

Improvised Lessons: Collaborative discussion in the constructivist classroom

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Effective classroom discussion is improvisational, because its effectiveness derives from the fact that it is not scripted. Instead, the flow of the class is unpredictable, and emerges from the actions of both teachers and students. In this article, I apply principles from training classes for improvisational actors to provide practical suggestions for teachers. To identify the improvisation community's own views on creative collaboration, I draw on recent observations of rehearsals, performances, and improvisation training classes, and interviews with actors and directors. I conclude that teachers could become more effective discussion leaders by becoming aware of improvisational acting techniques, and I make a case for instructing teachers in improvisational exercises.

Introduction

After decades of educational research, we know that discussion offers unique benefits for certain types of learning. In effective constructivist discussion, the topic and the flow of the class emerge from teacher and student together; it is unpredictable where it will go. Social constructivists have found that the unpredictability of multiple competing voices is what makes discussion a uniquely effective teaching tool (Bearison, Magzamen, & Filardo, 1986; Cobb, 1995; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 1980). But this is also what makes it so stressful for teachers, because the natural response to classroom anxiety is to impose even more structure on the class. Studies of everyday conversation have revealed that ambiguity is a source of anxiety, and participants act to reduce it as soon as possible. Speakers generally want to define an interaction as quickly as possible, narrowing the range of possible outcomes, and they often use ritual sequences to do so (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Collins, 1981; Giddens, 1984; Goffman, 1959). Thus, many teachers continue to use interactional sequences and strategies that keep them in control of the

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flow of dialog, such as the infamous Initiation–Response–Evaluation (IRE) sequence (Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). One of the most difficult skills for teachers to acquire is how to break out of these routines and lead open discussion, where the students partially guide the direction of the class.

In this article, I compare constructivist teaching with improvisational theater performance. Constructivist teaching is fundamentally improvisational, because if the classroom is scripted and overly directed by the teacher, the students cannot co-construct their own knowledge (Baker-Sennett & Matusov, 1997; Borko & Livingston, 1989; Erickson, 1982; Rogoff, 1990; Sawyer, 1997). Educational research on collaborating groups has begun to emphasize the features that they have in common with improvising groups: their interactional dynamics, their give-and-take, and the fact that properties of the group emerge from individual actions and interactions. Several researchers have noted that many classroom interactions balance structure and script with flexibility and improvisation (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Erickson, 1982; Gershon, 2002; Mehan, 1979).

Example 1, from an introductory lesson on functions (Lampert, Rittenhouse, & Crumbaugh, 1996), is an example of improvisational teaching. Lampert is the teacher in a whole-class discussion with her fifth-grade mathematics class. The discussion in Example 1 occurred after small-group work. Several of the small groups had found the following problem particularly hard: given four sets of number pairs, what is the rule to get from the first number to the second? The number pairs were 8–4, 4–2, 2–1, and 0–0.

Example 1. Whole-class discussion. Ellie is the first student to speak after the teacher opens discussion.

- 1 Ellie: Um, well, there were a whole bunch of—a whole bunch of rules you could use, use, um, divided by two—And you could do, um, minus one-half.
- 2 Lampert: And eight minus a half is?
- 3 Ellie: Four
[In response to this answer, audible gasps can be heard from the class, and several other students tried to enter the conversation.]
- 4 Lampert: You think that would be four. What does somebody else think? I, I started raising a question because a number of people have a different idea about that. So let's hear what your different ideas are and see if you can take Ellie's position into consideration and try to let her know what your position is. Enoyat?
- 5 Enoyat: Well, see, I agree with Ellie because you can have eight minus one half and that's the same as eight divided by two or eight minus four.
- 6 Lampert: Eight divided by two is four, eight minus four is four? Okay, so Enoyat thinks he can do all of those things to eight and get four. Okay? Charlotte?
- 7 Charlotte: Um, I think eight minus one half is seven and a half because—
- 8 Lampert: Why?
- 9 Charlotte: Um, one half's a fraction and it's a half of one whole and so

when you subtract you aren't even subtracting one whole number so you can't get even a smaller number that's more than one whole. But I see what Ellie's doing, she's taking half the number she started with and getting the answer.

10 Lampert: So, you would say one half of eight? Is that what you mean?

[Lampert and Charlotte alternate for three turns; then, Lampert checks in with Ellie, who again repeats her original answer; then Lampert calls on Shakroukh.]

11 Shakroukh: I would agree with Ellie if she had added something else to her explanation, if she had said one-half of the amount that you have to divide by two.

12 Lampert: Okay. You guys are on to something really important about fractions, which is that a fraction is a fraction of something. And we have to have some kind of agreement here if it's a fraction of eight or if it's a fraction of a whole.

The students propose different answers throughout the discussion; the teacher does not evaluate any given answer, but instead facilitates a collaborative improvisation among the students, with the goal of guiding them toward the social construction of their own knowledge. In fact, she has guided them to learning that was not in her lesson plan, which was simply to ask them to come with the “divide by two” rule—in addition, the students have begun to learn about variables, and have learned a fundamental insight about fractions that will help them when they begin to multiply by fractions.

Experienced teachers like Lampert are effective improvisers (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Nilssen, Gudmundsdottir, & Wangsmo-Cappelen, 1995; Sassi & Goldsmith, 1995; Sassi, Morse, & Goldsmith, 1997). Improvisation is a conversational skill (Sawyer, 2001) and, like other social and interactional skills, it can be taught. Several professional development programs in the United States have begun to use improvisational exercises with teachers: the Center for Artistry in Teaching in Washington, DC (www.artistryinteaching.org); Academic Play in New Jersey (www.academicplay.com); and *Whose Lesson Plan is it Anyway?* in Massachusetts (Kuhr, 2003). For example, the Center for Artistry in Teaching runs a summer workshop in Washington, DC that is heavily based on improvisational exercises such as verbal spontaneity games, role playing, and physical movement (Kuhr, 2003). A program assessment found that teachers were more effective in the year following the Workshop; teachers shifted from a teacher-centered style to a more student-centered facilitative style, and both teachers and students asked more higher-order questions (Center for Artistry in Teaching, 2001).

In this article, I provide some practical suggestions for how teachers can be taught to engage in improvisational interaction with their students, with the goal of helping them to become better at implementing social constructivist methods in their classrooms. I draw on recent studies of how actors are taught to improvise on stage (Sawyer, 2003; Seham, 2001). Throughout the discussion I connect these rules to situations in classrooms, to provide concrete

examples of how these principles could be applied to educational settings. There are numerous books of technique for actors, and, in most major cities, one can find classes that teach the skills of group improvisation. If teaching is indeed improvisational, then teacher training programs could draw on this large body of existing expertise.

Yes, and ...

In every conversational turn, an actor should do two things: metaphorically say *yes*, by accepting the offer proposed in the prior turn, and add something new to the dramatic frame. A turn that accepts the prior offer without adding anything new does not move the drama forward, and it is better to keep the scene moving by introducing something new to the dramatic frame with every turn.

Example 2. 1 minute and 50 seconds into a 60-minute long form improvisation. By this time we have learned that Ronald and the Girl have each brought the Student some papers, and seem to be helping him study. We do not yet know the names of the Student and the Girl. A fourth actor enters (all examples are from Sawyer, 2003).

- 1 Actor 4: I brought you those files [Walks on, delivers line to Student with a teary voice, and walks off stage immediately.]
- 2 Student: I think Ray's more nervous about it than I am [To Ronald; names Actor 4's new character.]
- 3 Ronald: He's the most nervous of all of us! [Blurted out, he seems a little upset.]
- 4 Girl: Tell him, Ronald. [Touches his arm, walks offstage.]
- 5 Ronald: Ray's the most nervous. [Quieter.]
There.
It's out.
- 6 Student: I made him nervous.
I'm surprised you're all not more nervous.

Most of these turns follow the "Yes, and ..." rule, particularly turns 2, 3, and 6. Such turns are known as *complementary offers*, because they accept the prior offer and then elaborate on it in a way that develops and builds on the original offer. Turn 2 accepts Ray's offer in 1 that he is nervous, implicitly communicated by his teary tone of voice, and then elaborates by proposing that Ray is "more nervous about it than I am," suggesting that the Student is also nervous. In turn 3, Ronald further elaborates that Ray is the "most nervous of all of us." Turn 6 elaborates further by suggesting "I made him nervous."

The "Yes, and ..." rule can be productively used by teachers in classroom discussion. In fact, many teachers instinctively follow this rule, even when engaged in the traditional discursive pattern of IRE; the teacher's evaluation is often a *revoicing* (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993) of the student's prior response. An effective revoicing first accepts the student's response as valid and appropriate, and then elaborates it by revoicing it in a way that scaffolds the student's

understanding, by connecting the response to other relevant material, or by reformulating the response in more scientific or technical language.

For effective discussion to occur, not only the teacher but also each of the students must follow this rule. Much research on classroom discourse has shown that many students need instruction in the norms and expectations of appropriate collaborative practice (Cazden, 2001, pp. 85–90; Crook, 1994, p. 145; Rogoff, 1998, p. 720). Teachers might consider instructing their students in the “Yes, and ...” rule at the beginning of the semester, perhaps even leading them in improvisational exercises.

No Denial

The inverse of the “Yes, and ...” rule is the rule “No denial.” To deny a fellow actor is to reject what he/she has just introduced into the dramatic frame; it is the opposite of saying “yes.” There are differing degrees of acceptance and denial. Occasionally a responder will formulate a clever response that appears to accept the offer, but, in fact, modifies or rejects some element of that offer. Example 3 contains several examples of denial. The audience was asked to suggest a crisis, and the suggestion was “the computer crashes.” Dave begins the scene by speaking as if into a microphone, with dialog that makes it clear he is an air traffic controller.

Example 3. Scene improvisation. First 11 turns of a five-minute scene. The location suggested was “A Control Tower.” When the lights come up, Dave is standing with left hand on ear, miming holding headphones. Facing the audience, he gives instructions to an aircraft for about 30 seconds before beginning to mix a cocktail just as Jack enters:

- 1 Dave: Just a little liquid refreshments. [Dave mimes picking up a bottle and something else off of a shelf.]
- 2 Jack: Uh, excuse me? [Jack walks on stage right. He is holding his pants up and slouching. Dave is shaking a cocktail.]
- 3 Dave: Yes, dude.
- 4 Jack: Uh, I believe I am the new trainee for the, uh, flight tower thing, job, whatever you call it.
- 5 Dave; All right!
Can you make daiquiris?
- 6 Jack: Oh ... yeah,
My last job was a bartender. [Dave picks up mixer and holds it in front of Jack for him to hold and shake it.]
- 7 Dave: Okay good, ‘cause I’ve been doin’it myself [and I] really
- 8 Jack: [okay] [Jack takes the mixer from Dave.]
- 9 Dave: Yeah, and I really have to =
- 10 Jack: = Ptchh [Jack takes mixer, starts to shake it, then makes sound effect Ptchh while swinging his right hand back.]
Oh, I lost the top!
Sorry [Turning to Dave.]
I, Is that, uh. [Jack points and looks up,]
ew [as if to say “what a mess.”]
- 11 Dave: Oh, that’s okay

We have another. [Returns arm to shelf and hands a second cocktail mixer to Jack.]

Here, hold this.

Turn 5 is a subtle form of denial known as *shelving*. Dave accepts Jack's offer in turn 4—that he is a trainee for a new job in the flight tower—but he immediately shifts the discussion to the topic of making drinks, one that is irrelevant both to being a trainee and to being in the flight tower. Turn 7 is a more subtle denial; Jack accepts Dave's offer that he has experience as a bartender, but does not reply to the content of the offer, instead continuing in a different direction. Teachers may choose subtle denials like these when a student's comment is not relevant to the discussion topic. However, if used too often, these subtle denials undermine the discussion culture of the classroom, because the implicit message to students is that their comments have no impact and may be ignored.

Turn 11 is a more obvious denial. In turn 10, Jack offers that he has accidentally lost the top to the cocktail shaker, and that when it fell off the drinks spilled, making a mess. Although Dave's turn 11 is not an explicit denial—he accepts the action proposed by Jack—he nonetheless makes the action irrelevant, by counter-offering that there is no problem, because he has a second cocktail shaker.

All of these denials result in one actor, Dave, overly controlling the direction of the scene, and make the performance less collaborative. In the same way, a teacher (or a student) who engages in any of these techniques of denial is likely to derail the emerging improvisational discussion, defeating the social constructivist intent of discussion. Many teachers who try very hard to be accepting and encouraging of their students' responses nonetheless occasionally find themselves using these more subtle forms of denial. In many cases, the line between a subtle denial and a constructive revoicing is fuzzy and open to interpretation. Students, like all participants in conversation, are extremely sensitive even to subtle denial, and can easily get the impression that their contributions are not being valued.

The Problem with Individual Creativity

In classrooms that do not use much discussion and that are not based on constructivist principles, the teacher does most of the talking (Cazden, 2001). In a staged improvisation, if one actor did most of the talking, that would defeat the purpose of the improvisation—a new scene is supposed to emerge unexpected from the collaborative dialog among the actors. Consequently, actors have several pejorative terms to refer to scenes when one actor talks too much. Actors use the term *driving* to refer to an actor who is taking over the scene and not letting other performers influence its direction. This is sometimes called *playwriting*—thinking more than one turn of dialog ahead, anticipating what the other actor will say.

In Example 4 neither actor is playwriting.

Example 4. The beginning of a five-minute scene. Lights up. Dave is at stage right, Ellen at stage left. Dave begins gesturing to his right, talking to himself.

- 1 Dave: All the little glass figurines in my menagerie,
The store of my dreams.
Hundreds of thousands everywhere! [Turns around to admire.]
- 2 Ellen: [Slowly walks toward Dave.]
- 3 Dave: [Turns and notices Ellen.]
Yes, can I help you?
- 4 Ellen: Um, I'm looking for uh, uh, a present? [Ellen is looking down like a child, with her fingers in her mouth.]

Ellen's non-verbal offer in turn 2 could have several potential meanings. In turn 3, Dave addresses her as a customer in his store, and at that point the meaning of turn 2 is that a customer entered the store. Ellen accepts this offer in turn 4, and provides a complementary offer, giving a reason for her visit. However, Dave could have chosen to address her as a coworker (or an employee) arriving late to work. If Ellen had entered the store intending one or the other meaning, she would have been playwriting and she could have been thrown off if Dave had chosen a different meaning.

Yet, even after turn 3, Ellen's character is not fully determined. In turn 4, Ellen could have chosen to respond by saying "I'd like to apply for that job posted in the window." Thus, if Dave had spoken turn 3 with the intention of "addressing a customer," that intention would have (turned out to be) incorrect, and this playwriting would again have the effect of slowing down his next response, and making the dialog flow much less naturally. When Dave says "Yes, can I help you?" he must say it without knowing what the specific relationship is. This sort of non-intentional action requires a great deal of trust: The actor has to trust his partner to select the relationship, and relinquish control to the process of collaborative emergence. This is why actors often talk in terms of "trust," "losing one's ego," and yielding to the "group mind."

As with the "No denial" rule, this rule encourages the collaborative creation of a performance. It takes the creative control away from any one actor and any one turn, and shifts it to the process of collaborative emergence that depends on the entire group. It shows us that actors themselves cannot know what the complete meaning of their turn is when they first enact the turn.

Teachers often find it difficult to relinquish control to this extent. Even during free-flowing discussion, a teacher will naturally have the day's lesson plan and curriculum goals in the back of his/her head. Yet, if the constructivist benefits of collaborative discussion are to be realized, the teacher must allow discussion to proceed without playwriting. Otherwise, socially-constructed insights do not naturally emerge from the students' discussion. Students then perceive that the teacher is not interested in true discussion, but rather in using the students to further the teacher's own hidden agenda—the scripted, preferred direction that it is hoped the students will move in.

Of course, unlike staged performance, the classroom teacher is responsible for setting the day's agenda and for determining what comments are relevant to the discussion. As a result, the teacher cannot avoid playwriting altogether. Yet, performing improvisational exercises could help teachers to understand how playwriting influences the subsequent flow of the discussion, and help them to understand which situations require which degree of playwriting. In particular, it can make them more comfortable with a lesser degree of playwriting than they are used to, particularly in the initial exploratory stages of classroom discussion.

Endowing and Asking Questions

Endowing is to assign attributes to another performer's character. In Example 5, the first four lines of Ann's turn 1 are endowing. First, she created a relationship with Donald that implies he is much younger, and that their relationship extends back to his infancy. Second, she has offered an interpretation for his initial hand position.

Example 5. Scene 9 of Freeze Tag game. Ann tags and takes a position standing next to Donald with her hands positioned as the tagged actor, who had been petting a cat. Donald's hands are frozen about two feet apart; he had been holding the cat. Ann's hands are about six inches apart:

- 1 Ann: I knew you when you were THIS big! [Shakes her hands for emphasis.]
I didn't know you when you were THAT big. [Pointing to the distance between Donald's hands.]
Your mom was in the maternity ward for SO LONG.
But listen, I knew you when you were THIS big.
And you know what you said to me?
The first thing you said to me?
- 2 Donald: What did I say to you?
- 3 Ann: Goo, goo.
Oh, you were so cute, can you do that again?
Just go "goo, goo."
- 4 Donald: Goo, goo? [Tentatively, as if wondering if he is doing it right.]

Actors are taught not to ask questions, because as Example 5 demonstrates, a question limits the range of possible responses. In the final two lines of turn 1 of Example 5, Ann asks Donald perhaps the worst kind of question—a question that he cannot possibly know the correct answer to, because Donald would have been too young to remember the incident being proposed. The result is that Donald has almost no creative freedom in turn 2. Any response other than "What?" would deny the proposed dramatic frame, interrupting the scene being proposed by Ann. Such questions have strong interactional power.

Teachers often ask questions that strongly constrain students. For example, in the initiation turn of an IRE sequence, the teacher asks a question with a single correct answer. The student who is placed in the response position is extremely controlled; he/she can only answer in the way that the teacher has "endowed" for him/her. This is part of the reason why IRE remains so

popular—it serves a behavior management function of making it clear who can talk at that moment, and it serves the curricular function of keeping the teacher’s preplanned lesson on track. Social constructivist theory makes it clear why such discourse is not very effective for learning—because students are not given the opportunity to collectively explore and create their own knowledge.

Instead of asking questions, actors are taught to follow the first rule: “Yes, and ...” Rather than asking your fellow actor to provide new information, you should do so yourself in your own turn. A teacher, rather than asking a question, might consider making a statement that provides many potential opportunities for response.

Don’t Cross the Fourth Wall

The *fourth wall* is the imaginary barrier between the stage and the audience, and the phrase is a metaphor for the dramatic frame. The dramatic world of the stage has four sides; the back and the two sides are physical walls, but the fourth wall is invisible, and opens to the audience. When actors say “don’t cross the fourth wall,” they mean that actors should not step outside of the dramatic world that is emerging on stage. They should not step out of character; they should not speak directly to the audience in an aside; they should not explicitly direct the action to come. Staying in frame is an attempt to be true to life: In everyday life we rarely “break frame,” and when we do something is usually very wrong (Goffman, 1974). Improvisational groups are striving to create dialog that seems as natural as everyday conversation; this principle helps them achieve this goal.

Actors avoid crossing the fourth wall because it is too easy to drive a scene with an out-of-frame voice. When all actors stay in-frame, the scene that emerges is more likely to be the result of collaboration. There are several strategies that fall on a continuum between in-frame and out-of-frame strategies (as in turn 4 of Example 3, “I believe I am the new trainee”); I refer to these blended strategies as *double-voiced*, borrowing a term from Bakhtin (1981), because they combine the character’s in-frame voice with a directorial out-of-frame voice. Double-voiced strategies carry an interactional power that is intermediate between in-frame and out-of-frame strategies.

Although an improvisational ensemble is a group of equal peers, in the classroom the teacher has unique responsibilities. In classroom discussion, teachers are more likely to use frame-breaking moves than the students, *metacommunicating* about the emerging discussion. For example, teachers need to metacommunicate to reinforce the ground rules of effective discussion among the students themselves; for example, to prevent a strong-willed student from “denying” fellow students (see examples in Cazden, 2001; for example, p. 84). In addition, teachers metacommunicate to keep students from straying too far from the topic. This requires the teacher to suspend collaboration and metacommunicate out-of-frame about the ongoing discussion.

Teachers also metacommunicate to summarize and make explicit key points that emerge from the discussion. Students do not yet have the expertise to recognize which emerging themes are critical and which are of only passing interest. Teachers must be highly attentive at every moment of the discussion, playing the essential role of noting each collective construction that emerges from the group discussion. Teachers have the difficult task of determining when an emergent insight should be explicitly noted: should the teacher call attention to it immediately, so as to provide material for the ongoing discussion? Or should the teacher make a note of it and then call attention to it at the end of the discussion period, so as to allow the discussion to continue on its natural path? The study of staged improvisations suggests that if the teacher metacommunicates too often, or uses strategies that are too powerful, the effectiveness of the discussion as a social constructivist learning environment is compromised. Frame-breaking moves can easily derail the collaborative emergence of socially constructed knowledge. Balancing these opposing tendencies and managing just the right level of metacommunication is a difficult and subtle skill to learn. Each emergent, improvisational discussion is likely to require its own unique degree of metacommunication; effective teachers need to have a full repertoire of metacommunicative techniques available, and to be comfortable with different degrees of control and direction. Many beginning teachers overuse out-of-frame metacommunication, in the attempt to retain control of the class and to keep the discussion on topic. By engaging in improvisational exercises, teachers might learn to be more comfortable with the natural, emergent flow of discussion, and to handle these pedagogical tasks through more subtle forms of double-voiced metacommunication.

Listen and Remember

There is a class of improvisational games known as *listening games* that forces actors to listen closely to the content of their partner's dialogs. For example, in the Entrances and Exits game, each actor is assigned a word suggested by the audience. Whenever the actor's word is spoken as part of a line of dialog, the actor has to either exit the stage, if already on stage, or enter the action, if off stage. The entrance or exit must be justified as logical within the dramatic frame; for example, the exiting actor cannot simply walk silently off the stage, but must first speak a line of dialog that provides an explanation for his departure that makes sense at that point in the scene. The game begins with one actor on stage; the game ends when the last remaining actor speaks his own word and then exits.

This game forces actors to listen to each other unusually closely. Such training results in actors that can remember everything that has been introduced into the dramatic frame. Not everything is resolved and connected right away, so there will always be small bits and pieces of plot and frame, waiting to be picked up and connected to the current scene. Making these connections is the sign of a skilled improviser, and Sawyer (2003) frequently saw knowledgeable audiences in Chicago applaud at such connections.

It has often been noted that good teaching requires teachers to make connections. Teachers must explicitly identify connections between the material of the lesson and the knowledge already possessed by students, and this requires teachers to listen closely and observe their students so that they will know what knowledge they currently possess. Previously covered knowledge must be connected to ongoing discussions, to reinforce both past and new material; when the discussions are improvisational, with no way of knowing what new material will emerge in discussion, a teacher needs a high level of pedagogical content knowledge (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986; Shulman, 1987) to be able to make such connections.

Beginning teachers are often so focused on their own lesson plan—that they want to cover, and what they want to come next in the class—that they find it difficult to truly listen to students' responses. Improvisation requires close listening, and a teacher can only do this if he/she is willing to relinquish some amount of control over the flow of the class. These listening exercises could be effective at teaching teachers how to more fully listen to students.

Conclusion

In social constructivist theory, new knowledge emerges from collaborative, exploratory discussions among learners. And in improvisational theater, a performance emerges from the ensemble's dialog. Both are collaborative conversations in which no participant knows what will emerge, and in which no participant is allowed to control what emerges. In an improvisational classroom, the class collaboratively creates its own knowledge, sometimes in a way that no teacher could have managed or planned.

Beginning teachers often have difficulty creating social constructivist classrooms, because they have difficulty managing the improvisation of collaborative discussion. This is why many teacher training programs have begun to incorporate improvisational techniques. I have given an overview of some of the principles taught to aspiring improvisational actors. Studying stage improvisations can help us to understand why acceptance, rather than rejection, encourages free-flowing discussion; why endowing turns and closed questions are deadly for true discussion; and how the group can collectively construct new knowledge on its own.

Teaching is improvisation, but that doesn't mean that anything goes. Even the games performed by improvisational groups have loose rules and frameworks that guide what can be done during the improvised dialog. Actors have realized that additional structure increases the consistency of the performance from night to night, reducing the risk of failure, but at the same time the structure reduces the possibilities for collaborative emergence (Sawyer, 2003). Teachers cannot afford to fail too much of the time, because students' learning is at stake; they will probably always need to have more structure than improvisational performances. They have curriculum goals, and the students

have to pass state-mandated tests. Nonetheless, examinations of improvisational theater games and formats can help us to better understand the relationship between curriculum structure, classroom processes, and learning. The most effective teachers are those that can effectively use a wide range of degrees of structure, shifting between scaffolds and activity formats as the material and the students seem to require. These shifts in themselves are improvisational responses to the unique needs of the class. Providing improvisational training for teachers might help them to more effectively create their own improvised lessons.

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