



Transforming professional performance through the power of human interaction

Conference Preview of Two Workshops: *Serious play: Improvisational tools for SP Educators and How to Expect the Unexpected” Improvisational Exercises for the SP & Educator”*

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SP educators are often called upon to do innovative work that varies from most day to day work however; there are times when we all fall into ‘the rut’. We get overwhelmed and feel like if we say “yes” to one more thing, we will pop! So, we revert to the age old “NO!” and then wonder why we are in a rut again? I confess, last year I, **Mary Cantrell** was in that very rut. While at my core there is usually a “YES”, in my real world, I had fallen into the ‘NO’ ditch and couldn’t see a way out.

It was around this time that I took a workshop at ASPE on ways that some SP programs are using exercises taken from Improvisational Theater to train SPs. Improv is a genre of performance art grounded in the concepts of spontaneity, adaptability, collaboration, and skilled listening.

The workshop put “YES, ... and” back into my vocabulary.

“Yes, ... and” is a basic tenet of improv; it means YES, I hear you and understand the information you’re presenting, AND I’m going to add to the idea I heard to make something greater instead of negating , belittling , or disagreeing with the idea, which can stop the conversation. This concept helped me to step back and see that everyone needs “Yes, ...and” to get out of the “NO” rut.

I wasn’t the only one who loved this session; in fact, it was so well received that ASPE is offering two improv workshops at the conference this year! See what others had to say about this powerful and fun workshop in their post conference evaluations:

“The pertinent subject matter, the engaging speakers, and the lively audience participation made this one of the highlights of ASPE this year.”

*“One of my favorites of the conference, I got great tools, what an incredibly practical session. These are so easy to take back to our program to use with our SPs. **Jamie Pitt and Gina Shannon** had us participate in fun exercises without making us feel stupid. They are upbeat, super positive and fun.”*

“I found it a refreshing change and a different approach to teaching SPs. I liked the interaction and their ideas – what dynamic engaging presenters!”

Why Improv? YES, it's fun....and it works!

Improv skills are life skills: listening, connecting, collaborating, creative problem solving, embracing risk and being flexible, are skills used to improvise. The use of these skills makes people better leaders and team members by fostering behaviors that improve relationships, the ability to handle conflict and willingness to approach work with a positive attitude.

Improv is uniquely suited to SP education as it is easy to implement, it can be applied immediately, and can be practiced and reinforced continually.

Ideally, our goal as SP educators is to standardized encounters as much as possible, so how does Improv apply? We can't predict everything that *might* occur, whether it is answering a question not covered in training or giving face to face feedback about the encounter. What happens when a learner says or does the unexpected? How do we prepare SPs for things we don't expect? SPs must be able to stick to the case, stay in character and tackle the unexpected moments with maturity. Improv exercises help with the ability to “think on your feet” and enhance an SP's comfort level in giving feedback.

During the workshop, we use a fun, immersive way of teaching in which participants are invited to join in on “play” during group exercises called “theater games”, or choose to observe. Knowing what I got out of the workshop last time, I suggest playing; this is the key to really capturing ideas that will get you out of any rut!

Attendees at either workshop will gain an introduction to improv, discover the power of “Yes, ...and”, as well as the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge to begin utilizing improv exercises and techniques in ways that best fit the context of their own institutions, audiences, and roles.

Note: because Improv exercises generate original and new content, you *could* attend both workshops and learn new things at each, however this is not required. If you can't make the Pre-Conference workshop, join us for the shorter workshop offered during the conference without fear that you'll have missed a pre-requisite.

1. Pre-Conference workshop called *“Serious play: Improvisational tools for SP Educators” is on Sunday, June 14, 2015.* The extended timeframe will allow a more immersive setting for play and include more in- depth content and exercises for SP educators and those administrators who are dealing with a large ‘ensemble’ to lead. Attendees will identify various exercises and tips for use with SPs, faculty, and staff but will also have guided training on “how to teach/use this exercise” and receive a detailed reference guide.
2. Conference Workshop called *“How to Expect the Unexpected” Improvisational Exercises for the SP & Educator” will be offered on Tuesday June 16th, 2015.* Offered during the regular conference, to accommodate the shorter time frame this workshop will be focused on using improv specifically with SPs and identifying exercises for use in hiring, training, portrayal, feedback.

I’m honored to have been invited to join forces on these two workshops with such powerful and energetic women as my co-presenters **Jamie Pitt, Gina Shannon, and Dehra Glueck.**

We, the presenters, are educators, directors, former SPs, a physician and a professional improv performer! We can’t wait share our “secret weapon”, the techniques of improv, with you. Join us at ASPE by saying “YES... and” to a powerful and exciting tool that you will use for the rest of your life in a big and genuine way.

Interested in reading more about improv? We suggest these great books:

1. *“Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses ‘No, But’ Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration--Lessons from The Second City”*, by Kelly Leonard and Tom Yorton.
2. *“Bossypants”*, by Tina Fey.
3. *“Yes Please”*, by Amy Poehler.
4. *“Theater Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook”*, by Viola Spolin .