

Yes, And! - Using Improv to Anchor Brainstorming

IMAGINE

Author: *Molly Levitt, Mentor, Boston*



Image from: <http://tophollywoodactingcoach.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/for-THAC-3-ways.jpg>

Level: All ages

Time: 45 minutes

Description:

Teaching brainstorming through the improv technique helps students to be more open to ideas. In design thinking brainstorming is at the heart of action. This lesson will help you set up a safe culture for brainstorming leading up to the first class-wide brainstorm about the actions that they want to take in the community.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Learn the benefits of supporting each other's ideas, even the ones they originally may not like
- Learn about the importance of brainstorming and how to build on each other's ideas
- Learn about the importance of brainstorming as it relates to design thinking

Relation to Project:

This lesson would potentially be helpful for:

- Building teamwork skills

- Teambuilding
- Brainstorming ideas for the project

Design for Change Benchmarks:

- Communication
- Collaboration

Curricular Skills:

- Discussion (speaking and listening)

Subject Areas:

- English Language Arts
- Art (Theater)

Core Standards:

- **SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Materials:

- Enough space to sit in a circle
- Whiteboard
- Markers

Vocabulary:

- **Improvisation:** something that is improvised, especially a piece of music, drama, etc., created without preparation.

Introduction (10 min):

- 1) Note to teacher: You can choose to have your students just work with a partner or you can divide the class into two lines down the center of the room. The two partners at the front of the line will come to the center.
- 2) Discuss the ground rules of improv with the students:
 - a) The first person in improv makes an offer (for example if the topic is space the offer of the first person may be "I can't believe this rocket we're on his about to go to Mars!")

- b) The number one rule of improv is that you have to go along with the suggestion of the first person. Why is this important? Denying their offer is the number one reasons that scenes will go bad.
 - i) Here is an example from the [Improv Encyclopedia](#): Any time you refuse an offer made by your partner your scene will almost instantly come to a grinding halt.
Example: Player A) "Hi, my name is Jim. Welcome to my store." Player B) "This isn't a store, it's an airplane. And you're not Jim, you're an antelope."
 - c) Instead we use “Yes, And” to build on an idea. Yes, And lets your partner know that you are going to build on their idea and work together to make the scene great.
 - d) You may also choose to discuss specific rules around appropriate content and supporting each other.
- 3) Explain the game to students:
- a) The teacher or leader suggests a topic (space, food, going on a field trip etc.
 - b) The first partner makes the offer. (Exp: “I can’t believe this rocket we’re on his about to go to Mars!”)
 - c) The other partner **MUST** start with “Yes, And…” then build on the offer of the first person. (exp: “I know! I wish I remembered my oxygen mask!”)
 - d) The first person responds with “Yes, And…” (exp: Maybe we should go home and get it?)
 - e) The second person responds, “Let’s go!” and the two partners high five.
 - f) They then return to the back of their respective line.
 - g) Each team should go through the activity at least twice.

Small Group Work (10 min):

- 1) Give students time to go through the activity at least twice.
- 2) When students are finished, ask them:
 - a) What was it like to trust your partner’s idea?
 - b) How do you think we can use the idea of “Yes, And” when we are brainstorming the best way to solve problems in our community?

Whole Group Work (20 min):

- 1) Have all your students sit in a circle, make sure everyone is included.
 - a) You may want to designate a student or a few students to be the recorders. Have them record all the ideas on the whiteboard. You could also record this conversation and write down the ideas after.
- 2) Let the students know that you are going to be brainstorming different things you can do to create the change you want to see in the activity. We are going to use the “Yes, And” to build on each others ideas. Let them know that the sky's the limit. With brainstorming, much like improv, often building on an idea that you may not initially like can lead to some really interesting ideas.
- 3) Tell students the brainstorming rules:
 - a) The first person gets to make a suggestion by raising their hand.
 - b) At least the following two comments much be a “Yes, And” comment building on the other person’s ideas.

- c) If you have a “yes, and” comment put your hand on your head. Until each Yes, And comment has been heard don’t move on to a new idea.
- d) As the teacher, you may choose to call on the students, or you can have them call on each other by saying “What do you think (student’s name) to signify that they are next.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways (5 min):

- 1) At the end of the brainstorm (or the next day if you decided to record the conversation) allow each student to circle three action ideas that they feel would really benefit the community that they are trying to serve.

Deliverables:

Please upload the following to the DFC Web portal by either taking picture or uploading an electronic file:

- List of ideas brainstormed by group
- Optional: Student reflections on the activity in addition to having a discussion