

Beginning Stages of Improvisation

Application: Dance improv allows a dancer to step outside of their comfort zone of technique and begin creating their own original movement.

Dance improvisation is defined as the process of spontaneously creating movement. Development of improvised movement material is facilitated through a variety of creative explorations including body mapping through levels, shape, and dynamics.

Centering: Have dancers begin by “centering” themselves. This can be standing in neutral, sitting, or laying on the ground. Invite students to close their eyes which will increase their concentration and allow them to be more kinesthetically aware.

Define the Structure: When defining the structure of their basic improv, you will want to establish three primary objectives with the dancers- *image, type of movement, and the timing.*

Example:

Imagine rolling like a ball after being thrown

Image: Ball

Type of movement: rolling

Timing: After being thrown- which is perceived as very fast

Develop 5-6 different exercises each time to begin the creative process of the dancers improv.

Leading with....: Another beginning based improv exercise that gets dancers used to leading with various body parts. This can be across the floor or a free for all around them room. Have them begin leading with their head. Then move onto different body parts such as the shoulder, elbow, knee, toe ribs, belly button, spine. When they are “leading with” a certain body part, that is the body part that initiates all of their movement. Make it more challenging by adding levels to the improv: How can your head lead you to and from the floor?

Pedestrian Improv

Application When we say “dance” it’s easy for students to get big an elaborate, wanting to showcase their best technique. This is an exercise that allows students to just be human for a few minutes, and get down to the root of how they naturally respond to situations and emotions. The more pedestrian like qualities we can make our movement, the more the audience will be able to relate.

Have dancers line up at the front of the classroom to face the center of the room. The two dancers that are at either ends will begin, they will walk down to the back of the room, turn, facing each other to make eye contact and walk towards each other holding the eye contact. Once they reach the center, still holding the eye contact, they remain there until the “caller” reveals their word. Once they hear the word, they immediately face the front and strike the position that they feel best suits the word. They hold this position for three seconds, come out of it, then walk to the center where the lines meet to get back in line.

The Caller: The caller will call out one emotion, or an extremely short circumstance that they want the dancers to portray in a very human like way.

Some examples-

- Grief
- Falling
- Praise
- Encouragement
- Waking up
- Exhaustion
- Accomplishing a new task
- Hard work
- Getting cut off in the middle of traffic
- Forgetting to study for a test
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The word and the movement should represent what every person has experienced at some point in their life.

The Dancer: At the beginning of the exercise, making and holding eye contact is essential. For one, it begins to break the bad habit shifting our focus to the floor. Furthermore, it is a discipline that serves as a reminder that you and your partner are connected. You’re both human, and you both experience the same emotions in life, but react differently. When given your word, just go with your very first response. Take no longer than half a second to hit your pose. It’s improv, your interpretation of the portrayal of that word. There is no right or wrong, but just be YOU.

Remember that dance is not in your technique, but in allowing freedom in the movement of who you really are-human. To be able to get on stage to perform movement that opens you up allows you to be authentic and vulnerable to your audience-which is way more impactful

Resistance Improv

Application When relying a message or theme in a dance, a dancer relies on their entire body. This is a great exercise for dancers to use their whole body and to recognize how to utilize the many difference forces/dynamics their body has to offer.

This is an across the floor exercise that should be repeated on both sides. After the first side, stop and talk about what you observed.

The three resistances I typically use are *heavy, smooth, and light/airy*:

Heavy- *move across the floor like you're attached to a 1,000-pound weight.*

****common observation**** a lot of dancers, when first doing this, will move across the floor simply “pushing” an object. Even though they show a hint of struggle, most likely in their face, it doesn't always reflect in their entire body (which is what we're aiming for)

If you think about it, 1000 pounds is basically IMPOSSIBLE to move! (unless you're superman) If done correctly, a dancer should take approx. 3-5 minutes to move across the floor during this, attempting to push with their backs, arms, pulling with all of their strength. By the time they get to the end their bodies should be tired! As if they literally pulled 1,000 pounds across the floor with them.

If you feel as though a dancer still isn't grasping the concept, try sitting in front of them and having them physically pull/push you across the floor, by making it as impossible for them as possible. Then they will physically be able to feel what it's like to attempt to move something nearly impossible.

(No, I am not implying I, or any teacher is 1,000 lbs, but we know how to position our bodies in ways that make it difficult to move)

Smooth- *move across the floor as though you're swimming through jello or pudding (pick one of the two to have the class do)*

Before dancers begin, point out some key components of how swimming in jello/pudding is different than swimming in just water. All three hold a resistance that prevent you from moving as fast as you would be able to typically on land, but have dancers dig even deeper into their improv. If moving through jello, movement may be slightly bouncy and rigid. Can stickiness be represented into movement? Pudding would be a lot denser than water, making movement move even slower, but a lot smoother than the movement of jello.

Light/airy- *move across the floor as if you're flying through the clouds*

Dancers may start pulling out of their “tricks” during this exercise, with leaps, turns, kicks, ext. Encourage students to find a way to “soar” across the floor without using their common dance movement. How can they develop their own leaps, turns, and kicks while still exploring the freedom of being weightless and free?

NINJA!- Introduction to Partner Improv

In partnering, the foundation is how to **respond** and **react** to your partners movements. In this exercise, since they begin by moving in slow motion, they begin to grasp how to make their body respond. If they see a person's arm coming towards their back, they have time to think and adjust their body to get out of the way of the arm. By round 2, they've focused their mind on how they would want their body to react to certain situations. In this round, as in real partner improv, they will have barely any time to "think" about what to do next, and they just have to naturally allow their body to react.

Round 1: Start by having dancers in 2 lines, facing each other. Each line is a team, and the objective is to get the other team out. Start the game with a bow towards your opposing team, then strike a beginning pose. Next, you begin moving in slow motion towards the opposite team. You may only use the forearm of your arm to get a person out. You may only respond and react **in slow motion**. If you are hit, or move suddenly, then you are out and must melt to the ground slowly and dramatically.

Once everyone on a team is out, then the winning team turns of each other and tries to get their team members out. The last one standing wins.

Round 2: Begin Standing in a circle, like in the original Ninja. This time the dancers go one at a time clockwise, but they may use any body part to get a person out. They can only use one advancement per turn, and they will want to move quickly so the person they are advancing towards doesn't have time to get out of the way. This is a time to get creative! An advancement doesn't simply have to be a step forward, but they can lunge, chase, roll, turn, jump, ANYTHING that can be summed up into one move. They can attempt to get anyone in the circle out, it does not just have to be someone to their right or left. BUT you have to continuously go in the same clockwise order. So even if person 1 ends up between person 5 and 6 throughout the game, being in a new spot does not change their order to move. This round they get ONE advancement per turn. When a person is out, they slowly melt to the floor like in the first round. Last person standing wins.

Round 3: Similar to round 2, but now the objective is to get all four of a dancer's limbs out (two arms, 2 legs) Once a body part is out, they may no longer move it in their advancement or getting someone out. This forces the dancer to get creative in how to utilize their body. For example- If both of their legs have been hit out, how is the dancer supposed to move without legs? Only one limb can get out at a time. A dancer is out once all 4 of their limbs have been struck.

Fill the void

Application - helps create unique poses, and teaches dancers about how to fill “holes” in choreography.

Have dancers begin sitting on the floor in front.

Round 1 : Have one dancer go to the center of the floor and make a pose, any pose he/she wants. (but remind them that they will be holding the pose for a while, so ensure its something they are able to maintain.)

Then have another dancer to go pose. But they have to create a pose within a “hole” or open space that the other person has created.

Examples to look for-

- Between their legs
- Space between arms
- Stomach/back is contracted or arched
- If their legs/arms/whole body is closed off, the pose can be create in the space above, below, or around them, as long as it abstractly connects somehow
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Send another dancer up, and they are to do the same thing. Fill the empty space that the other dancer’s have created in their pose. Continue to have dancer’s come up and pose until everyone has gone.

Round 2: Split the group in half. Have the first group do exactly what they had done before. The second group is observing closely. When the first group is done, have the second group recreate the pose the first group had just finished. This requires the dancers to pay close attention to detail. Switch group roles and try again. (This works well if large groups! Take a picture for reference)

Round 3: Give the dancers a theme/emotion that their poses have to represent (similar to the pedestrian improv). Have dancers repeat this same exercise while exemplifying the direction you’ve asked them to go. This then creates a tableau of what you’ve asked of them.

Join the Flock

Application teaches dancers how to move as a unit as well as pick up on others cues when things begin to change. This allows them to prepare themselves to be ready for anything

Begin with dancers in a tight clump in the middle of the room

The Flock- Assign one dancer to start off as the “captain” and she is going to lead the group around the room in a flock (think like a flock of birds). The goal during this is to stay as close together as possible-like shoulder to shoulder close- the whole time. Leave this part at just simply walking around the room. The speed doesn’t matter, but the faster they go, the more of a challenge it is to “flock”.

When the captain is ready, they will stop and begin slowly improving in place, and the flock must follow the movement, then as soon as the captain faces another angle/direction of the room, the person ahead in that direction takes over the improv and is now the new captain. Now the flock is following the new captain. When this captain is ready, flock around the room again, until ready to stop and improv, until a new captain takes over.

This is knowing how to follow the lead and move as a group. But it’s also about knowing when the appropriate time is to take over as the lead and lead your group in the best, most efficient way possible. Sometimes that means giving your group a challenge! Make this as challenging as you so wish, but if your flock begins to fall apart, figure out a way to bring them back together.