How to yes-and: Using improvisational games to improv(e) communication, listening, and collaboration techniques in tourism and hospitality education

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A B S T R A C T

Improvisational theater games can foster a space where academics become more aware of their speech and behaviors in order to respond to their environment. This study, informed by self-efficacy theory, explores how improvisation workshops potentially help individuals feel confident about their work and improv(e) their collaborative learning environments. Faculty and graduate students participated in an improvisational workshop at an academic conference. Based on attendees' survey responses and follow-up phone interviews, the improvisation workshop provided tools to help participants become confident teachers, communicators, and leaders. Thus, learning improvisational techniques can foster a paradigm shift in designing and experiencing higher education.

1. Introduction

At times, academics express difficulty communicating their research and ideas to the general public despite their responsibility to do so. Further, the inability of academics to communicate clearly to the public on pressing issues, for example climate change, has contributed to mistrust and misunderstanding (Somerville & Hassol, 2011). Developing skills to communicate research at a level that general audiences can comprehend requires specific practice and training (Brownell, Price, & Steinman, 2013). Additionally, it requires a change of culture within academia where academics are allowed time to learn how to explain their work more clearly to the public and improve their communication techniques (Chappell & Hartz, 1998). This is specifically essential for academics and students in tourism studies, where the "crisis of legitimacy" – defending tourism studies as a legitimate discipline – is of major concern (Caton, 2015). Thus, incorporating improvisational workshops that help academics learn how to communicate can be a great first-step in fostering a paradigm shift to encourage researchers to become comfortable speaking in public and communicating their epistemological views.

Improvisation, or improv, is performing without a script where everything is made up with help from audience suggestions. Improvisation has, as a result, long been recognized as useful means of promoting spontaneity, intuition, empathetic listening, nonverbal communication, ad-libbing, role-playing, risk-taking, team building, creativity, and critical thinking (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Crossan and Sorrenti, 1997; Moshavi, 2001; Sawyer, 2004; Spolin, 1999). However, performing improv requires a learned skill set where improv participants are able to be present, listen carefully, and react with clarity and confidence to their partner in order to

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contribute to the scene. The key is to be open to outlandish ideas and build on them by being mindful and entirely in the moment (Kelly, 2013). Furthermore, theater and improvisation are communal art forms that "require not only spontaneity (*say the first thing that comes into your head)* but also sharing of offers (*Say 'Yes! and … ' to all of your partner's offers*), and generous, mutual support (*make your partner look good*)" (Diggles, 2004, p. 1).

The tenets learned through improv encourages people to support their partners by building their communication and teamwork skills. Hence, improvisation can offer a framework where academics can let go of self-judgment and learn to trust their best, most creative, most confident, authentic self (Hackbert, 2010). Furthermore, improv combines convergent and divergent thinking that helps people manage their own actions and interactions with others (Hadley, 2015). This understanding of managing interactions and conversations can assist students and academics, especially in tourism studies, defend their research and contribute to knowledge production across disciplines.

Including humanities and liberal arts within tourism studies curriculum, as Caton (2015, p. 20) posits, contributes more than "concrete and discrete skills and competencies" and allows for empathy, creativity, imagination, and compassion for students to become critical scholars promoting human development. This skill set allows for students and scholars to defend the "legitimacy" of the field and argue past the ridicule of the field as only being a study of "holidays" and "fun" (Hall, 2005). Hence incorporating improvisational workshops in tourism curriculum in higher education, allows for students to understand human concerns and behaviors, and "for illuminating the complexity of the field" (Caton, 2015, p. 34). Furthermore, the tenets learned with improvisation provides skills for analysis and critical thinking, which is an essential resource across disciplines, but especially, within tourism studies.

Specifically, within tourism and hospitality studies, incorporating improvisational workshops or courses, can potentially help students learn to "think on their feet" and become confident in dealing with high stress or intense situations with customers/visitors once they graduate and enter the workforce. Additionally, by participating in improvisational activities, both faculty and students can become better listeners, understand cultural differences, and become empathetic toward diversity issues (Rossing & Hoffmann-Longtin, 2016). Learning these skills can possibly contribute to how tourism students transition into their industry careers and learn how to interact with diverse cultures and manage difficult customers/tourists. Thus, this study examines the impact of theatrically-based improvisation training on academics' sense of self-efficacy through improvisational workshops. The workshops developed were designed to teach improvisational tenets at four academic national and international conferences in the United States and Canada each lasting between 45 and 90 min.

The major goals learned during the workshops focused on helping participants improve their communication, listening, and collaboration skills. Through a mixed-methodology approach with surveys and follow-up phone interviews, we explored the effects that learning improvisational skills can have on participants' self-efficacy with the following research questions:

1. How did participants view the improv workshops?
2. In what ways did the workshop activities have an effect on participants' perceived self-efficacy?
3. What were the major points/games that participants intended to incorporate to improve self-efficacy?
4. How did the participants' views of the workshops correlate with their perceived self-efficacy and their intention to use improv skills in the future?
5. How do differences exist among participants' responses according to individual characteristics?
6. In what ways did participants experience lasting impressions from the workshop?

We begin the article by offering a brief explanation of the basic principles of improv, examples of improv classes within higher education, and key research on benefits of improv workshops for academics.

2. Context

2.1. Theoretical framework: self-efficacy theory

The study was based generally on human agency and its various self-constructs (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination, autonomy, self-confidence, empowerment, and self-concept) and specifically on self-efficacy theory. Human agency is thought of as the ability of individuals to act on behalf of goals that matter to them (Alkire, 2005), whether those goals are poverty reduction of one's community or a goal to exercise daily. Indeed, the construct of agency is often associated with individual or societal well-being and can include dimensions related to both internal and external circumstances that impede the aim at hand. Within the theory of self-efficacy, one's perceived ability to exert influence over one's own actions or over circumstances that affect one's life, is a key determinant of the motivation, effort level, and perseverance toward a goal. It is "an optimistic sense of personal competence" (Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002, p. 242) that facilitates goal-setting, anticipated outcomes, personal investment, persistence when facing barriers, resilience, and recovery from setbacks (Alkire, 2005).

Alfred Bandura developed empirical methods for exploring self-efficacy in an attempt to create a unifying theory to explain psychological and behavioral changes attained through different methods of treatment (Bandura, 1977). The development of self-efficacy scales continued into the 80s and 90s where researchers worked to distinguish between personal, individual social, and collective social types of efficacy (Alkire, 2005; Bandura, 2000) as well as tested the "universal nature" of perceived self-efficacy across cultures (Schwarzer & Born, 1997; also see other works of Ralf Schwarzer). It should be noted that constructs of agency are valued in individualistic cultures and/or post-material societies where materials needs are met (Alkire, 2005). Likewise, individual

self-efficacy and collective self-efficacy hold varying value within cultures along an individualistic – collective continuum (Klassen, 2004). Because this study takes place in North America, the scale items adapted from previous studies were deemed relevant; more detail on the survey instrument follows in the methods section. Additionally, it is commonly understood that individuals cannot hold mastery within all subjects and all realms of their life, therefore one may have a high perceived self-efficacy in organizational tasks, for example, but a lower sense of self-efficacy in interpersonal relationships. However, at times a "spillover" effect can occur whereby self-efficacy in one domain can foster self-efficacy in another (Alkire, 2005) or certain sub-skills may exist that govern different "spheres of activity" thereby providing a feeling of self-efficacy across unrelated domains (Bandura, 2006, p. 308).

Self-efficacy has increasingly been explored both in community-based tourism development (Kline, 2017; McGehee, Kline, & Knollenberg, 2014) and academic tourism settings (Bui, So, Kwek, & Rynne, 2017; Mei, Zhan, Fong, Liang, & Ma, 2016), as well as within the context of tourist decision-making (Hung & Petrick, 2012) or the effects of travel on one's confidence (Kakoudakis, McCabe, & Story, 2017). Of the four, it is least often explored within tourism academia. Using a pre-post design, Bui et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy was significant in predicting the performance of domestic tourism students in Australia, however not among international tourism students visiting during the test period. And in a study focused on improving tourism students' entrepreneurial intention, Mei et al. (2016) concluded that universities have a role in creating entrepreneurial atmospheres, by focusing on enhancing students' *self-efficacy* and creating policies that help develop entrepreneurial intention. There was no literature found that addressed self-efficacy among hospitality and tourism faculty or staff within the university setting. The current study therefore begins to address a gap by focusing on a sample of professionals who work within an academic setting – and their perceived self-efficacy during and as a result of a workshop teaching improvisational skills.

2.2. Understanding improvisation

Improvisational (improv) theater games can foster a space where people become more aware of their own speech, body, and behaviors in order to observe, listen, and respond to their environment. There are four major tenets of improvisation which formed the foundation of the workshops facilitated in this study to ensure that everyone felt supported and welcomed: 1. Must Agree; 2. Yes-And; 3. Make Statements; 4. There Are No Mistakes. These principles came from Tina Fey's book, *Bossypants* (2011), and helped participants learn how to listen, communicate, and creatively think by participating in improvisation theater games.[1]

Tenet # 1: You Must Agree. The first tenet of the workshop revolves around the concept of "agreeing." Introducing the concept of "agreement" opens a space for an idea to grow and forces people to let go of their egos. Participants learn how to respect what their partner has created and relinquish being right. Thus, participants practice saying "yes" and agree to whatever scene or idea their partner created. However, learning how to agree or how to say yes is step one. Learning how to say, "yes-and" is step two, and the most important principle within improvisation.

Tenet # 2: Say Yes-And. This is the "Golden Rule" of improvisation (Gesell, 1997). Participants learn how to agree, but also, learn how to contribute. Learning how to say, "yes-and" helps individuals build upon people's ideas in a supportive way and boost creativity and innovation (Diggles, 2004). In a culture where the default answer is no, in order to avoid risk and possibility of failure, incorporating a yes-and mindset allows for a fast pace, energetic, forward momentum. This process harnesses the power of collaboration where participants contribute to and support the group's activity (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Koppett, 2001).

Tenet # 3: Make Statements. Speaking in statements, instead of apologetic questions, helps participants be part of the solution, whatever the problem is. Instead of asking hard questions, improv helps participants become confident so that they can set a direction for others to follow. Making statements helps to create a path where everyone works together to fix the problem instead of contributing to the chaos.

Tenet # 4. There Are No Mistakes. Within improv, there are no mistakes, only opportunities. Participants learn how to increase their flexibility and comfort level with the unknown in order to be willing to take risks. This allows for a space where participants learn how to manage change and respond decisively to unanticipated challenges. Thus, improv is about moving forward in order to create something novel and unexpected. These tenets presented by Fey (2011) aligns with and contributes toward the six goals implemented in the workshops used in this study:

1. Build communication & team work
2. Increase confidence
3. Prepare for the unexpected
4. Practice being uncomfortable & develop self-awareness
5. Learn how to yes-and!
6. Learn how to listen empathetically and actively

Participating in such games encourages academics to communicate directly both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, learning to be more extemporaneous can potentially transform academics to teach and present in a confident manner where they don't feel the need to follow a script, which in turn, results in an audience-focused presentation. Improv allows academics to "*yes-and*" a scene, transforming how they observe their environment and communicate while engaging audiences (e.g. students, conference attendees, faculty, tourists/visitors) in a way that is approachable, creative, and playful (Hackbert, 2010). Thus, participants who

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[1] Tina Fey, actor, director, and writer, started her career at the Second City where she practiced and performed improvisation.

attended the workshops learned skills to help them achieve these goals in addition to learning how to build trust, stay present, promote creative problem solving, and think on their feet through several improv theater games facilitated by the first author.

2.3. Improv and academics

Despite improv's growing recognition as a training space to improve communication, enhance connection with audiences, and ease stress in public speaking situations, only a handful of studies have explored the topic of improv as a body of techniques to improve feelings of competency among academics. For example, in 2012, LaPolice examined improv's effect on primary and secondary teachers' self-efficacy and found that:

The most dramatic shift occurred in the areas of the teachers' ability to implement alternative teaching strategies and the teachers' sense of how much they could do to get students to believe they could do well in school. The participants who seemed to benefit the most from the training were the ones who had the most extensive involvement in the study (p. 88–89).

LaPolice struggled with getting teachers to participate in the free improvisational workshops, however expressed that those who completed the workshops did receive insightful ways to help improve their teaching and communication skills. Additionally within the context of higher education, a limited amount of research exists and pertains mainly to business disciplines.

Huffaker and West (2005) worked with undergraduate students in their course titled "The Power of Soul and Spirit in Business." Within this Business course, students were introduced to improv to help them achieve three objectives:

(a) to build community and encourage risk taking to create an environment conducive to learning, (b) to facilitate experiential learning about key course themes, and (c) to provide a dynamic alternative to traditional classroom discussion, capitalizing on creative, nonlinear expression and idea exchange (Huffaker & West, 2005, p. 854).

From their analysis of their students' midterms and surveys, they found that using improv allowed for risk-tolerance, creativity, an energized atmosphere, and a playful dynamic amongst the students. Another example of including improv in coursework came from Aylesworth (2008, p. 114) who included an "improv mindset" in his marketing communication class for graduate students. He summarized the success of his experiment by stating:

The overly aggressive student learns the value of supporting the rest of the class and that steamrolling is not productive. The shy student learns confidence and understands the importance of each contribution, no matter how small. The unprepared student must acknowledge that he is unable to contribute to a successful discussion without knowing what has happened before. The reluctant class sees that everyone is supporting everyone else, and that the value of the discussion is dependent on everyone's contribution. Finally, mistakes are recognized as opportunities to expand the discussion in novel directions (p. 114).

The improv mindset can work within disciplines other than Business and should be tested to see what differences/similarities students and faculty have when it comes to incorporating improv techniques. Thus, within the current study, we explore several disciplines, including hospitality and tourism, where students and faculty learn the "improv mindset" and tenets.

Tribe (2002) posited that tourism curriculum should include "crucial components" that help form the "the philosophical practitioner" who "will be able to sell themselves in the market place as productive employees" (p. 354). Adopting characteristics of the "philosophical practioner" empowers students to recognize the "partiality of the world of operations and technical problem solving" (p. 349) in addition to promoting communicative rationality for decision making. Within hospitality and tourism, students are learning techniques to deal with unruly guests and interactions where improv can help them think on their feet and be prepared for the unexpected. Additionally, Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) found that tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and service expenditures increased with the level of co-creation that existed within their experiences. Thus, including improvisational guidelines into tourism and hospitality curriculum can help with personal transferable skills, that include flexibility, that helps with work effectiveness (Cooper & Shepherd, 1997). Lastly, as suggested by Tribe (2002), adapting tourism curriculum where students are "able to sell themselves in the market place as productive employees" can be facilitated through skills acquired through improv games including role-playing.

More and more educational institutions are seeing the value in incorporating either classes or workshops immersed in improvisational skills that help students and faculty embrace the unknown and think swiftly when delivering their research and lectures (Patel, 2014). For instance, The Center for Communicating Science at the State University of New York at Stony Brook is offering improv classes and workshops to students and faculty across its campus. Actor Alan Alda (best known for the television series M*A*S*H) founded the center in 2009 consisting of improvisational theater techniques training people at over 60 universities across the country (Basken, 2013). One goal of the center is to help scientists learn to speak plainly to a lay audience and learn how to be spontaneous when communicating (Patel, 2014). Valeri Lantz-Gefroh, a lecturer and improv coordinator at Stony Brook explained:

It doesn't matter how much information is in your head. What matters is whether the other person is staying with you in that moment, because if they're not, you've lost the conversation, there is no longer a connection, and you have reverted into lecture mode (Patel, 2014, paragraph 19).

The Center advocates for improv techniques that help assist graduate students to listen better, to think more quickly, and to be comfortable with the concept of failure.

The University of California at Irvine also adopted improv classes to assist graduate students. For instance in 2013, Drama 227 was offered to graduate students to help them explain their research and knowledge base. The class helped students find innovative

ways to connect with the audience while defending their dissertations as well as increase confidence in job interviews. Furthermore, foreign graduate students strengthened their ability to speak English and overcame fears of public speaking. Additionally, Massachusetts Institute of Technology provided improv workshops to their faculty and teaching assistants to help them become better teachers in the classroom (MIT, 2017). Likewise, the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University offered a course as well as intensive workshop on business and managerial improvisation to their MBS students (Berk, 2009). Several other institutions such as The Pennsylvania State University and Virginia Tech University have invited instructors to lead improvisational workshops to help their faculty and staff. Lastly, the University of Tennessee recently adopted an Improv(e) You! course using improvisation theater games to help first year honors students polish their professional development skills. However, even with the increase of improvisation classes and workshops within higher education, the benefits of these skills are not always easily measured.

3. Methods

A mixed-method approach was used to design this study that included a survey instrument (quantitative and open ended questions) and in-depth semi-structured phone interview questions (qualitative). We chose this approach to effectively answer the research questions to help achieve the research purposes and aims (Creswell, 2014). During 2016, the first author facilitated an improvisational workshop at four higher education academic national and international conferences (primarily Hospitality, Tourism, Education, and Geography disciplines) in the United States and Canada.[2] The workshops ranged from 45 to 90 min and were attended by a total of 95 faculty and graduate students from academic institutions across the world. After each workshop, the first author distributed a two-page survey that 47 (49.5%) attendees completed. Additionally, approximately eight months after the workshop, six participants were interviewed via phone by the first author to explore which techniques they were using inside and outside their classrooms.

3.1. Survey design and data analysis

The survey included three sections. The first section consisted of six open-ended questions regarding the participant's view of the workshop that were adapted from a doctoral dissertation entitled *Effects of Improvisation Techniques in Leadership Development* (Tabaee, 2013):

1. Why did you choose to participate in this workshop?
2. Now that you've completed the workshop, what surprised you?
3. Based on this workshop, what changes, if any, would you make to classroom activities? Please briefly explain why.
4. Based on this workshop, what changes, if any, would you make to everyday work environment (outside the classroom)? Please briefly explain why.
5. What was your favorite improv activity that you did in the workshop?
6. What was the most significant learning outcome for you?

In the second section, participants were asked to rate their perception of the workshop and the skills/techniques practiced during it. These questions were adapted from several established instruments including the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale* (Rosenberg, 1965), *Generalized Self-Efficacy scale* (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction & Frustration Scale [Work Domain]* (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Several items within this section were also adapted from Tabaee (2013).

Self-determination theory suggests three universal psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). One question related to feelings of competence was pulled from the *Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction & Frustration Scale* [Work Domain] (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Self Determination Theory, n.d.). The *Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale* (Rosenberg, 1965) contributed two items to the instrument; the original version of the scale provided response options of Strongly agree, Agree, and Disagree. Five items were developed from the *Generalized Self-Efficacy scale*, originally published in English in 1995 by Schwarzer and Jerusalem. Whereas the original scale offered 4 response options (1 = Not at all true; 2 = Hardly true; 3 = Moderately true; 4 = Exactly true), all of our adapted questions used a 6-point continuum (1 = Strongly disagree and 6 = Strongly agree). To estimate participants' intention for future behavior, a question was included to measure likeliness to use improv skills toward the end of various outcomes. Table 1 breaks down the source of each survey item within the second section of the instrument.

Scale items were grouped according to theme and tailored to the domain of study (Bandura, 2006), i.e. the academic profession. The first set was about the workshop event and how it made the participant feel. The second and third set related to benefits of the workshop, particularly regarding perceived self-efficacy, however they differed in focus. The second set of statements focused on the participant's relationship to others whereas the third set captured more general intrinsic benefits. The final set of scale items captured the participant's intent to use improv techniques in the future. Lastly, the third section of the survey collected information about the respondent's position at the university, number of years affiliated with current university, number of years affiliated with academia (include years in MS and PhD studies), nationality, ethnicity, gender, and age-range.

SPSS 24.0 was used for statistical analyses; Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, *t*-test, and ANOVA were used. Because self-

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[2] The primary researcher is a trained Improvisational Workshop facilitator who completed improvisational classes in 2014. She also performs weekly with her improv comedy troupe and facilitates professional and academic workshops.

Table 1

Adapted and original survey items.

Adapted survey question	Original scale item	Source
The improvisational skills workshop ….		
benefited me personally	On a scale of 1–6, how did developing improvisational skills benefit you personally?	1
made me aware of my listening skills	On a scale of 1–6, how did developing improvisational skills make you aware of your listening skills?	1
made me aware of how quickly I trust others	On a scale of 1–6, how did developing improvisational skills make you aware of how quickly you trust others?	1
made me feel stressed as I was participating in it	On a scale of 1–10, circle the amount of stress you feel now.	1
helped me to feel competent in the moment	When I am at work, I feel competent to achieve my goals.	2
I think improvisational skills could …		
benefit me in my ability to lead others	On a scale of 1–6, how do you think improvisational skills could benefit you in your ability to lead others?	1
benefit me in working with students	On a scale of 1–6, how do you think improvisational skills could benefit you in working with others in your organization?	1
benefit me in working with colleagues	Same as above	1
benefit me in working with supervisors	Same as above	1
increase a positive attitude toward myself	I take a positive attitude toward myself	3
increase the feeling that I am able do things as well as most other people	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	3
I think improvisational skills could …		
increase my confidence to deal efficiently with unexpected events	I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	4
remain calm when facing difficulties	I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.	4
increase my reliance on my own coping abilities	Same as above	4
help me solve difficult workplace problems	I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	4
handle whatever comes my way	I can usually handle whatever comes my way.	4
increase my personal growth		
Future behavior		
Using a scale of 1–6 where *1 = Not at all likely* and *6 = Extremely likely*, please indicate your likeliness to use improv skills for each of the following:		
to connect with students? (if applicable)		
to improve listening		
to improve collaboration		
to improve creativity		
to help with interviews		

Note: 1 = Effects of Improvisation Techniques in Leadership Development (Tabaee, 2013); 2 = Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction & Frustration Scale - Work Domain (Deci & Ryan, 2000); 3 = Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965); 4 = Generalized Self-Efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

efficacy scales do not measure specific behavior change, a follow up interview was conducted with a sample of the participants roughly eight months after the workshops. Interviews were used to collect detailed and nuanced data regarding the participants' impressions and activities.

Qualitative analysis was used for the open-ended questions on the survey instrument as well as for the phone interviews. During the first cycle of coding, we individually analyzed and coded the questions from each participant (Saldaña, 2016) using In Vivo and Value codes. Next, we grouped together any codes that we felt were similar in order to eliminate any redundancy. After this step, we finalized the codes and identified themes establishing thematic parameters and frequency within analytic memos (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013) for a thematic analysis.

3.2. Phone interviews

Participants who provided their email address after the workshop were invited to discuss their improvisational workshop experiences. From a total of 20 invitations sent, six volunteered to participate in a phone interview that ranged between 30 and 60 min (Table 2).

Table 2

Phone participant information.

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Conference
White	Female	29	Tourism
White	Male	34	Hospitality
Black	Female	39	Hospitality
White	Female	41	Geography
White	Female	45	Geography
White	Male	38	Geography

The questions that guided the interview were as follows: *What improv skills, if any, have you incorporated inside or outside your classroom; In what ways has taking an improvisational workshop helped with your listening skills; In what ways has taking an improv workshop helped with your confidence/self-worth?* After each phone call, the primary researcher transcribed the conversation and returned the transcription for member checking (Saldaña, 2016). Three major themes were created (Instilling a "yes-and" mindset; Listening to understand – not answer; and Embracing vulnerability) discussed in section 4.3 - Lasting impressions.

4. Findings

The study sample was primarily female (62.2%), White (76.9%), U.S. American (67.5%), and young (between the ages of 20–29; 45.7%). Over half of the participants were tenure-track or tenured faculty (55.6%), another quarter (26.7%) lecturers or adjunct faculty, and 17.8% graduate students. Over one third (38.1%) had been affiliated with academia for less than ten years, half (50.0%) for 10–19 years, and the final 11.9% for 20 years or more.

Three major themes emerged describing why participants chose the improv workshop: personal challenge, improve communication skills, and seemed like a fun alternative workshop. Participants were excited to challenge themselves in a workshop, and more so at a conference, that forced them to go beyond their comfort zone. They were also interested in learning new ways to communicate, learning "new ways to get students engaged," and felt like this workshop could help them achieve these goals. The remainder of the results are arranged according to the research question, interspersing the open and closed ended questions from the survey including section 4.3: Lasting impressions, which corresponds to research question six with the data collected from the phone interviews.

4.1. General impressions of workshop

To answer the first two research questions *How did participants view the improv workshops?* and *Did the workshop activities have an effect on participants' perceived self-efficacy?*, descriptive statistics were examined (Table 3). The participants were very positive about the workshop with 85.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it benefitted them personally. Another large portion (80.9%) stated that the workshop made them aware of their listening skills, and over half agreed/strongly agreed that it made them aware of how quickly they trust others (61.7%) and helped them feel competent in the moment (60.9%). Interestingly, slightly less than one fifth (19.1%) admitted that they felt stressed participating in the workshop.

Table 3
Descriptive results from survey (n = 47).

Survey question	Mean	SD	Disagree* (%)	Slightly disagree (%)	Slightly agree (%)	Agree (%)
The improvisational skills workshop …. (α = .749)						
benefited me personally	5.32	1.02	4.3	2.1	8.5	85.1
made me aware of my listening skills	5.00	1.27	8.5	4.3	6.4	80.9
made me aware of how quickly I trust others	4.64	1.34	10.6	6.4	21.3	61.7
made me feel stressed as I was participating in it	2.89	1.70	46.8	17.0	17.0	19.1
helped me to feel competent in the moment	4.48	1.21	6.5	10.9	21.7	60.9
I think improvisational skills could … (α = .936)						
benefit me in my ability to lead others	4.89	1.37	8.5	4.3	17.0	70.2
benefit me in working with students	5.23	1.16	4.3	2.1	8.5	85.1
benefit me in working with colleagues	4.83	1.37	6.4	12.8	8.5	72.3
benefit me in working with supervisors	4.36	1.50	12.8	14.9	14.9	57.4
increase a positive attitude toward myself	5.04	1.30	6.4	4.3	12.8	76.6
increase the feeling that I am able do things as well as most other people	4.85	1.38	8.5	2.1	19.1	70.2
I think improvisational skills could … (α = .909)						
increase my confidence to deal efficiently with unexpected events	4.98	1.24	4.3	6.4	12.8	76.6
remain calm when facing difficulties	4.74	1.17	4.3	6.4	29.8	59.6
increase my reliance on my own coping abilities	4.72	1.19	4.3	4.3	30.4	60.9
help me solve difficult workplace problems	4.19	1.36	12.8	8.5	36.2	42.6
handle whatever comes my way	4.64	1.05	4.3	8.5	27.7	59.6
increase my personal growth	4.89	1.37	6.4	4.3	21.3	68.1
increase my optimism about workplace dynamics	4.47	1.44	10.6	8.5	27.7	53.2
Using a scale of 1–6 where *1 = Not at all likely* and *6 = Extremely likely*, please indicate your likeliness to use improv skills for each of the following: (α = .874)			**Unlikely**	**Slightly unlikely**	**Slightly likely**	**Likely**
to connect with students? (if applicable)	5.02	1.26	6.4	0.0	10.6	83.0
to improve listening	5.00	1.29	6.4	2.1	19.1	72.3
to improve collaboration	4.85	1.38	6.4	2.1	21.3	70.2
to improve creativity	5.09	1.14	4.3	0.0	17.0	78.7
to help with conference presentations	4.55	1.44	8.5	8.5	31.9	51.1
to help with interviews	4.38	1.57	15.6	8.9	24.4	51.1

*Note: Disagree = response options 1 and 2; Slightly disagree = 3; Slightly agree = 4; Agree = 5 and 6.

When reflecting on the potential benefits of improv, participants were again very positive. The statements that yielded the highest agreement were "I think improvisational skills could … benefit me in working with students" (85.9%), "… increase my confidence to deal efficiently with unexpected events" (76.6%), "… increase a positive attitude toward myself" (76.6%), "… benefit me in working with colleagues" (72.3%), and "… increase the feeling that I am able do things as well as most other people" (70.2%). When asked about the likeliness to use improv skills in the future, 83% were likely to use it to connect with students, 78.7% to improve creativity, 72.3% to improve listening, and 70.2% to improve collaboration.

Additionally, participants were asked *Now that you've completed the workshop, what surprised you?* Participants said that they were surprised that "Improv is applicable inside and outside the classroom" and could help them to "relieve stress and have fun." Additionally, participants were more "personally aware" and able to "break down barriers." While participating in these workshops, they were able to feel "energized" and left the workshop wanting to "learn more about improv." Most of the participants were a bit "afraid", but felt, after taking the workshop, more confident and empowered to navigate their everyday lives.

Two major themes emerged that were significant learning outcomes for the participants: *improv is easy to integrate in my daily life* and *how to create a supportive environment*. Participants felt that they came out of the workshop feeling more "confident," "self-aware," and able to "get out of their head," and that the workshop provided novel ways to help them navigate life. They felt like the skills learned in the workshop helped them to "pay attention to those around you" and "get beyond personal hang-ups when making a mistake." Furthermore, participants stated that they now having a better "understanding of how we communicate" and are able to "understand cultural differences" more effectively thanks to the improv tenets and skills learned. These two major themes showcased the power of improvisational games and how these games allow people to access deeper parts of themselves that help with focusing on our partners and suspending personal judgment.

Research question three examined the major points and games that participants intended to incorporate to improve self-efficacy. The open-ended questions from the survey were used to address this research question. Specifically, we asked them to explain what changes, if any, they would make to classroom activities, and to explain why. The majority of the participants shared that they will include a "yes-and" mind-set in their classroom. As Rossing and Hoffmann-Longint (2016) posited, improvisational training has the potential to cultivate the creativity and collaboration required to respond more effectively to complex problems. This means, not shooting down a student who may say an incorrect answer or something off-base. Instead, participants learned how to "promote a relaxed atmosphere" where they are actively and empathetically listening to their students and creating a space for creativity and critical thinking.

Additionally, participants noted that they would make changes to their everyday work environment (outside the classroom). Embracing vulnerability, staying present, and seeking out opportunities to take additional improvisational classes, were major themes that emerged from the data. Participants stated that they are more willing to "take risks" and "loosen up" and "be brave" and that it is honorable to show students that being vulnerable is welcomed, and a necessary part of embracing changes inside and outside the classroom. Participants also stated that "being present" was a major element in becoming a "better person" and this included "being patient," "listening better," "focusing on others," and "maintaining better eye contact."

Out of the six to seven games played, the top three games were: "one-word game" (n = 12), "the emotion game" (n = 5), "all the games" (n = 5), and "partner work" (n = 5). The "one-word game" was a story building game where five to six participants lined up in a row and told a collective story, saying one word at a time. This exercise forced the participants to yes-and a scene and truly listen to what was being said. They were able to understand that everyone plays a supporting role and that even "the" or "and" are important words for helping the story make sense. Many of the participants identified as a "Type A personality" and had trouble with not being in control of where the story went. Thus, this game was a challenging exercise where they had to support their peers and work together. The second favorite game played was "the emotion game." With this exercise, participants partnered up and started a random conversation of their choice. Throughout their conversation, the facilitator yelled out different emotions ranging from "sad" to "happy" to "frustrated", where participants had to embody that emotion while staying in the conversation. This game helped participants deal with change and sharpen their ability to read and recognize different emotions people express in conversation. The third favorite game noted were various "partner" games. One example of a partner game was the "I" game. Participants partnered up and were not allowed to use the pronoun "I" during their conversation. This game brought awareness of how much "we" talk about "ourselves." The point being, when we talk with people, to truly listen to what they are saying, stay present, and be active and empathetic listeners.

4.2. Improv and self-efficacy

To address research questions four and five, scale item questions from the survey instrument were combined according to their theme in order to create composite variables according to their theme. However, because of the negative and opposite nature of the item "The improvisational skills workshop made me feel stressed as I was participating in it," it was dropped from the first set of questions. The composite variables were then subject to scale reliability analysis; results are shared in Table 3. The Cronbach's alpha for each set of questions follows: item set relative to the workshop event α = .749, the self-efficacy "external facing" set of questions α = 0.936, general self-efficacy set α = 0.909, and future behavior set, α = 0.874.

Correlations were then run to determine the relationship between each of the composite variables; this analysis related to research question four *Is there correlation between participants' views of the workshops, their perceived self-efficacy, and their intention to use improve skills in the future?* In particular, we were interested in how the workshop event might relate to self-efficacy measures which in turn might relate to intention to use improv skills. We suppose that the perceived feelings of self-efficacy are positive and that participants will want to continue to feel as well as share the positive emotional feedback that they felt in the workshops. All of the composite

Table 4
Correlations between composite variables (n = 47).

Survey question	Workshop event composite	External-facing self-efficacy	General self-efficacy
Workshop event composite			
External-facing self-efficacy	.820		
General self-efficacy	.813	.846	
Future behavior intention	.837	.828	8.45

variables had strong positive correlations with one another (Table 4), thus indicating that the workshop event itself led to positive feelings and the intention to re-create the situation in the future.

To address the fifth research question, *Do differences exist among participants' responses according to individual characteristics?*, differences of groups analyses were performed with each composite variable. There were no significant differences at the $p < .05$ level regarding gender, age ethnicity, nationality, position or academic affiliation (Table 5).

4.3. Lasting impressions

To address the final research question regarding the workshop's lasting impressions, the first author facilitated an in-depth, semi-structured phone interview lasting thirty to sixty-minutes, eight months later, with six participants who completed an improv workshop resulting in three major themes: Instilling a "yes-and" mindset; Listening to understand – not answer; and Embracing vulnerability.

4.3.1. Instilling a "yes-and" mindset
The majority of the participants answered that they continue to use the improv mindset of "yes-and" within their classrooms and interactions with faculty, friends, and family. Saying "yes-and" instilled confidence and comfort with how they communicate with their students and helped to create a relaxed atmosphere where students were not afraid of saying the wrong answer:

Using Yes-and so when students respond in the classroom, I let them know they are on the right track … even if it is not something I was

Table 5
Means and Standard deviations of demographic variables across composite variables (n = 47).

	Workshop event composite variable M (SD)	External facing composite variable M (SD)	General self-efficacy composite variable M (SD)	Future behavior composite variable M (SD)
Gender				
Male (n = 17)	4.66 (0.58)	5.21 (0.79)	5.97 (0.69)	4.98 (0.59)
Female (n = 28)	4.32 (0.84)	4.69 (1.36)	4.44 (1.65)	4.67 (1.28)
Test statistic	$t(42) = 1.427$	$t(43) = 1.432$	$t(42) = 1.684$	$t(37.77) = 1.088*$
Ethnicity				
White (n = 30)	4.44 (0.84)	4.97 (1.05)	4.72 (0.99)	4.82 (0.96)
Non-white (n = 9)	4.51 (0.47)	5.24 (0.57)	4.86 (0.57)	5.19 (0.68)
Test statistic	$t(36) = -0.214$	$t(37) = -0.747$	$t(36) = -0.361$	$t(36) = -1.069$
Nationality				
American (n = 26)	4.44 (0.92)	4.97 (1.29)	4.68 (1.23)	4.90 (1.27)
Nationality other than American (n = 13)	4.51 (0.49)	4.60 (1.07)	4.43 (0.54)	4.68 (0.68)
Test statistic	$t(37) = -0.252$	$t(38) = -0.888$	$t(36.71) = 0.871*$	$t(37) = -0.565$
Age				
20–29 (n = 6)	4.57 (0.56)	4.53 (1.07)	4.43 (0.59)	4.81 (0.51)
30–39 (n = 21)	4.52 (0.68)	4.92 (1.19)	4.67 (1.03)	4.81 (1.15)
40–49 (n = 10)	4.16 (1.01)	4.79 (1.22)	4.57 (1.22)	4.53 (1.19)
50+ (n = 8)	4.53 (0.76)	5.08 (1.43)	4.88 (1.10)	5.06 (0.99)
Test statistic	$F(3, 41) = 0.617$	$F(3, 42) = 0.268$	$F(3, 41) = 0.235$	$F(3, 40) = 0.331$
Position				
Tenured/track (n = 24)	4.34 (0.87)	4.70 (1.26)	4.55 (1.12)	4.42 (1.20)
Lecturer/Adjunct (n = 12)	4.48 (0.67)	4.92 (1.37)	4.83 (1.10)	5.26 (0.82)
Graduate student (n = 8)	4.73 (0.51)	5.23 (0.64)	4.71 (0.66)	5.04 (0.41)
Test statistic	$F(2, 41) = 0.764$	$F(2, 42) = 0.603$	$F(2, 41) = 0.295$	$F(2, 40) = 2.96$
Academic Affiliation				
Less than 10 years (n = 16)	4.55 (0.53)	5.03 (0.96)	4.71 (0.76)	4.93 (0.58)
10 years or more (n = 25)	4.38 (0.92)	4.71 (1.35)	4.53 (1.18)	4.59 (1.31)
Test statistic	$t(39) = -0.688$	$t(40) = -0.884$	$t(39) = 0.542*$	$t(33.951) = 1.11*$

*Equal variances not assumed.

looking for.

Using Yes-And with graduate students when I have meetings with my graduate students. I use Yes-And approach to help them feel like they can be creative.

Additionally, one participant shared that they are, "using ideas of improv to teach or train the skills of a collaborative or co-produced learning environment." Building an atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks and learning how to collaborate helps faculty break down barriers and sustain an inclusive learning environment. This is part of the "yes-and" mindset where co-collaboration is welcomed and encouraged:

Guide it in a way that our knowledge is co-produced and our environment is an inclusive classroom. I use improv to illustrate how collective knowledge is greater than one person's way of thinking.

Spirit of improv … will guide the class in a way that our knowledge is co-produced and our environment is an inclusive classroom.

Inclusive in the mindset of "yes-and" people are encouraged to let go of "being right" and learn to be more of a "team player" (Yorton & Leonard, 2015). Taking the improv workshop allowed for some of the faculty to let go of their egos and learn how to "let loose." Furthermore, one participant stated, "taking this workshop allowed for me to feel like I can be creative in the classroom and gave me freedom to teach creatively." This idea and concept of "letting go of judgement and ego" is crucial within improv and gives people permission to have fun:

I want to create an environment that isn't so serious.

Also, I feel that using improv is a way to redistribute power in the classroom.

I used one of the improv activities we learned in the workshop as an "ice-breaker" the first day of class. Students had to introduce themselves to each other without using the word "I". We discussed the goals of this class through the lens of the exercise. One of the main themes in the class is "place" and challenging our stereotypes about different places, considering different views of the world beyond our own.

Learning how to facilitate and guide lectures and conversations, both with undergraduate and graduate students, can be difficult. However, the participants who learned improvisational techniques felt more equipped to handle difficult subjects and feel confident with *performing* in the classroom in order to build a creative and collaborative learning environment. They appreciated the "yes-and" approach where they felt equipped to open up space for difficult dialogues by agreeing with their students, then contributing to the discussion.

4.3.2. Listening to understand-not answer

Leonard and Yorton (2014) argued that performers of improv must necessarily be attentive to the entirety of what their collaborators say, "which contrasts with a common (and largely unconscious) practice in daily life of passively waiting for the chance to utter predetermined monologues or defend one's fixed ideas" (p. 54). More generally, Yorton posited that this amounts to having "to listen to understand as opposed to just listening merely to respond" (2014, p. 65). Thus, teaching participants *how to listen* can be a challenge. However, the participants were excited to learn new techniques to listen to non-verbal and verbal cues and shared ways of how they are incorporating better listening personally and with their students:

Instead of cutting students off, I listen to them finish their thoughts/ideas I'm actually listening to them instead of waiting for them to stop talking so I can answer them. I'm not forming a response in my head … I'm actually listening to them talk/communicate.

For me in the context of the classroom, has caused me to reflect more consciously. More so, listen attentively to what the student says and build on that. This involves active listening in order to probe the student or build on their words to help produce something better than stopping the conversation. The workshop also helped me to reflect on my classroom style of collaborative learning and figure out how to be more mindful.

I always struggled with listening since it isn't really where I want it to be. I am, though, careful with myself and my self-awareness. I feel like after taking this workshop, it is easier to listen to students.

[The workshop] made me realize what I was saying and I focused in on what others were saying too. It also forced me to listen to other people and now I'm more cognizant of what I'm saying and what others are saying.

I focus a bit more on the non-verbals from students. For instance, when a student says that he/she needs to leave early but does not directly says they have to leave early … I can notice their non-verbal's like [their] body language.

Learning how to listen can sound like a simple task. However, as mentioned by Leonard and Yorton (2014), most people are waiting for the other person to stop talking so they can interject their opinion. However, with improvisational games focused on listening, participants learned *how* to listen to both verbal and non-verbal cues which helped them to actively and empathetically listen to what their partner was saying. This can assist with miscommunication and potentially lead to fewer arguments and misunderstandings.

4.3.3. Embracing vulnerability

Learning how to be vulnerable and incorporate vulnerability within the classroom was another major theme amongst the interviewees. They shared that they would like to create an environment that feels more like a community where students are able to "step out of their comfort zones." For instance, some of the participants shared several accounts of how the workshop taught them to not be as self-conscious, be comfortable with being uncomfortable, and aware of their environment:

My own sense of confidence in the classroom has improved.

I feel more relaxed and confident in front of crowds. I don't get as tripped up if I don't answer something right.

I'm more confident with my physicality and where I am at in the room … I'm more content.

One participant shared that they want to encourage their students to take risks and learn how to use vulnerability to their advantage:

After taking this workshop I felt empowered to use similar strategies in the classroom. I already do some weird and experimental stuff in the classroom, so using improvisational games and techniques provided a particular framework which has been very generative for diving in and consciously saying how improv will inform this classroom. For instance, on day one, we do some weird and awkward games and this helps the class feel empowered because the worst thing imaginable was already accomplished! We laughed and produced something better than producing it on our own.

Improv teaches people to learn how to let go of self-judgement and become confident innovators. The concept of embracing vulnerability can potentially help academics learn to take risks and embrace a culture of failure. Perhaps, sharing stories and experiences around failure can help students realize that everyone makes mistakes – but just like Fey eloquently stated, "there is no such thing as mistakes, just happy accidents" (Fey, 2011, p. 86). Thus, learning how to embrace these *happy little accidents* in order to adapt, be vulnerable, and learn to move forward is essential.

5. Discussion

The value of "play" is a crucial element of improvisation. When people are having fun, they push their limits, but they also relax and are able to communicate better. Creating a playful atmosphere allows people to investigate how well they can work with the world around them. Most importantly, improvisation can put people in touch with their own unique voice fostering a confident and creative professional. Thus, the workshops in this study facilitated an alternative environment to help the participants let go of their egos and let loose. Within the surveys and phone interviews, the participants stated that they are open to using these games in their classes and appreciative of the techniques learned that helped them become more confident, present, and open-minded.

Understanding *how* to play is a crucial part in teaching and becoming a holistic person (Quick, Byrd-Bredbenner, White, Colby & Greene, 2014; Russ, 2014, pp. 45–62; Van Leeuwen & Westwood, 2008). As adults grow, there are fewer and fewer incidences for opportunities to *play*. Thus, learning how to include and implement these improvisational games allows for students and faculty to create an environment that facilitates spaces conducive to alternative ways of learning, including a "yes-and" where students feel empowered and not judged for making mistakes. Participating in improvisational workshops, classes, and activities helps to build relationships and make stronger connections where people learn to listen empathetically and be able to yes-and any issue thrown their way.

Specifically, within hospitality and tourism, embracing a culture informed by improvisational techniques and skills, can help faculty and students become better listeners, understand cultural differences, and be more empathetic toward diversity issues. The hospitality and tourism industry presents unique opportunities to understand new cultural experiences for both employees and the tourists. The very nature of tourism experiences is co-creation, therefore improv provides the tools and confidence to approach the act of co-creation with confidence and poise (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Thus, it is important for hospitality and tourism faculty to be trained to teach their students how to enhance their interactions with tourists of different cultures and appreciate and accommodate people with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Implementing improvisational techniques into the hospitality and tourism curriculum, in addition to training faculty within improv techniques, can help to address these concerns.

5.1. Academic implications

While the literature is scant regarding the use of improv to assist academics in their confidence, and thereby their communication skills, there are a few places where comparison can be drawn. The contrast to the LaPolice dissertation is most evident as he was working with teachers to enhance their feeling of competence with teaching. Similar to his findings, the participants in our study felt confident to employ new teaching strategies and they felt more equipped to help students to feel comfortable participating in class (LaPolice, 2012). Further, Huffaker and West (2005) used improv with their students to encourage risk taking, build an environment conducive to learning, and encourage experiential learning. After taking the workshop, the participants in this study in turn used improv for these same purposes. Finally, like Aylesworth (2008), our participants stated that they tried to use improv to get their students more comfortable with making mistakes within the classroom. By facilitating a sense of self-efficacy for participants, the workshops could be viewed as an alternative "world" or space where faculty and students have the ability to create their own realities and substantiate positive parts of their identity. The self-efficacy gained through the workshops seem to give way to the desire for additional positive feedback, fostering a self-reinforcing tendency to incorporate similar workshops into their own curricula. Since

very little has been investigated specific to hospitality and tourism academe, this study provides a foundation for future investigations into our field.

Finally, this study advances the research on general, personal self-efficacy by developing a new combination of self-efficacy measures and applies the measurement of self-efficacy after an improv workshop intervention (Bandura, 2006). As evidenced by the data, a spillover effect (Alkire, 2005) seemed to occur among the participants whereby self-efficacy in the professional domain fostered self-efficacy outside the classroom. Much more research on a spill over into other life domains is needed particularly because the self-efficacy construct is so complex. Additionally, longer term studies are needed to explore the sustaining nature of improv, including the effects of participating in follow up workshops, as mentioned by one participant in an interview six months after the initial workshop.

5.2. Practical implications

Improv is not about you personally, but your ensemble/team. Thus, using improv greatly enhances students' and instructors' collaborative classroom experience. In particular, its value in creating an environment conducive to risk-taking, creativity, collaboration, and support fosters an attitude open to exploration and exchange. Evident through this study, participating in improvisational workshops provides tools to help instructors and students become confident learners, teachers, communicators, and leaders that contribute toward a very positive and creative classroom. Thus, learning improvisational techniques can foster a paradigm shift in how students and instructors are designing and experiencing higher education.

In this era of rapidly changing student demography, fluctuating fiscal economy, and a myriad of other social/cultural concerns, the professoriate of the twenty-first century will continue to face diverse challenges and opportunities (Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010). However, with the implementation of improvisational classes and workshops, administrators, faculty, and students can adapt quickly and become comfortable with change. Thanks to the tenets learned through improv including, preparing students and faculty to face failure, staying in the moment, and listening empathetically, helps to ease anxiety and stress caused by pressures of higher education. Hopefully, the skills learned through these workshops can potentially influence students to become more understanding of diversity and advocate for inclusion opportunities in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Lastly, the improvisational workshops were only offered to faculty and PhD students in a North American setting. To gain a better understanding of using improv internationally, workshops offered beyond a North American setting could shed a different perspective. Additionally, it might be interesting to measure a longitudinal study starting with first year undergraduate students to see how, if any, improvisational classes helped to build soft skills and self-efficacy over the course of their tenure in college (and beyond).

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