

EDUC 1001.02 Improvisation and Learning

Kevin Leander, Associate Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning, Peabody College; Matthew Redd, Member of Music City Improv; Sam Tanner, Assistant Professor, Literacy Education, Penn State University (Guest Instructor)

T 4:15-7:00pm (one 45-min. session: 1/13; four 165 min. sessions: 1/24, 1/31, 2/21, 2/28; one 105-min. session: 3/14)

Course Description

In this course, we will explore the improvisational dimensions of learning. Through improvisational workshops, through reading academic work on improvisation and learning, and through experiments with teaching and learning, we will investigate aspects of learning that often get overlooked in taking classes and cracking books. Much of how we respond to everyday activity, and what we learn from it, is not primarily or merely rational. Learning is also very embodied, full of affect and emotion, and emerges in ways that we cannot predict in advance. We will be concerned with different improvisational dimensions of learning, including personal presence, coordinated group action, making do in the moment, and producing possibilities and meaningful differences in the flow of learning.

This course will address the following questions, among others:

- What does it mean to be “serious” as a student, in terms of how we invest ourselves in personal ways that involve our minds, emotions, and bodies?
- How might we stay open and adaptable to the unpredictable nature of learning, all while being successful to “cover” subjects in traditional ways?
- What does it mean to learn alongside others in ways that do more than simply divide up tasks?
- How do binary ways of thinking get in the way of learning?
- How might we bring joy and surprise into learning?

This course will involve you in both short and long-form improvisation. However you need not have experience in improvisation and/or theater to participate. You will participate in workshops, discussion, and informal performance opportunities in order to consider how improvisational strategies, techniques, and tools might be used across different learning environments. Through discussion, we will contrast improvisational activity to more traditional forms of learning, and also read and discuss how learning and improvisation have been theorized through a selection of texts.

Evaluation

You will be evaluated in the course through your participation and also your completion of a final, multi-media creative project that draws together your interpretation of key themes concerning learning and improvisation.