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# Developing Therapeutic Alliance Through Improvisation: A State-of-the-Art Review for the Speech-Language Pathologist

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# Developing Therapeutic Alliance Through Improvisation: A State-of-the-Art Review for the Speech-Language Pathologist

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 **The Wellness Group**  
Voice, Speech, and Swallowing, LLC



Portland State  
UNIVERSITY

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# Disclosures



Ryan DePauw, BS

Financial:

- None

Deanna Britton PhD, CCC SLP

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Aaron Ziegler PhD, CCC SLP

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- 2022 ASHA Invited Speaker

Non-Financial:

- Former Actor

# Study Objective



Examine the potential application and benefit of theatrical improvisation core principles and skills in healthcare generally and to the discipline of speech-language pathology as a tool for forging therapeutic alliance.

# What is Speech-Language Pathology?



Field of rehabilitation where the practitioner, a speech-language pathologist, works to prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social-communication, cognitive-communication, voice, fluency, feeding and swallowing disorders in children and adults.

(American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). Scope of practice in speech-language pathology [Scope of Practice]. Available from [www.asha.org/policy/](http://www.asha.org/policy/))



*Photo courtesy of author*

# Therapeutic Alliance

- Dynamic element of intervention
- Affects treatment adherence
- Influences therapy outcomes
- Comprised of:
  1. Getting to know the person
  2. Developing shared therapy expectations
  3. Establishing role boundaries and goal ownership
  4. Effective responsiveness



*Clinically, therapists should engage in cognitive reflexivity to challenge personal biases (Lawton et al., 2018)*

# Theatrical Improvisation...



- Interactive and experiential learning
- Does not require “talent”
- Organic experience of environment and involvement with it on an *intellectual, physical, and intuitive* level.
- Comprised of 7 aspects of spontaneity
- Often taught in workshop form
  - Orientation → Exercises of differing foci → Improv performance

*“Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves.”* Viola Spolin

(Spolin, 1999)

# Methods



## Eligibility Criteria

- Original research
- Academic Journal
- English
- Medical Improv Intervention

## Info Sources

- 6 Academic Databases

## Search Strategy

- **Terms:** “clinical (improv)isation,” “medical (improv)isation,” “applied (improv)isation,”

## Selection Process

- Utilized Prisma 2020 flowchart for systematic reviews
- ***14 studies met criteria for full-text review and were included for qualitative analysis***

## Data Collection Process

- Utilized standardized data collection form



# Results: Studies' Objectives



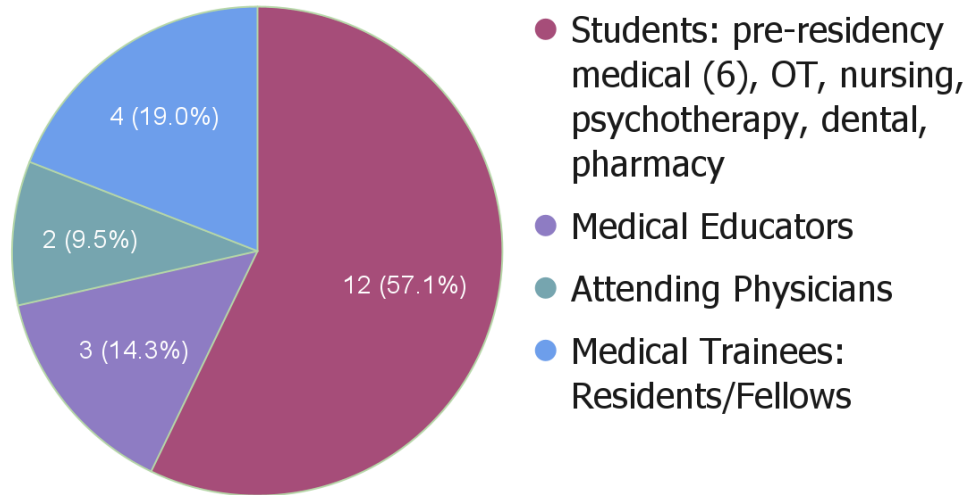
- **8 studies:** to study the effect medical improvisation has on therapeutic presence and/or communication skills.
- **4 Studies:** *Increase empathy/empathetic communication in medical students.*
- **1 study:** *to develop an instrument called the Empathy and Clarity Rating Scale for measuring communication elements used by doctors to test the effectiveness of medical improv.*
- **1 study:** *to provide medical educators with tools to teach communication concepts.*

# Results: Target Population



## Intervention Populations

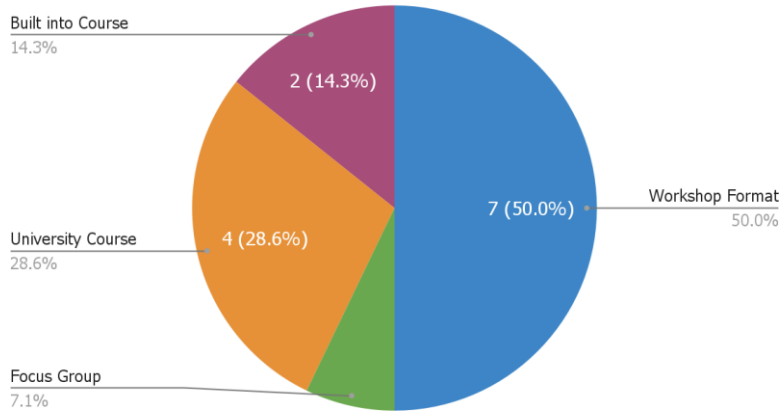
Numbers of Studies Including these Populations by Level of Education



# Results: Intervention Characteristics



## Medical Improv Service Delivery



- Workshops (7 Studies)
- Focus Group (1 Study)
- University Courses (4 Studies)
- Built into larger courses (2 studies)

\*None of the studies included Speech-Language Pathologists

# Results: Theatrical Improvisation Activities



- Rant\*
- Headlines
- But vs. And
- Mirroring\*
- Time-Traveler\*
- Ta-Da\*
- Drawing Game\*
- “Yes, and..”



- Late to work
- Hitchhiker
- Status Cards
- Gibberish Interview
- Frozen Picture
- Ball Toss
- 4-Headed Genius



\* most used games by doctors in practice in 3 month post-survey follow up

# Results: Medical Improvisation Goals



*To name a few....*

- Create challenging cases
- Stimulate reflective thinking
- Fostering relationships
- Provide/gather information
- Listen and watch intently
- Help patients make decisions and support emotions
- Understanding (patients') perspectives/emotions
- Communicating that understanding

## Results of the Individual Studies- Synthesis



- More presence in therapy (includes active listening, more observant)+++++++ (7)
- Improved awareness of Emotions (including empathy) ++++++ (6)
- Improved communication skills+++++ (5)



# Clinical Implications



- Experiential learning in safe spaces carries over into real-world clinical experience.
- New avenues of collaboration and creativity.
- Deeper connection to intuition, allowing for stronger therapeutic bonds.
- Integration of active listening skills into therapy- more presence with patients and clients.
- Increased levels of animation, calmness, relaxation, personal qualities- makes patient feel more at ease

# Proposed Integrated Solutions



Interactive and experiential workshops, courses, and trainings could be developed at all levels of training for speech language pathologists in-person and online or a combination thereof:

## Who?

- Undergraduate/Post-Bac students
- Graduate Level Clinicians
- Licensed SLPs

## What?

- Use improv exercises that worked for other healthcare professionals such as Rant and/or Mirroring to target skills garnered from the studies that relate to the field of Speech-Language Pathology.



# Conclusions



- Therapeutic Skills categories in which showed highest proportion of self-reported qualitative data included ***more presence in therapy***, ***improved awareness of emotion***, and ***improved communication skills***.
- Therapeutic Alliance is an integral aspect of treatment and may benefit from the core elements improvisation such as games, role playing, and playing to an audience.
- Based on these studies, medical improvisation for speech-language pathologists may be a valuable tool to sharpen clinical skills and forge therapeutic alliance.

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