

COURSE IN IMPROVISATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO PRACTICE ENGLISH SUMMER SCHOOL

. THEATRE AND IMPROVISATION FOR PRACTICING ENGLISH

Practice English in a fresh, physical and very funny way as well as develop useful skills for Language learning in general.

My Workshops are for students of English 9 -12 years old (beginner), 12 -15 years old (intermediate) and 16 -19 years old (advanced) whom want to improve their fluency in English and to develop more confidence in their self expression in a context which is both creative and fun.

The benefits of using improvisation and theatre games for practicing languages is that the group not only trains the linguistic (word smart function) and (musical or oral) functions of learning but there is great scope within this context to exercise the Interpersonal/intrapersonal (Imaginative and Relationship smart functions), the Kinesthetic function or body memory as well as the visual and spacial learning functions.

. improvisation

To Improvise means to perform or deliver without previous preparation. In the theatre we use Improvisation as a training to develop important skills for creative thinking, problem solving or story telling for example or as a theatrical form to present to a public.

There are several principles of Improvisation for Theatre, which can help with similar blockages that might occur in a language learning context.

a) Unblocking the Imagination – The unfettered imagination/memory can be accessed by generating a relaxed atmosphere in which students have fun. Using games I create an atmosphere in which the student is able to have a pleasurable and enlivening experience. ‘Pressure to get it right’ create tension which blocks spontaneity and flow. We practice improvising story or conversation in a playful context.

b) Failure as a tool – Failure is vital element of any creation, providing understanding and growth. In a class of Improvisation we follow a sequence of games and exercises in order to open students to the unexpected and embrace error as regards to the learning process.

c) Training constructive habits - The main block of most performers in relation to improvisation (and language learners) is fear. The basis of the work of improvisation is to identify and help to "unlearn" a series of habits and reactions, such as self-blame, negativity and evaluation and replace them with the principles of improvisation: listening, acceptance, simplicity, immediacy and common sense.

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d) Working as a team - Normal schooling is intensely competitive and students are expected to outdo each other however in the context of an Improvisation class, the individual is only as strong as the group with whom they work. A group can make or break its members and a great group can propel its members forward to achieve amazing things.

In that way I see my job as a teacher being to galvanize the group into improving each other. This approach has the secondary benefit of helping to develop communication skills within a team context. In focusing more on enjoyment of the process rather than producing results, a group relaxes and gains more confidence.

. how classes are structured

Each class of 2h hours will begin with a physical warm up to specifically release nervous energy and regulate breathing. Then structured games, delivered in simple English to warm up mentally as well as improve basic skills for Improvisation.

Following our warm ups, students will participate in Improvisation exercises and or theatre games, in teams as well as working individually depending on the level of the class. As the workshop progresses vocabulary can get more demanding following the students willingness to intensify the games or develop stories more profoundly. I also use singing exercises, writing, free association and movement to stimulate other learning capacities.

. outcomes

By the end of a long term workshop a student should;

- . Feel more confident in their expression of English
- . Speak with more fluency and vocabulary
- . Feel more confident in their self expression (physicality, voice)
- . Feel more comfortable working in a team
- . Have better oral skills

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. sources

The pioneering Improvisation work of Keith Johnstone in the 1960's and 70's was deeply connected with deconstructing a lifetime of teaching which had made his students to scared to learn anything new. Johnstone's approach involves asking students to rehearse their bad habits, in the hope of bringing them under conscious control. Students are gradually able to relax and become more objective which enables them to modify their responses and behavior. I am also interested in the idea of progressive desensitization in teaching which involves coaxing my students (generally by disguising learning as a game) into dangerous areas without having them back off. It is a way of inviting people to move towards their blocks and deconstruct them rather than staying in escape mentality, so common amongst frustrated language learners.

Having spent many years studying the work of Keith and then having had the privilege of attending an intensive training with him and ongoing Improvisation work with Volker Quandt whom trains long form storytelling and is currently IMPRO GLOBAL (improvising with actors communicating in many different languages simultaneously).

I have 15 years of teaching experience with both actors and general public, five years teaching children specifically at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in Sydney. In Portugal I have been teaching in professional theatre schools in Porto (ESMAE) and Lisbon (ESTAL, EVOÉ, Inimpetus) since 2011. Since 2014 I have been teaching theatre and creative dance in English to students at Colégio Alegria (Lisbon).

. biography

JAIME MEARS | Sydney. 1981

Jaime Mears is an actress with over a decade of professional experience in Theatre, Film and Television in Australia and Europe. She graduated from Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 2001 with a Bachelor of Dramatic Art and has extensive training in Classical Theatre, Voice Work, Suzuki, Viewpoints, Improvisation, Buffoon, Clown, Singing and Dance.

She has credits with companies such as the Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre Company, Darlinghurst Theatre Company and Teatro Nacional São João. Jaime has appeared in several television drama series in Australia, between 2003-2007, as the award winning hospital drama *All Saints* and also *Mcleods Daughters*. She appeared in *Mata Hari* for Star Media productions in Europe in 2014.

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Her desire to explore and diversify her theatre practice, led her to schools and training programs in France (École Philippe Gaulier, Paris, 2008 -2010), Denmark (Keith Johnstone 2011), the UK (Complicité 2010) and the USA (SITI Company, NY 2012) with theatre makers and teachers from many different disciplines.

Based in Portugal since 2010, Jaime formed Theatre Company 'Rei Sem Roupa' in the same year with Portuguese Actor and Artistic Director of Operação Nariz Vermelho, Pedro Fabião. She devised and performs in 'Mau Lobo Mau' which continues to be shown throughout Portugal and abroad. Jaime co - directed Cabra Cega, a co-production with Circolando (Porto) that has since toured to France, Cape Verde and Brasil. The company has presented at Portugal's largest International theatre Festivals 'Festival de Almada', 'FITEI' and 'Festa do Avante!', and was most recently invited to 'COS International Festival of Movement and Physical Theatre' (Reus, Barcelona).

Jaime is currently teaching various programs in the Escola Superior de Artes e Tecnologias de Lisboa (ESTAL), Espaço EVOÉ and Inimpetus in Lisbon. She participates in international Improvising and Impro Sports programs for Harlequin Theatre Company (Germany) and is writing and devising original work with Rei Sem Roupa.

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