

Workshop aids communication skills



The space walk was part of the Theatre Games Workshop held Monday and Tuesday in Centennial West. The purpose of the workshops was to enhance verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The workshops were sponsored by a national educational laboratory, CEMREL, Inc.

By Susan Lindberg

"Space Walk," "Follow-the-Follower" and "Explosion Tag." Sound like kids' games? They are, but they were also a part of a Theatre Games Workshop which was conducted for students and teachers in CVA Gallery I and 301 Centennial West Monday and Tuesday evenings.

The six-hour workshop was one in a continuing series of national Theatre Games Workshops being offered by CEMREL, Inc., a national educational laboratory, through the cooperation of its affiliated Aesthetic Education Learning Centers. ISU's Center for the Visual Arts is one such center.

Theatre Games, developed by the internationally known Viola Spolin, are a series of techniques and activities designed for use in classroom situations to enhance verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Accord-

ing to Stephen Book, executive director of the Spolin Theatre Games Center in Los Angeles and workshop leader, the students are not "taught" or "directed" in Theatre Games—they are "coached".

As Book "coached" workshop participants through a variety of active exercises and games, he continually stressed total involvement of body and mind. During "Space Walk" he coached participants to "move in new ways, feel the space supporting your body." They were asked next to observe and be aware of their bodies in space without making it a purely mental process.

Getting students to act spontaneously without first working every movement out in their minds was a key point in the "Play Ball" exercise. Book coached the group of eager players to form a ball from a piece of space, to "play with

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Theatre games workshop tests variety of body, mind capacities

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the ball, keep it real—out of the head into the space."

Group games as well as individual exercises were tried out during the second session of the workshop. Concepts like "group agreement," "part of a whole," and "mirroring" were defined for participants again through their own total involvement.

Book said group agreement is essential to the success of activities involving several students (like improvisations). Chaos and conflict occur when players fail to be aware of their own and the other player's roles, he added.

One game which Book introduced to the workshop consisted of two players mirroring each others lip movements during conversations. The purpose of this game, Book stated, was to develop awareness of speech both on an auditory and visual level.

He emphasized mirroring is not imitating or mimicking because those are what he terms "head processes." When

people imitate or mimic they first analyze what they have seen, in mirroring there is no such mental process for the actions of the two people occur simultaneously.

The workshop, which drew students and teachers mainly concerned with art, music and theatre, was geared towards all levels of education. The Spolin Theatre Games, Book indicated, can be adapted to students in elementary school as well as college.

Book, a professional theatre director, stated that he uses Theatre Games during the first hour and a half of rehearsals as warm-up for his actors.

The exercises and games presented during the workshop are styled so they can be used in many curriculum areas as a means to increase student response and anticipation.

The creative, relaxed and natural tone which prevails throughout the Theatre Games was echoed in Book's remark at the end of the workshop "Remember, play with your students but keep your head out of it."

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