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# WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY? USING IMPROVISATION TO FOSTER CREATIVITY IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Whose Line Is It Anyway? Using Improvisation to Foster Creativity in College Students

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In the Fall of 2005, under its new core curriculum, Bacone College began offering a series of classes under the umbrella title, “Creativity and Social Influences.” Developed by Dr. D. Layne Ehlers, former Chair of the Division of Arts and Sciences, the Creativity series’ course content included one-third student exploration into the nature of human creativity, and two-thirds application of understanding creativity to a variety of topics, including improvisation. The specific class discussed here is called “Creativity: Improvisation.”

In this paper, the author will briefly explain the adaptation of Jill Badonsky’s “Nine Modern Day Muses” creativity philosophy to a broad-based student population, most of whom are athletes or health sciences students with no arts background. Part of this application is a discussion of how the students learn to incorporate their natural—but often unexplored—creative impulses into improvisational games, first through traditional scenarios, then through some of the games used in the television show, “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” or adapted from those or similar games to something appropriate to non-theatre students. The final result is a multi-part elimination presentation of “Survivor: Whose Line Is It Anyway?” by the whole class, before a live audience with guest judges. Aside from performing at least once, students’ grades are not affected by their performance or standing in this presentation, which is designed as a fun way to bring the elements of the class together at the end of the semester.

Creativity: Improvisation is a popular class. It is an alternative to the more traditional approach used in some of the other options to meet the core requirement, such as Creativity: Treasuring the Arts and Creativity: Treasuring the Performing Arts. It is taught every fall. Students begin with very simple exercises designed to build trust and create an ensemble and end with experience in specific improv games which will be used in “Survivor: Whose Line Is It Anyway?” Students vary from those with some experience in playing improvisational games to those who have never appeared on stage in any situation other than as part of a group.

Two of the core concepts of the Creativity and Social Influences courses are that although all artists are creative, creativity does not have to involve the arts directly; and creativity is human as opposable thumbs. Students in these classes spend varying amounts of time absorbing these concepts, after which they free themselves by recognizing they, too, have creative abilities. For students who have experience in the arts, what they learn reinforces their personal understanding of human creative potential. For students who believe they are not creative, what they learn is eye-opening and exciting to observe.

In Creativity: Improvisation, as in other versions of the class, a third of the grade is based on group activities in class which explore different aspects of creativity and individual exercises done outside of class and reported in journals. Students in Creativity: Improvisation also keep a journal of their response to both participating in and observing other students in improvisational exercises and games across the semester.

This report will use power points reinforcing concepts covered in the course; anecdotes and comments from both students who completed the course and faculty and staff members who served as judges; and suggestions for ways to apply this experience in either an academic or extracurricular context.