Advancing the Advisor’s Toolkit: Improv Skills for Student Success

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Purposes of Improv Techniques in Higher Education
- Communicate research outcomes
- Teach professional skills for industry
- Advance student identity and leadership development
- Prepare clients to deal with potentially stressful situations
- Academic advising training and development

Introduction of Improv Terms

Opening the Scene
- **Narrative**: The story told by a scene. Scenes should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- **Point of Concentration**: What the scene is about.
- **Offer**: Any dialog or action which advances the scene. Offers should be accepted.
- **Offer from space**: Dialog or action that is bizarre and that appears to come from nowhere.
- **Complementary offer**: An offer that meshes well with what’s already gone before (and usually enhances it in some way).

Developing the Scene
- **Accepting**: Embracing the offers made by other performers in order to advance the scene.
- **Advancing**: The process of moving the scene forwards.
- **Explore and heighten**: To take an idea and see where it leads, exploring its natural consequences while simultaneously raising the stakes.
- **Raising the stakes**: Making the events of the scene have greater consequences for the characters. One technique for advancing.

The Do Not’s
- **Wimping**: Accepting an offer but failing to act on it.
- **Information overload**: Introducing too much information into the scene, making it difficult or impossible to ever find a satisfying ending that resolves everything.
- **Driving**: Taking over a scene and not letting other performers influence its direction. Makes you an unpopular improvisor.
- **Blocking**: Rejecting information or ideas offered by another player. One of the most common problems experienced by new improvisors. In conventional theatre, the term is used to mean something different (pre-planned stage movement).

Benefits of Improv Techniques in Higher Education
- Help advisors prepare for unknown scenarios
- Build student confidence in their interactions
  - Discussing decisions with family members
  - Networking and interviewing skills
  - Self-advocacy

Reflection: How are you going to incorporate improv techniques into your professional practice?
Resources

Improv Terms
http://improvencyclopedia.org/glossary/index.html
http://www.improvcomedy.org/glossary.html

Improv Games
http://improvencyclopedia.org - instructions for improv games
Freeze Tag: Useful for creating a narrative, identifying the point of concentration, and advancing
Party Quirks: Practice asking open-ended questions to get clarity on character, situation, etc.
Yes Let’s: Practice advancing a scene and accepting an offer and the “Yes, and” theme of improv
Ding: Practice handling an offer from space and a good game to adjust reactions and responses
The Scream: Fun warm-up activity for group sessions

References


Ronen, A. (2017). Teaching is as much about fucking it up as improvising is. YESand Blog. Retrieved from https://yesand.com/2017/05/31/teaching-much-fucking-improvising/

