

Book Review – Unscripted Learning – Using Improv Activities Across the K-8 Curriculum

Authors Carrie Lobman and Matthew Lundquist

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Everyone these days talks about the necessity of “being out of the box”- so much so that it has become almost a cliché. In Keith Sawyer’s foreword to “Unscripted Learning” he points out that everyone from Washington pundits, to CEOs of large corporations have joined the dialogue on the importance of creativity and have even produced influential reports designed to legislate innovation such as “Innovate America.” (2005). Missing in this conversation is the question of how we are to accomplish this. It is this vital issue that Lobman and Lunquist address in their theoretically rigorous yet very practical book Unscripted Learning.

If we are to foster creativity then we will have to create environments where creativity can flourish. This means that all of us – whether we are teachers, parents, community developers or managers will have to learn something about how to create those environments. Teachers are obviously key in this endeavor as they are on the front line working with children; and it is to teachers that Unscripted Learning is primarily addressed. However, the book is really for anyone who is interested in creating environments where people can grow, develop, and learn.

In addition to the fact that so many community development scholars and practitioners are in some way, teachers, Unscripted Learning is very relevant to our field because it is written for people who work with groups. The focus of Lobman and

Lundquist's work is to build the supportive and creative environment whereby groups can grow and develop. They believe that it is in the context of a developing group that individuals can learn.

The first part of the book lays out a theoretical basis of performance and its relationship to learning and development. Lobman and Lunquist discuss recent discoveries that have found that teachers and children (and in fact all human beings) are essentially improvisers and performers. They show how an understanding of children (and teachers) that emphasizes their performatory capacity opens up creative possibilities for everyone.

While *Unscripted Learning* does not overtly criticize the way education is currently organized (modeling its message, since one of the basic tenets of improvisation is to 'accept offers' and not to negate), it does pose this interesting question. How does one assess performance work, which is mistake-free and constantly emergent, in an environment of outcome and grade orientation? Lobman and Lundquist do not condescend to the reader by providing definitive answers to this question since the issue of creating what is possible in a sometimes constraining and non-creative environment is the issue for all of us who work in such traditional institutions.

The second part of the book is the part that teachers and community developers will refer to over and over. My copy is already so dog eared that I had to develop a new system for finding what I want! There are over 100 improv games, grouped by subject such as "creating the ensemble", "improvising language and literacy, "improvising math" etc. I have used many of these games in my community development work and the beauty of them is that a game for kindergarteners is often appropriate for adults. A simple

math game or language game turns into an ensemble play when used in community development contexts. Under each activity there are easy to follow directions and hints. You don't have to be a theatre expert to teach them or to do them. In fact, Unscripted Learning's impassioned message is: the more we "don't know" together, the more we can create together.

Unscripted Learning is a practical guide to creating playful and collaborative environments. It is an invaluable resource for anyone concerned with building creative teams whether they are in the classroom, in the Board room or in our communities.