Discovering Applied Improvisation for Design Thinking
Here’s the plan

A little talking > Applied improvisation: what is it and why does it work?

A lot of experiencing > Jolt activities with 4 objectives:

- Getting Comfortable
- Building Ensemble
- Idea Generation
- Distress Tolerance

De-brief > What’s next?
Maria Meschi
Improviser / Designer / Facilitator

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1. OFFER
an offer is made

2. YES
it is accepted

3. AND
it is built upon

Applied Improv
the practice of using improvisation techniques and principles outside of a performace context
Defenses and beliefs are learned through social situations, so we need **direct experiences in healthy social situations** to learn new, more useful forms of coping with psychological threats that are adapted to the current need.

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**Jude Treder-Wolff**
Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Certified Group Psychotherapist, Certified Practitioner of Applied Improvisation

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What to expect

- This is **not** a performance
- This is a **BRAVE SPACE**
  - NO JUDGEMENT
  - SUPPORT EACH OTHER
- Take care of yourself
**Boundaries**

- **Touch:** Limited to handshakes and high fives.
- **Content:** Limited to topics appropriate for a professional setting. *Specifically excluding sex, violence, and drug use.*
- If you feel uncomfortable, step out of the group/room. Come back when you’re ready.
The value of improvisation is in the potential it holds to unleash creative action for individual designers and design teams.

Elizabeth Gerber
Improvisation Principles and Techniques for Design
Unleash creative action

Improvisation

- encourages spontaneity
- breaks familiar patterns of thought and behavior
- offers practice in
  - learning through error
  - adaptability
  - collaboration
Activities to support

- Getting Comfortable
- Building Ensemble
- Idea Generation
- Distress Tolerance
Getting Comfortable

- Massive Thumb War
- 3 Elbows
- Spectrogram
Massive Thumb War

1. Reach right hand to one neighbor, and left hand to the other. Grasp hands in the Thumb War position.

2. Chant “1-2-3-4, I declare a thumb war.”

3. Try to defeat both opponents simultaneously.
1. Walk leisurely around the room.

2. When the facilitator prompts “3 Elbows”, form little groups, each group consisting of three touching elbows.

3. Repeat, finding new groups for the remaining prompts.
1. The facilitator will provide a prompt, usually an either-or / agree-disagree scale.

2. Based on your perspective, find a place in the line.

3. Repeat with additional prompts.
Building Ensemble

- Yes Circle
- Word at a Time Advice
- Gator Martian Salesperson
ACTIVITY
Yes Circle

1. Stand in a circle.
2. One person begins by making a sound and gesture.
3. The group responds by saying “Yes!”, then imitating the sound & gesture. Repeat around the circle.
Word at a Time Advice

1. Stand in a circle. One person begins by saying the first word of a piece of advice.

2. The person next to them adds a word, and the advice builds around the circle.

3. Once the advice feels done, the whole group says “yes yes yes yes yes yes.”
ACTIVITY
Gator Martian Salesperson

1. You can be 3 things:
   - Gator: make a gator mouth with your arms and say “chomp chomp”
   - Martian: hold your index fingers up next to your head, as little antennas and say “bleeb bleeb”
   - Salesperson: extend your right hand and say “hey there”

2. Form a group of three and turn your backs to each other. Decide which of the 3 characters you want to be.

3. On the facilitator’s signal, turn around and become what you selected. Repeat until everyone is the same.
Idea Generation

- 5 Things
- Top That
- Gibberish Spelling Bee
**ACTIVITY**

5 Things

1. Stand in a circle. One person (A) turns to the person next to them (B) and offers them a category.

2. As quickly as they can, B names 5 things in that category. The rest of the group counts after each thing.

3. B then turns to the next person in the circle (C) and offers them a category. Repeat around the circle.
Top That

1. One person begins by offering a simple, repetitive gesture that all mimic. This person then says what they’re doing, then all say “Top that!”

2. The next person says something else that fits the gesture and the group responds with “Top that!”

3. This repeats around the circle until someone can’t think of something to match the gesture, saying “I can’t top that.” They then begin a new gesture.
ACTIVITY

Gibberish Spelling Bee

1. Form a group of four.
   - 1 - offers a gibberish word
   - 2 - defines the word
   - 3 - uses it in a sentence
   - 4 - spells the word

2. Repeat the pattern until each person gets to try each role.
Distress Tolerance

- 1–2–3
- Misnamer
- Walk–Stop
1. Round One
   Pair up. Each pair counts to 3, switching off saying each number.

2. Round Two
   Same as Round One but replace 1’s with claps.

3. Round Three
   Same as Round Two but replace 2’s with snaps.

4. Final Round
   Same as Round Three but replace 3’s with stomps.
ACTIVITY
Misnamer

1. Partner up.

2. Walk around and switch off pointing at something and calling it anything but what it actually is (e.g. point at an eraser and say “Look, a pizza!”).
ACTIVITY
Walk-Stop

1. You will be asked to follow simple commands.
   **Round One**
   Walk & Stop (and reverse)

2. **Round Two**
   Jump & Turn (and reverse)

3. **Round Three**
   Clap & Name (and reverse)
You did it!
De-brief

What will you take away from this experience?
The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the *play instinct*.

Carl Jung