

Distilling your message: hands-on communication practices from the Alda Center

Teaching Arts Luncheon
January 25, 2019

I. Participants in the *Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science Core* May Faculty Workshop, May 30-31, 2018:

Jess Bacal (Narratives
Project/Wurtele Ctr)
Michael Barresi (BIO)
Alex Barron (ENV)
Joanne Benkley (CEEDS)*
David Bickar (CHM)
Molly Falsetti-Yu (SPN)
Nat Fortune (PHY)
Suzanne Gottschang (ANT + EAS)

Katherine Halvorsen (MTH)
Ginny Hayssen (BIO)
Valerie Joseph (AEMES)
Patricia Mangan (ANT)
Naila Moreira (Jacobson Ctr)
Amy Rhodes (GSC)
Susan Sayre (ECO)
Greg White (GOV)

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II. Activities planned for today's luncheon:

Clown Bow: Group into pairs, A and B. Count 1-2-3, alternating A and B. Any mistake or break in rhythm, *both* A and B throw your hands up and say "Ta-da!" Get more complicated: replace "2" with a hand clap. Then replace "3" with a foot stomp. Takeaway: own your mistakes, surf the uncertainty, think on your feet. Mistake = mental reset, an opportunity to take a breath and be creative.

See-me, don't-see-me: Divide each table into two groups, A and B. A's, sit at table as if you do NOT want to be seen, while B's observe. Then A's sit at table as if you DO want to be seen. Then A's and B's switch roles and repeat. Discuss. Takeaway: Good communicators need to read their audience's body language and other cues, and adapt their message accordingly, and be conscious of their own body language.

Yes, and...!: Group into pairs, A and B. A starts a story or conversation with a single sentence or statement. B replies with "No, ..." and adds to the conversation, etc. Continue for several turns. Then start again but use "Yes, but ..." to start each turn. Finally, use "Yes, and ..." to start each turn. Takeaway: notice the difference in the feeling and tone of the interaction when using "Yes, and ...". Try this in any interaction, especially difficult or contentious ones.

One-minute explanation: Group into pairs, A and B. A gives a 60-second talk about a project or issue in which they are personally involved. B listens, reflects back the core of the message and any feedback – positive comments first, then suggestions for improvement. What would you remember most the next day? A does 60-second talk again, with more feedback from B. Then A and B switch roles. Takeaway: Distill your message; avoid jargon; consider your audience; use personal story and emotion to connect.

III. Resources

Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science

<https://www.aldacenter.org>

Improvisations for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques (Third Edition) by Viola Spolin (1999, Northwestern University Press)

AAAS Communicating Science Workshops

<https://www.aaas.org/programs/communicating-science>