a few minutes.

Workshop

Content Lesson (10-15 minutes). Deliver this content by using volunteers to set up “Complete the Image” as done in the previous key lesson. Only two people should be onstage while all others watch. Have them start in the traditional handshake. Ask, “Who are these people

to one another? What is their relationship?" Ask students to justify their responses, e.g., "Why do you say they are coworkers?"

Have a volunteer tap out one of the actors, instructing them to pose in a way that changes the relationship. Ask the students what this relationship could be; again, ask them to justify. Repeat this process with several scenes, and take your time. The goal is to help students identify the body language and actions that portray different relationships. If they are ever confused about a tableau and cannot pinpoint a relationship, allow it to remain ambiguous and move on to the next tableau.

Exercise: Image Alive (10-15 minutes).

Transition into playing "Complete the Image" and "Image Alive" with the students, just as in the last key lesson. Coach them to try to change the relationship with each pose change: who are your characters to one another? How do they feel about each other? How can you tell? When you say "image alive," remind them to use these details as a springboard for their scenes.

Processing. Were you and your partner on the same page about your relationships? Why or why not? Which poses communicated clear relationships? Were you able to use the relationships in your scenes? What else did you notice about relationships? The goal is to continue the conversation from the content lesson, helping the students to notice cues that indicate different relationships.

Exercise: Relationship Wheel (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 79-81).

Create two concentric circles of participants so that each person has a partner: circle A is smaller and toward the center of the room. Circle B is on the outside of circle A, and everyone in

circle B should be lined up with someone from circle A. (The guide cannot participate well in this game, so if there is an odd number, designate a specific spot in one circle as the "observer" spot.) This game occurs in rounds. For each round, the guide calls out a relationship and an activity. At first, the game is silent; the two people try to perform that activity as the people in that relationship. After a minute or two, the guide calls, "Speech!" and the actors can begin talking to one another, still focused on the relationship and activity. After another couple of minutes, the guide calls "freeze" and circle B all move one partner counterclockwise. Then, the guide calls out a new relationship and activity to begin a new round.

Some of Rohd's (1998, pp. 79-80) relationship suggestions include: "doctor/patient," "parent/child," "sibling," "teammates," "good friends," and "teacher/student." I like to include "lab partners" or similar, along with "friends-of-friends." I also recommend repeating the same relationships with coaching to find different qualities of relationship; for example, "If you last played 'siblings' as adversaries, try playing them as distant or very close." They will naturally have new experiences each time because they are changing partners every round.

Processing. What did you notice about different behaviors based on different contexts? Do you notice any patterns in how people tend to act in certain relationships? Why do people change their behavior in different social contexts? Again, the goal is to help students examine interpersonal relationships rather than reach specific conclusions. The "thesis" of this lesson is that it is natural to behave differently across contexts; some of that changed behavior is socially appropriate and feels fine, while some might feel like we are not being ourselves. We are trying to help students navigate the reality of social contexts.

It is also worth discussing where and when conflict arose. Did scenes automatically tend toward conflict? Was it more prevalent in some contexts than others?

Assignment

Students should observe how their behavior changes in different social contexts. For example, do they behave differently at home versus at school versus at sports practice? They should journal about what they notice and how they feel about it. Do they feel their changing behavior is socially appropriate? Does it feel "right?" Is there anything they would like to do differently?

Next Directions

If students enjoyed this work and were engaged, "Status" is a natural and fun extension of it. If they seem like they understand and were interested in conflict, move to the next unit. If any of the previously-mentioned issues came up, explore whichever supplementary lessons seem appropriate until they can focus on creating strong scenes and verbalize observations about interpersonal interactions.

Key Lesson 16: Hero, Villain, and Victim

Goals

This lesson uses some common conflict roles, framed as archetypes to connect back to the "Identity" lesson, to introduce the conflict unit. These roles were suggested by Gary Harper in his 2004 book *The Joy of Conflict Resolution* as a framework for examining conflict; Harper suggests that awareness of these roles (or "the drama triangle" as he calls them on p. 4) can help to move out of these mindsets and into a more productive mindset for conflict resolution. Here, we introduce these roles to ground students in one theory of conflict resolution. Note that this is not a workshop on *escaping* the drama triangle; the goal is to recognize and experiment with it.

Warm-Up: Try That on for Size (5-10 minutes)

Source: Unknown; learned in OutRegis! at Regis University under the name "Put That in Your Pipe and Smoke It"

The group stands in a circle. One member of the group initiates a movement, and everyone tries to copy the movement as closely as possible. The initiator offers an explanation of what they think the movement resembles, turns to their right, and says, "Try that on for size." Then, the person to their right must offer a different explanation and repeat the speech act. It sounds like this:

"I'm cleaning a window. Try that on for size!"

"I'm wiping someone's face. Try that on for size!"

"I'm painting a giant portrait of an ant. Try that on for size!"

This continues until every person in the circle has taken a turn. The idea is for everyone to spontaneously come up with something and avoid getting "hung up" on their first idea, which will almost certainly be "taken" at some point.

Workshop

Content Lesson & Exercise (10 minutes). Source: Original, adapted from a workshop led by Sara Knickerbocker.

The group stands in a circle. Explain that we have roles we often play during conflict—conflict archetypes, perhaps. We're going to experiment with what these roles look and feel like. Explain that you are going to call out a word, and the group has five seconds to get into a pose demonstrating that word.

Call, “Hero! Five, four, three, two, one… Freeze.” Everyone in the group should strike some pose that represents “hero” to them. Ask everyone to hold their poses while having a brief conversation. They are welcome to move their heads to look at others’ poses. Ask: How does this feel in your body? What images appear in several people’s poses? You are likely to hear that the hero pose feels expansive, good, confident, and big. Help them to make connections between how their bodies feel and their emotions. Let the group relax.

Repeat this process with “victim” and “villain.” Victim poses tend to be small, sad, low-energy, and protected. On the other hand, villain poses tend to be cartoonish, varied, and often fun.

Processing. Ask what any of those roles might look like in conflict. What does it look or feel like to be playing the hero, for example? The victim? Villain is usually difficult; we tend to cast *other* people as the villains, but not ourselves. In any case, this conflict story often makes it hard for us to leave conflict. Leave this conversation on the surface level; as long as they have a basic understanding of these archetypes, move to the next exercise.

Exercise: Sculpting, Hero/Villain/Victim Variation (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd via Living Stage (1998; pp. 62-65).

The class splits into groups of three or four. Introduce the tool of “sculpting,” in which some group members are “clay” and other group members are “sculptors.” “Clay’s” job is to be relaxed and hold the poses while “sculptors” move the clay’s body to form shapes. This is a silent process, where all communication happens nonverbally. The sculptor can either physically touch and move the clay or can demonstrate the pose for the clay to copy. (The latter is the best

way to adjust facial expressions.) Prompt all groups to have a quick conversation about consent and how they would like to communicate.

To proceed, introduce the idea that sculptures do not need to be literal; they can be abstract and expressionistic. To warm up, have each group label their participants A, B, C, and D if needed. Say, "A, you sculpt first. All other players are clay. Sculpt 'heroes.'" Give them a minute or two. Let them look at one another's sculptures briefly, then continue. Let B sculpt victims and C sculpt villains; if there are groups of four, add "conflict" so that D gets a chance. Move through these quickly; this is a warmup.

Then, move into group sculptures. Have A sculpt "hero/victim." This time, let all the A's wander the room looking at each sculpture and calling out what they notice. Give each sculpture a brief chance to relax and look at the others, so all can see what hero/victim might look like. Repeat with new sculptors and the prompts "victim/villain" and "hero/villain." In the latter, students often note that it can be difficult to tell who is the hero and who is the villain. In this process, there are no wrong answers; sculptures can be goofy and fantastical or grounded and realistic as long as they come from the prompt.

Finally, form a circle. Three volunteers get in the middle. Tell them to sculpt any variation of "hero/villain/victim" in silence. The three form a sculpture however they wish over the next five seconds, and the group observes. Feel free to ask if anyone has any thoughts about the image, or to just let them take it in. Tell the circle that they may re-sculpt the image however they wish. Process each re-sculpting. Did it change the roles and dynamics? Are the participants still "in the drama triangle?"

If there is time, let a new sculpture form in the center, still focused on "hero/villain/victim." Hold your hand over each player's head in turn, asking, "What is this person thinking?" After the circle has offered a thought for each player, invite re-sculpting and repeat the process. This helps students to connect perspective-taking with these conflict archetypes.

Processing. Most of the processing happens during the process. However, it is worth having a closing conversation about whether students see these roles in their lives. Let them know that there is not one clear way out of the "drama triangle," but that there are many possible ways. We'll explore these possibilities over the next few weeks. In the meantime, however, the first line of defense is *awareness;* recognizing that one is in the triangle is the first step to escaping.

Playtime: Freeze Tag (5 minutes)

Source: Unknown; popular improv game

This is a natural segueway from the final stage of "Sculpting." The group stands in a circle, and two volunteers get in the center and start a scene. At any time, any member of the circle can call, "Freeze." If they do, the players freeze in their current positions. The person who called "freeze" tags one of the players and takes on the same pose. They then start a brand new scene, using their current pose as a starting point.

Evaluation. I don't like to evaluate this game too much, especially since it is ongoing. The guide should feel free to side-coach, reminding players to accept offers ("yes, and…") and use physicality rather than getting stuck talking.

Assignment

Students should choose a conflict, either from real life or from a piece of media. They should write or draw a short examination of the conflict through the lens of the drama triangle. Are any of the participants playing the role of hero, villain, or victim? Are they casting the other participants as certain roles?

Next Directions

This tends to be a fun, relatively easygoing introduction to conflict. If students are engaged and involved, proceed directly to "Exploring Conflict", and save the supplemental lessons for later. However, if the guide senses that strong emotions are starting to come up, move to "Managing Anger and Anxiety." "Managing Differences" might also make sense if students were quick to villainize, point fingers, or relate this work to a current ongoing conflict in the classroom.

Key Lesson 17: Exploring Conflict

Goals

This lesson helps students make their own observations about actions that escalate and deescalate conflict. It is intentionally placed before the "Strategies" lesson to let students invent as many conflict resolution strategies on their own as possible. In this lesson, use the language of hero, villain, and victim as a springboard for wider conversation. Instead of teaching scripts for conflict resolution, we are training students to recognize and evaluate conflicts, reflecting on how their choices are affecting it. In addition, this lesson lets the guide observe for emotional regulation and recognition of social cues to see which supplementary lessons the students need.

Warm-Up: Any Trust Game (5 minutes)

At this point, the group has learned several trust games: Blind (No Contact), Falling, Storytelling, and Storytelling on a Timeline all appear in key lessons, while they may have encountered Find Your Mother Like a Little Penguin, Trust Circle, or Trust Falls in supplementary lessons. Choose one they enjoyed and have been successful in, so they start this lesson in an upbeat mood and feeling bonded.

Workshop

Content Lesson (2-5 minutes). Explain that we are going to play some games today. As we do so, they have a job: to watch for what makes conflict worse, and what makes it better. Their goal is not to intentionally exacerbate or fix the conflicts between their characters, only to notice. They can also notice when characters end up in the drama triangle.

It is a good idea to recognize that, while this work feels playful and "fine" to most, it can feel pretty intense for some people. By now, most guides will know if their group contains people who might get overstimulated in this environment. If this is the case, review body scans and asking what "warning signs" often look like in the body; racing hearts, hot faces, sweaty or tingly palms, and tight chests/throats are common ones. Consider setting up a "time out" signal that anyone can use to pause their scene for a moment. Your goal isn't to scare the students, but to let them know that they have an "out" if they need it. This is a valuable real tool in conflicts, so this introduction is a subtle way to see if they need further work on managing emotions that arise in conflict.

Exercise: Russel's Soup (15-20 minutes).

Play this game as outlined in Key Lesson 14. If the group seems ready, allow them to choose both their own relationship and their own intentions. If not, continue to use the intention cards. Remind them that their goal is to create and sustain conflict driven by strong choices; the non-instigating character *cannot* give in to the other character's ask and must have good reasons for not doing so. Play this game two or three times. After each round, have the players go over the feedback questions and process as a group. The guide should observe during this game.

Processing. What actions made the conflict worse (escalated)? Did anything seem to smooth it out (deescalate)? Did any characters fall into the hero/villain/victim story? What else did you notice about your conflicts? Let the students explore their conflicts. If they get stuck, the guide could point out interesting observations: "Kelly, I heard your character say Devon's character 'always does this.' How did Devon's character react?" Help them to articulate their observations about conflict.

The students might make many different observations with the help of the guide facilitating the conversation. Actions such as blaming, saying "you," accusing, exaggerating, and yelling tend to escalate the conflict. They are unlikely to identify de-escalating tactics in this game, but they might notice that listening to one another, expressing feelings, and trying to cooperate often do so.

Exercise: Line Improvs (20-30 minutes). Source: adapted from Rohd (1998; pp. 86-89).

The group forms two lines facing one another; everyone should have a partner, who stands a few feet away from them. The guide cannot play, so an odd student out should observe. (This is a good way to give someone who is overstimulated a break.) The guide will provide the pair with a

relationship and conflicting intentions, which is often what conflict is about. The students' goal is the same as usual: they should work to take their character's point of view, make strong choices, keep the stakes high, and notice what happens. In this game, however, there is no environment work; the conflict is face-to-face.

Rohd offers many compelling scenarios; however, in my experience, their effectiveness depends on the community. While it is important for students to practice perspective-taking, it is possible for situations to be too far afield to be helpful for this conflict-focused work. If the scenarios are not ones they have encountered, students are likely to overshoot empathy and instead lose focus; worse, they try to act as they imagine high school or college students act as informed by their media. It is best to have relatable scenarios, ideally written based on classroom observations and common community issues. Every scenario gives a strong conflict outline but requires students to fill in the details with their own choices. The first of the below examples is taken from Rohd, and I wrote the others based on my classroom community. Feel free to use them or create your own.

- Parent/child: The child is an adolescent who wants to go to some sort of protest or rally tonight because it is important to them, and the parent really does not want them to.
- Close friends: One friend feels like the other has been pushing them away or walling them off from the friendship. The other friend is uncomfortable with choices the first friend has been making.
- Siblings: The younger sibling expects to be invited to an event the older sibling is throwing; the older sibling is asking the younger sibling to make themselves scarce.

- Parent/child: The parent is approaching their adolescent child to explain that they are divorcing the other parent; they are hoping to have the child understand and accept this change. The child wants their parents to make a different decision.
- Siblings: Following from the above scenario, the siblings' parents are divorcing and each child is taking one parent's "side."
- Friends: The friends had originally planned to go to the same high school together; this desire had greatly influenced their decision. One friend approaches the other to tell them that they have changed their mind and want to attend a program at a local high school.
- Teacher/student: The student believes that a teacher has handled a situation unfairly and is confronting them about it. The teacher believes they did what was best for the class.
- Classmates: The two classmates have held a specific long-term position together for several weeks, e.g. being co-managers of a class business. One person feels they have been doing all the work and, feeling burnt out, approaches the other to quit. The other person does not think they can do this job alone and wants the first classmate to stay.

For each scene, read out the scenario. You can assign the roles or let the students spontaneously take them on. Let the conflict build for several minutes, observing for real or simulated emotional reactions. Laughter and grins are common even in these serious scenes; they are a way to manage vulnerability and should not be addressed as long as the players are engaged. Students should have several minutes to let the conflict build and make strong choices; end scenes when they have reached an apex and are stuck, or when a student seems to need a break. After each scene, have the pairs process the feedback questions. Then, have one line rotate so that everyone has a new partner and proceed to the next scene. Leave several minutes at the end for processing.

Processing. What happened during the conflicts? What actions made them worse or better? Do you feel like your characters ended up in the triangle? Did any attempt to get out of it? Conflict is often the result of conflicting intentions (Rohd, 1998); were there any cases where that seemed true?

Though there is no playtime at the end of this workshop, take care to do a cool-down with fidelity. Help the students return their bodies to resting states.

Assignment

Within 24 hours of the lesson, students should write a reflection listing everything they can remember. Specifically, they should focus on how actions affect conflict. Then, they should observe themselves and others in conflict over the next few days, taking notes on which actions they notice themselves and others taking and the results.

Next Directions

This lesson likely highlighted which supplementary lessons the students need. If there was strong emotional activation, prioritize "Managing Anger & Anxiety" as the next lesson. If students struggled with perspective-taking or often ended up in scenes where characters stonewalled or did not listen to one another, move to "Managing Differences." If the guide got the impression that students struggle with reading social cues regarding conflict, move to "Approach/Avoid." That same lesson is also helpful as a follow-up emotional regulation lesson or for managing conflict spirals and stonewalling. If students were very involved in this lesson and seem hungry for more detailed content, try "Conflict Styles" next.

It is possible to move to the next key lesson if the students seem ready. However, think carefully before doing so. The supplementary lessons offer them more opportunities to learn to

manage conflict for themselves, and we don't want to rob them of the possibility of discovering strategies for themselves. Only move directly to "Strategies" if the group was already coming up with solid conflict-resolution strategies in this lesson.

Key Lesson 18: Strategies

Goals

In the final key lesson, students explore many conflict resolution strategies. Again, the goal is not to provide students with a conflict resolution "script" that will not translate to the complexities of daily life. Instead, the goal is to provide a few strategies and allow the students to practice them, noticing what they do to their bodies and experiences.

Warm-Up: Falling (3-5 minutes)

Workshop

Content Lesson (10-15 minutes). There is no one way to resolve conflict, but there are several strategies we can try. Ask if anyone in the group can think of any, and put good suggestions on the board. Students might pull from their previous lessons or from their own experiences.

If students have not brought up the following strategies, add them to the list while explaining:

- Body awareness: Noticing one's body states and acknowledging one's emotions is important. Often, conflict gets nasty because we don't realize how angry or upset we are; we don't realize what we need. Ask yourself, "How do I feel? What do I need?" Taking a moment to notice the warning signs—and taking a break if needed—can de-escalate conflict.

- Using “I” statements: This means starting sentences with “I” and explaining how one feels. These sound like, “I feel sad that you said that,” or “I wish you would not say that.” (The opposite is saying something like, “You made me upset,” or, “You shouldn’t have said that.”) When we use “I” statements, we are sharing our own wants and feelings without putting anything on the other person. A great template to use is, “I feel X, and I want Y.” Point out that, “I feel like you…” is sneaky; it sounds like an “I” statement, but it’s often an accusation.
- Asking questions: When we feel stuck in a situation, asking the other person questions is a good way to proceed. It can help us to gain clarity of their perspective and calm down.
- Problem solving: Ask, “What can we do to solve this problem?” This shifts the focus from the conflict to collaborating on a solution.

Of course, there are many more effective conflict resolution strategies. These are included here because they are quick to teach and flexible in application. Feel free to add more. It might also help to give students a handout with more detailed explanations to take home.

Exercise: Variation on Line Improvs (20-30 minutes).

Play this game with the same basic format as introduced in Key Lesson 17. However, instruct the students to let the conflict escalate for a moment. Once they have reached a certain point, call “Freeze—strategy.” This is a cue for students to glance over the strategies and mentally choose one to try. Let the conflict play out for a few more minutes, then move on to the next round. Encourage students to experiment with strategies. Leave several minutes for processing.

Processing. Which strategies did you try? What happened when you tried that one? Why do you think that did/did not work? Does the strategy's effectiveness depend on the situation? Which ones do you think sound useful? Did you come up with any more strategies in these scenes?

Again, the goal is to let the students explore. These strategies are not immutable and eternal; all are tools to have in one's toolbox.

Assignment

Students should review these strategies daily. Next time they are in a conflict—even a small one—they should choose one of these strategies to try. Then, they should journal about what happens and how it goes.

Next Directions

From here, any supplementary lesson in this unit can be an effective next step; all will serve the purpose of practicing conflict resolution strategies. "Strategies Practice" is a natural next step for continuing this work, and "Conflict Styles" will elaborate on it. For more foundational practice, proceed to "Approach/Avoid," "Managing Anger & Anxiety," or "Managing Differences." If students struggled to know what to do with the "problem solving" strategy, proceed to the next lesson of the same name.

Explore this unit for as long as it is helpful. The goal is to help students to practice these strategies and develop their procedural records, so there is no such thing as too much conflict resolution practice. Once the guide has proceeded as far as possible, it might make sense to proceed to the final unit: Community. There, one can apply the workshops thus learned to examine an issue in the community.

APPENDIX C: Tables

Below are two tables per unit: one to communicate which improvisation and SEL skills are covered for each lesson, and another to provide an overview of activities within each lesson. Numbered lessons indicate key lessons, while non-numbered lessons are supplemental lessons. Finally, Table 11 outlines small, supplemental lessons that can be given when the need arises.

Table 1

Skills Addressed by Lesson for Unit 1: Foundations of Improvisation

Lesson	Improvisation skills	SEL skills
1: Ensemble	ensemble	cooperation; eye contact; body awareness; social flexibility
2: Communication	ensemble; group mind	cooperation; trust; eye contact; active listening
3: Yes, And…	Yes, And	active listening; social flexibility; responding with relevance
Active Listening	active listening; being present with a scene partner	active listening
Group Mind	connecting the whole group into one group mind	cooperation; eye contact; social flexibility
Mindful Play	being careful and focused as we play	being careful and focused as we play
Responding with Relevance	further "yes, and…" practice	responding with relevant comments in social situations
Storytelling	establishing who, what, & where quickly	active listening; social flexibility; responding with relevance

Table 2

Supplemental Lesson Outlines for Unit 1: Foundations of Improvisation

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Active Listening	Circle Dash	Signs that one is actively listening	Storyline; Blind (No Contact--vocal variation) (Rohd); Storytelling (Rohd)	Expert or Oracle; either way, put audience "onstage" as well.	Practice active listening in one context (class, etc.) daily and journal about progress.
Group Mind	Circle Dash; Scream-ing Toes	What does it look like for the whole group to work together? How can we use eye contact to communicate? (Do not force eye contact if it is uncomfortable; let them explore it.)	Counting; High Jump (Bogart & Landau); Jog to Center	Tableau	Twice before the next lesson, get together with a few other members of the class and play "counting" or "high jump" for several minutes.
Mindful Play	Circle Dash	We are doing playful work in this class. What does it mean to play mindfully? What does it mean to work and play?	Blind Handshakes (Rohd); Cover the Space variations (Rohd)	Tableau with addition-al challen-ges	Choose something that's not fun to focus on and try to give it your full attention. Journal about what it was like.

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Responding with Relevance	Zip Zap Zop	In both improv and conversations, it helps to respond to someone's statement with something relevant. It shows that we care and are willing to cooperate. What does that look like?	Three Line Scene (learned from Madcap Theater) with coaching on adding relevant information	Storyline	During one conversation per day, focus on responding with something directly relevant or even a question. Journal about the experience.
Storytelling	Zip Zap Zop	Who: relationship; What: activity; Where: location. These are important elements to establish early in in improv games. How can we establish them?	3-Line Scene with coaching	Freeze Tag	Pair up with another member of the class. Meet up twice this week to play 3-Line Scene.

Table 3

Skills Addressed by Lesson for Unit 2: Body, Senses, & Environment

Lesson	Improvisation skills	SEL skills
4: Sensations	sensory awareness; showing over telling	body awareness; managing discomfort; mindfulness
5: Mirrors	mirroring; observation	observation (specifically of other people); mirroring as nonverbal cue; self- and other-awareness
6: Building Environment	applying pantomime skills and the circle of offers to creating environments	collaboration; trust; responding with relevance; social flexibility; body awareness
7: Collaborating In Environments	transitioning from "faking" environments to fully participating in them	collaboration; responding with relevance; trust; social flexibility; focus; managing impulses; body awareness
Body Awareness	moving one's body safely around others	body awareness, especially internal emotional cues
Bodies in Space	moving around/with other players; demonstrating environmental cues with entire body; soft focus	body awareness; self- and other-awareness; spatial relationships; focus; teamwork
Further Mirror Practice	continuing mirror work	eye contact; observation; social flexibility; body awareness
Managing Discomfort	getting more comfortable onstage	emotional regulation, especially discomfort
Pantomime	pantomiming objects; doing instead of telling	communicating so that one can be understood; perspective-taking
Tableau Work: Shape & Spatial Relationships	using shape & spatial relationship to communicate mood	body awareness; assigning mood; space between people

Table 4

Supplemental Lesson Outlines for Unit 2: Body, Sense, & Environment

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Body Awareness	Yosemite paired with body scans	Using the mindfulness technique of body scanning to notice changes to emotional and physical state	Tilt (Rohd) (variation: half the group participates while the other half observes); Cover the Space (Rohd) with tempo variations	Machine (Rohd/ Spolin)	While doing a physical activity (e.g., P.E., sports practice, piano lesson), pay close attention to how the body moves and feels. Journal.
Bodies in Space	Who Started the Motion? (Spolin)	Soft focus (via Bogart & Landau): during cover the space variation, encourage students to use peripheral vision to watch one another.	Tilt (Rohd); Cover the Space group mind variation (all stop/start at the same time); Space Walks variation (adapted from Spolin)	Any game learned to this point	Pay attention to distance and spatial relationships. Journal about what you notice when people move close together or far apart.
Further Mirror Practice	Jog to Center; Tilt (Rohd)	Side coach and use body scans throughout to help students build procedural awareness.	High Jump (Bogart & Landau); Who Is The Mirror (Spolin)	Expert	Same as "Mirrors"

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Managing Discom-fort	Circle Dash (Rohd)	A good way to manage discomfort is to notice it, name it, and accept it. Then, ask what you need. We'll practice this throughout the games we play today.	Jog to Center; Mirror (Spolin & Rohd); Tug of War (Spolin) with body scans and "what do you need" processing throughout	Expert with Hands	All week, notice when you feel uncomfor-table. Use the technique we practiced to ask what you need.
Pantomime	Zip Zap Zop (focus on respond ing to energy bolt); Yose-mite	Pantomimes work best when one acts like they are performing the action rather than carving out little details in space; the clearest communication makes sense to the audience. How can you show them what the object is?	Tug-of-War (Spolin); Physicalizing an Object (Spolin); Space Shaping (Spolin); Transformati on of Objects (Spolin)	Expert with Hands	Daily practice: notice the weight, quality, shape of an object in your hand. Put it down and try to replicate that while pantomime-ing using it. Show a friend; see if they can tell what it is.
Tableau Work: Shape & Spatial Relation-ships	Yosemite	Shapes: linear, angular, curvy; Spatial Relationship: how shapes relate to one another	Tableau using shapes; Complete the Image (Boal via Rohd) focusing on spatial relationship	Tableau	Notice what body shapes and spatial relationships tend to communicat e around you. Journal about it.

Table 5

Skills Addressed by Lesson for Unit 3: Character

Lesson	Improvisation skills	SEL skills
8: Gibberish	Gibberish work; not relying on the content of speech to perform	Tone and vocalics; reading and displaying body language
9 & 10: Characters via Movement (2 Parts)	physicalizing characters	separating traits from feelings; reading & communicating with body language
11: Identity	creating characters through the lens of identity; avoiding stereotypes onstage	noticing stereotypes; identity; empathy; respecting differences
12: Perspective	learning to inhabit a character and build a full, real perspective	point of view/perspective-taking; empathy
Emotion	portraying emotions in characters	recognizing and communicating emotions
Further Gibberish	continue Gibberish games and work	continue practicing reading body language and tone
Gesture	communicating via gesture and body language	learning to recognize and communicate with gestures
Physical Characteristics	portraying characters with physical characteristics	building empathy around physical characteristics of others; accepting one's own
Playing-At: An Advanced Character Workshop	creating detailed, complex characters	using our hopes about who we are to make decisions
Values	exploring character perspectives further	examining our values and how they influence our perspectives
Vocals & Tone	Communicating intention & relationship with tone	Reading tone & other vocal cues

Table 6

Supplemental Lesson Outlines for Unit 3: Character

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Emotion	Who Started the Motion? (Spolin)	Recognizing the nonverbal cues of different emotions.	Changing Emotion (adapted from Spolin); Emotion Contagion	Party Guests where all quirks are a dominant emotion	Observe the body cues that people use to display different emotions. Make a list or chart of what you notice.
Further Gibberish	Screaming Toes	N/A	Gibberish: The Where Game (Spolin); Gibberish Film Translation	Gibberish Poetry or Sales Pitch Translation	Practice talking in gibberish with other members of this class. How long can you carry on a conversation? What helps?
Gesture	Who Started the Motion? (Spolin)	How do we use gestures to communicate messages? About how we feel, what we need, what we want others to do? How about character quirks?	Practice making gestures in a circle for various messages, needs, and moods; Who Game: Body Attitudes (Spolin)	Party Guests	When you feel like you are not being understood, try using a gesture to communicate what you mean. Journal about it.

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Physical Characteristics	Creative Joint Play	What assumptions do we make about other people? How does your character feel when another character makes an assumption? Do physical characteristics say anything about us? Discuss body neutrality.	Art Gallery (Spolin); Nervous Habit or Tics (Spolin); How Old Am I? (Spolin)	Party Quirks	Think of a physical characteristic you have. Journal about how to notice it neutrally--how can you practice accepting it?
Playing-At: An Advanced Character Workshop	Falling (Rohd)	We often become who we are by pretending to be someone. That is, none of us feel comfortable in ourselves right away; we have to "play at" being someone to figure out who we are. This workshop is an exploration of how we do that.	Select an archetype card. Everyone finds their own place in the room and takes ten minutes to create a character, similar to Monologue Work. They stay in character for the rest of the workshop (about 30 minutes.) All characters interact at a dinner party or similar, considering why they are there and what they need from others.	N/A	Journal about this workshop experience. What was it like? Did the sustained character feel good? Bad? Weird? Would you want to be this kind of person?

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Values	Find Your Mother Like a Little Penguin (Rohd)	What are values? How do we form them? How do they influence our perspectives?	Values Clarification (Rohd); Scupting (Rohd)	Any game	Complete a values inventory and journal about your answers.
Vocals & Tone	Zip Zap Zop : change pitch, tempo, & dyna-mics; vocal warm-ups	Your voice is changing. How do we communicate with our voices?	Neutral Scripts played as different relationships (e.g. old friends, antagonists, etc.) & with different intentions	Gibberish Poetry Trans-lation or Film Trans-lation	Focus on your voice and others' voices over the next week. Make notes about what you notice.

Table 7

Skills Addressed by Lesson for Unit 4: Relationships & Scene Work

Lesson	Improvisation skills	SEL skills
13: Wants, Needs, & Stakes	setting up character relationships via wants, needs, & stakes	examining how perspectives affect relationships
14: Intentions & Impacts	Communicating relationship qualities onstage; scene work	differentiating between intentions and impacts; how choices affect relationships
15: Social Context	Communicating relationship qualities onstage; scene work	recognizing social context and appropriate behavior
Being Present	sustaining focus onstage; communicating presence and distance	mindfulness; examining how actions affect relationships
Boundaries	being aware of boundaries onstage; communicating boundaries	being aware of one's boundaries and others' boundaries; reading cues
Further Intentions	Helping bring intention to scenes as characters	perspective taking; examining motivation
Leaning in/out	sharing the stage with a fellow actor	social awareness; participation; taking risks
Scene Practice	practicing sustaining scenes	responding with relevance; staying present; focus; cooperation
Status	portraying status onstage (adapted from Keith Johnstone)	reading subtle body cues; exploring complex relationships

Table 8

Supplemental Lesson Outlines for Unit 4: Relationships & Scene Work

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Being Present	Tilt (Rohd)	What does it feel like for someone to be distant in an interaction? How about when someone is present? How can we be present in our relationships?	Preoccupation (Spolin); any Rohd game also used in this section with related processing	New Choice	Practice being fully present in everyday conversa-tions, especially the hard ones. Journal about what it's like.
Boundaries	Circle Dash (Rohd)	What are boundaries? How do we set and respect them? How can we tell someone when we are uncomfortable?	Trust Circle (via Rohd); Trust Falls (via Rohd); Entrance (Rohd)	Machine	Talk to an adult in your life about a time they had to set a boundary. Journal about the conversation.
Further Intentions	Story-telling (Rohd) with a related prompt	Review Identity & Perspective lessons. Ask how these affect relationships.	Russel's Soup (Rohd)	Freeze Tag	Choose an intention at the beginning of social interactions throughout the week. Notice how your intentions affect the interaction. Journal.

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Leaning in/out	Minefield (Rohd)	We sometimes engage so much that other people don't have a chance to participate, or we don't engage at all. Let's practice evening out our participation so everyone gets a chance to shine.	Give & Take (Spolin); Storyline with no director	Freeze Tag with a focus on being mindful	Notice how much you tend to "lean in" and "lean out" in everyday life. Play with doing the opposite to see how it feels. Journal.
Scene Practice	Three Line Scene	Establish who (a relationship), what (an activity), and where (a location) early on. Use "Yes, And…" and physicality to continue the scene and keep it interesting.	Line/Location/ Theme (Rohd)	Freeze Tag	Pair up with someone from this group. Play any improv game with scenes together to practice twice this week.
Status	Any	Status is a perceived type of relationship between people. It is neutral and depends on context. Statuses serve purposes. (See Johnstone.)	Complete the Image, analyzing status symbols (Boal via Rohd); Status Number Game (Angela Mercier)	Party Guests with status "quirks"	Pair up with someone from this group. Play any improv game, but decide if you are going to match status, stay higher, or stay lower.

Table 9

Skills Addressed by Lesson for Unit 5: Conflict Resolution

Lesson	Improvisation skills	SEL skills
16: Hero/Villain/Victim	Using archetypes to explore possible roles in scene conflict. Note: archetypes and sculpting are useful prerequisites.	Exploring what common conflict roles feel like in the body and look like in body language; exploring how to escape conflict roles
17: Exploring Conflict	portraying conflict with believable characters	exploring what actions escalate or deescalate conflict
18: Strategies	problem solving conflict between characters	exploring conflict resolution strategies
Approach/Avoid	playing with character intentions in onstage conflict	noticing how pushing in or pulling away affects a conflict; reading body language
Conflict Styles	adding conflict styles to characters to create believable scenes	exploring conflict styles and how they affect conflict
Managing Anger & Anxiety	managing big feelings onstage	recognizing and managing the emotions of anger and anxiety
Managing Differences	listening	active listening; handling differences
Problem Solving	solving the problem of a scene so it feels satisfying	focusing on the problem rather than the person
Strategies Practice	see "Strategies"	see "Strategies"

Table 10

Supplemental Lesson Outlines for Unit 5: Conflict Resolution

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Approach/ Avoid	Tug-of-War (Spolin); Circle Dash (Rohd)	Have you ever been in a conflict where someone kept following you when you were done talking? Or the opposite? How did that feel? How do we know when it is time to approach or give a break? How can you recognize and communicate where you are?	Exit & Entrance (Rohd) with processing focusing on pushing vs. avoiding	The Serious Game	Make a chart with two columns. Write down the body language you notice people use when they don't want to be approached vs. avoided.
Conflict Styles	Minefield (Rohd)	Researchers have found different ways that we handle conflict. Some of us avoid; accommodate; compete; compromise; or collaborate. What do each of those look like?	Relationship Wheel (Rohd) variation: assign conflict styles. Have students rotate styles and explore how they feel.	The Serious Game	Take a conflict style assessment. Do you think it is accurate? Do you want to change your conflict style?
Managing Anger & Anxiety	Zip Zap Zop; Yose-mite	What our bodies do when we feel these emotions? Anxiety usually means we need self-care, like deep breathing or comfort. Anger usually means we need something to change or to let it out (but not in a way that scares/upsets people.)	Conflict Exercise (Spolin) with sensation processing; Entrance/Exit (Rohd) with similar	The Serious Game	Look up strategies for managing either of these emotions. Write down strategies that seem helpful; share them with the group next week.

Lesson	Warmup	Content & Processing	Games & Exercises	Playtime	Assignment
Managing Differen-ces	Minefield (Rohd)	What is the difference between listening and hearing? How can we listen to others? What do we do when we have different needs and ideas?	Values Clarification (Rohd); Entrance/Exit (Rohd) with related processing	Any scene game	This week, practice listening openly to other people as much as you can. Breathe if you find it difficult. Journal.
Problem Solving	Try That on For Size	One way to handle conflict is to focus on solving the problem; whenever the conversation veers away, we bring it back to that. We solve the problem by discussing the cause and brainstorming solutions. Let's practice.	Russel's Soup (Rohd) variation: let the conflict escalate, then clap and announce that it's time to problem solve. Process.	The Serious Game	Next time you find yourself in a conflict, try to redirect the conversation to solving the problem. Journal about how it goes.
Strategies Practice	Screaming Toes	Review the strategies from "Strategies." Continue to experiment with them in the games.	Hidden Conflict (Spolin); The Serious Game with strategies partway through	Any scene game	Look up conflict resolution strategies and write down any that seem helpful. Share them with the group. Try one if you get a chance.

Table 11

Supplemental Micro-lessons

Lesson	When to introduce	Questions to ask	Solutions, pointers, etc.
Audience	First audience game; revisit as needed	What does it look like to listen with your whole body? What do you want the audience to do when you're onstage?	Whole-body listening. Empathize with actors.
Being Clever	If students are trying to find ways around solving the problem presented in an improv game rather than attempting to solve it.	What do you think the problem of this improv game is?	Help them understand what the specific purpose of that game is and encourage them to work with the challenge of the limitations.
Buy-In	If one or more students resist participation because they do not see the value in these activities.	Why do you think we are doing these lessons like this? How is this different from sitting at a desk to learn social emotional skills? What would help you to feel like you're getting something out of this?	Note that this can usually be prevented by working through Unit 1 with fidelity and keeping scenarios relatable. Make agreements with students to get started or to try each activity once. Some students feel reassured after seeing the scientific backing to this work, or if the guide acknowledges that it feels silly but is valuable.
Emotional Safety	If students seem afraid to be vulnerable, can be heard mocking or gossiping about what others have done in workshops, etc.	What do you need to feel like you can be open and safe in this space?	Make agreements about not telling stories about others without permission, how to word feedback, etc.

Lesson	When to introduce	Questions to ask	Solutions, pointers, etc.
Evaluation	When students are struggling to self-reflect during evaluation; revisit as needed	Why do we reflect on how we did? What do you think helpful feedback looks like?	Focus on what works and what does not work, rather than "good" or "bad."
Inappro-priate Laughter	If students are either struggling with uncontrollable laughter in non-appropriate situations or if they appear to be laughing to avoid engagement with activities.	Why do we laugh? Do you notice that we laugh when we are uncomfortable? Why is that?	Treat the laughter as an experience passing through the body. Let it come while taking deep breaths. Continue working through the activity with a smile and giggles. Focus on full engagement.
Managing Anxiety & Stage Fright (basic)	If students are nervous about going onstage or the evaluation process; if students are fidgeting and pausing for long periods of time onstage. (Visibly nervous but willing to participate.)	Where do you feel anxiety in your body? How can we support one another when we have stage fright?	Make agreements as a group such as: not to pressure one another; to take as much time as needed and be patient while others do so; support one another; work non judgmentally; and not tell stories about other people without permission.

Lesson	When to introduce	Questions to ask	Solutions, pointers, etc.
Managing Anxiety & Stage Fright (severe)	If a student is unwilling to participate because they are nervous about what is going to happen.	One-on-one conversation: What do you think is going to happen? Where do you feel anxiety in your body? How do you manage it in other situations?	With the student, agree to small steps. In early stages, they might be observers and help with the evaluation process. Then, they can graduate to pair games with no audience before trying stage games. Try to involve them in whole-group games at every step. Some students also feel better if they can see the lesson ahead of time and know what is going to happen.
Physical Safety	If students are at risk of harming themselves or others with their bodies.	Do you see objects in this space that could hurt you?	Make agreements about respecting our bodies, others' bodies, and the environment. If a student is out of physical control, ask them to take a few deep breaths on the sideline and return when their body is calm.
Silliness	When students engage in wild, overly silly behavior that does not fit the activity at hand (to the point where they are not following the guidelines and/or are disrupting others).	What do you think the purpose of this game is? Is that something you have seen happen? What are our norms?	As facilitator, make sure that provided situations are relatable to the students and that all foundational skills are present; this often happens when students do not feel grounded and/or they don't have the skills to engage with the current game. As a group, establish safety norms and obtain buy-in. Gently remind one another of the problem and the prompt.