

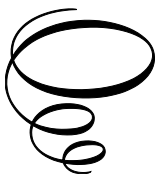
Improvisation and Spontaneity in Teaching

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By

Brad Garner

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*To my grandson Augie, and great grandson Addison.
A great and amazing adventure lies ahead.
Always pursue your dreams.*

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PREFACE

*“The key is to use something that is a mystery to you and then follow it.
And let it reveal itself without too much concern for solving that mystery.”*

—Rob Schiffman, actor/producer

Three of my favorite pastimes are enjoying sketch comedy, teaching, and learning. This book represents the intersection of those three great loves. I write to learn, so this created a perfect storm, and merging improvisation with teaching seemed like a perfectly logical pursuit. I began, as most writers and scholars do, scouring the professional literature to find research on the topic. To my pleasant surprise, there was an abundance of information available across a variety of disciplines, including music, comedy, dance, theatre, visual arts, education, business, and everyday life. I was thrilled to dig into this treasure trove of content. That feeling lasted for a while, but then it felt rather hollow.

I concluded that learning about improvisation must be more than reading research, listening to podcasts, and watching YouTube videos. I needed to experience improvising. Fortunately, the folks at the Crawlspace Comedy Theatre in Kalamazoo, Michigan, offer classes that teach people to do improvisation. I immediately signed up. It was an amazing and freeing experience. My teachers, Tara Sytsma and Brian Duguay, skillfully and in a caring way, took a diverse group of adults and introduced us to the process, etiquette, and thrills of improvising.

My research involved questioning every member of our improv troupe; I asked each person two specific questions.

1. Did you consider not attending class today and have anxiety about the experience?
2. (After class, I asked) Are you glad you came to class today?

Every time, the answer was “Yes” to both questions. As Rob Schiffman observed, coming to class was an example of following a mystery. We were all attracted to the experience, even if we were anxious and uncertain, and found a unique sense of joy in completing a class session and stretching ourselves to fully engage with the process.

I have always approached my teaching with the goal that I will respond to student needs and maintain a sense of flexibility in the way I conduct classes. I also embrace the importance of active learning and students' engagement with me and their classmates inside and outside of the classroom. Becoming familiar with the process of improvising, even though I am still a novice, has added a new dimension to my teaching. In writing this book, I hope to provide readers with a sense of the rich history of improvisation dating back over 2,500 years. This space will also help us reflect on our teaching practices, including how we use improvisational games or spontaneously adjust our lesson plans to create optimal learning moments for our students. Thank you for joining this adventure. I hope that you will find a collection of strategies that match well with your teaching personality and the academic discipline in which you teach.

At the conclusion of writing a text like this one, the final (and most arduous) task is to create the subject index. It is always interesting to see which terms have been used and with what frequency. I was thrilled to see that the following words appear most often in this text: collaboration, empathy, inclusivity, presence, psychological safety, trust, uncertainty, and vulnerability. This seems so appropriate and represents the ethos sought in improvisation. Let us all strive to exemplify these principles in our teaching.

A Word About Artificial Intelligence and the Writing of this book

In the spirit of intellectual curiosity and creative exploration, I engaged generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools during the development of this book. These tools supported various stages of the process—prompting reflection, generating questions, surfacing connections, and offering alternate phrasings. At times, AI served as a conversational partner, helping me to articulate emerging ideas or explore different perspectives.

However, AI in the creative process does not diminish the human authorship of this work. The core insights, arguments, and interpretations expressed here result from my discernment, lived experience, and scholarly engagement. AI did not determine the direction of my thinking; rather, it acted as a stimulus—a mirror, not a map. In short, while AI played a role in shaping how I thought through certain concepts, what is represented in these pages ultimately reflects my voice, my choices, and my responsibility as an author.

Readers may wish to consider using AI to generate prompts related to their academic discipline and the chosen improvisational activities. This is a helpful and creative use of technology to generate classroom learning activities.

CHAPTER ONE

EVERYDAY IMPROVISATIONS

“Here's the truth. Your teens and twenties are your Plan A. At 50, you're assessing whether Plan B or Plan C or any of the other plans you hatched worked. Your sixties and seventies, they're an improvisation.”

—Dick Van Dyke, American actor, entertainer, and comedian

When you hear the word *improvisation*, what comes to mind? Perhaps you envision a jazz musician effortlessly riffing in a dimly lit club, weaving intricate melodies on the spot. Maybe you think of a comedian firing off sharp, unexpected remarks during a live performance or an actor seamlessly adapting to a forgotten line on stage. A freestyle rapper might come to mind, crafting brilliant, off-the-cuff rhymes that offer both insight and entertainment. Or perhaps you picture an athlete making split-second decisions—dodging defenders, executing dazzling moves, and leaving both their opponents and the audience in stunned admiration. These improvisational moments showcase well-honed skills, quick thinking, and a fearless embrace of spontaneity, creativity, and presence.

When observing these cited examples, we might commonly respond with a statement like, "I wish I could do that!" It is certainly appropriate to applaud and admire an amazing performance. However, it's crucial to remember that behind the seemingly effortless improvisations of musicians, comedians, actors, freestyle rappers, and athletes lie years of dedicated practice and honed skill, resulting in their impressive expertise. With that mindset and incredible expertise, they feel comfortable pushing their limits and doing the unexpected.

Often, improvisations occur so smoothly and subtly that we remain unaware. Kellen (2021) provided some remarkable examples:

- The phrase "I Have a Dream" never appeared in the written version of Martin Luther King's famous speech. From the audience onstage, gospel singer Mahalia Jackson shouted, "Tell them about the dream," which prompted his improvisation.

- On the Apollo 13 space flight, the astronauts applied their knowledge to improvise repairs to their spacecraft and return home safely.
- The drug Viagra was initially designed to treat angina but has been shown to have other interesting side benefits.
- While performing the song "Minnie the Moocher," Cab Calloway once forgot the lyrics and improvised the phrase "Hi-de-hi-de-hi-de-ho." This became his signature phrase for the rest of a brilliant career.
- William Henry Perkin, a British chemist and entrepreneur, invented the color mauve while working to create an organic dye.

In these examples, everyone recognized the importance of deviating, going "off script," trusting their instincts and embracing the improvisational mantra of "Yes, and" which we will explore in depth throughout this text.

Another area to observe improvisation is in the workplace. An immediate response is often essential to resolve urgent dilemmas in different contexts (Goiny-Zbierowska and Zbierowski, 2021). Here are some examples of how improvisation can appear across various professional and academic fields.¹:

- **Healthcare:** Use a smartphone light for better visibility during an emergency procedure.
- **Engineering:** During prototyping, engineers use readily available items, such as zip ties or adhesive for temporary solutions.
- **Architecture:** Sketching design concepts on a napkin when formal drafting tools are not available.
- **Law:** The ability to identify alternative legal precedents when essential references are not accessible.
- **Performing Arts:** Performers who can adjust a script or piece of choreography on the spot when they forget their lines or movements.
- **Business/Management:** The necessity of creating alternative meeting strategies when key stakeholders are delayed or unavailable.
- **Marketing and advertising** campaigns frequently adapt their strategies in response to unexpected feedback or market trends.
- **Environmental Science:** A decision to collect water samples with makeshift containers when appropriate tools are unavailable.
- **Journalism:** Recording footage with a smartphone when professional equipment is unavailable.

¹ ChatGPT, response to "Provide some examples of the ways in which we improvise daily," OpenAI, September 26, 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

- **Finance:** Tracking expenses manually when accounting software encounters a glitch.

Improvisation surrounds us. We sometimes embrace improvisation, while at other moments, we avoid or deny opportunities to engage with the unpredictable nature of improvising.

On a more personal level, each of us engages in different levels of improvisation daily. Here are a few examples:²

- **Home Repairs:** Use duct tape to repair a broken item or substituting a missing
- **Cooking:** Consider swapping ingredients when you do not have everything you need for a recipe (e.g., using yogurt in place of sour cream)
- **Home Repairs:** Use duct tape to repair a broken item or substitute a missing screw with a temporary object.
- **Transportation:** Take an alternative route or use rideshare services when public transit is delayed
- **Workplace Tasks:** Experiment with innovative ways to present effectively without sufficient equipment.
- **Parenting:** Transform everyday items into toys or games
- **Social Interaction:** Generate topics to maintain a conversation.
- **Health/Wellness:** Use a bag of frozen peas as an ice pack or build a standing desk with books.
- **Technology:** Use everyday items to prop up a smartphone or seek free Wi-Fi options.
- **Hobbies:** Repurpose old items for crafts or using unconventional materials.

Elam (2021) made the following observation about the role of improvisation in our daily lives:

We are all improvising all the time. Improvisers do it on a stage for laughs and applause, while the rest of us are constantly making it up as we go (and almost never getting standing ovations for our efforts). In order to improvise games, scenes, even a two-act Shakespearean play or a full Broadway-style musical (both of which I do weekly as a professional improviser and improv

² ChatGPT, response to “Provide some examples of the ways in which we improvise on a daily basis,” OpenAI, September 26, 2023, chat.openai.com/chat.

teacher), theatrical improvisers cultivate a willingness to take risks, a well-developed sense of play, and major trust in oneself and one's teammates.

Most of us may never perform on stage or improvise in front of an audience. However, there are countless opportunities for us to be present and aware of our surroundings and then respond unexpectedly to create a surprising moment that can benefit those around us.

Defining Improvisation

The Cambridge Dictionary defines improvisation as "the act of making or doing something with whatever is available." This definition opens a wide range of possibilities in our lives. The focus of this text is to provide a context for teachers at all levels to embrace and practice the elements of improvisation, helping their students learn more effectively. However, this requires that we each learn more about the intricacies of improvisation and continuously reflect on our successful and unsuccessful attempts to improvise in various contexts.

There have been a variety of other definitions for improvisation that highlight the varied elements of this process.

Table 1-1. Varied Definitions of Improvisation.

Definitions of Improvisation	Sources
"A mode of creative activity in which spontaneous invention coincides with the time of execution and delivery."	(Alperson 1984, 17)
"The ability to make creative decisions in the moment while performing."	(Sawyer 2000, 17)
"The practice of acting, singing, talking and reacting, of making and creating, in the moment and response to the stimulus of one's immediate environment and inner feelings."	(Spolin 1999, 4)
"The conception of action as it unfolds, drawing on available cognitive, material, affective, and social resources."	(Cunha et al. 1999, 302)

<p>“The creative and spontaneous process of managing the unexpected through action that departs from routine practice and cultivate habits.”</p>	<p>(Leybourne 2009, 519)</p>
--	------------------------------

Definitions of Improvisation	Sources
<p>"Improvisation is getting on stage and making things up as you go along but doing it skillfully enough so that it looks planned."</p>	<p>(Johnstone, 1987, 23)</p>
<p>"Improvisation is about being so present that you're ready to accept whatever happens and make it work."</p>	<p>Bill Murray (from Saturday Night Live and several notable films), quoted in Shales and Miller (2015, 213)</p>
<p>"Improvisation is not making things up. It's getting in touch with yourself and your partner to discover what's already there."</p>	<p>Paul Sills (One of the founders of Second City), quoted in Sweet (1978, 45)</p>

An analysis of these definitions highlights several key elements that are essential for engaging in the process of improvisation. These include:

- A prerequisite for improvisation is being present in the moment.
- Improvisation is inherently creative and spontaneous.
- Improvisation includes acknowledging and making use of immediate circumstances.
- Improvisers are aware and present in the moment and make the choice to improvise in real time.
- Unexpected processes and results are often yielded by improvisation.

The Benefits of Improvisation in Our Lives

The ability to improvise offers benefits in many personal and professional endeavors (Drinko 2023; Ferreira 2019; Short 2024; Siliezar 2023). Some of these benefits include:

- **Enhanced communication and listening skills:** Improvisation encourages deep listening and meaningful responses. As we will emphasize often, this is based on the core principle of "Yes, and" (Johnstone 1987).
- **Enhancing creativity and problem-solving abilities:** Improvisation encourages creative thinking and nurtures innovative solutions to challenges. Improvisation thrives in uncertain moments, and it boosts our ability to respond effectively in difficult situations (Sawyer 2000).
- **Developing emotional resilience:** Improvisational practices can foster mindfulness, acceptance, and resilience. By accepting mistakes and uncertainty, individuals can learn to manage discomfort and adapt in positive ways (Lobman and Lundquist 2007).
- **Strengthening personal and professional relationships:** Improv's collaborative nature fosters social bonding and mutual trust, which are vital in both personal and professional spheres (Koppett 2023).
- **Supporting personal and professional relationships:** Improvisation offers a platform to explore identity, values, and new ways of being, fostering self-discovery and transformation (Nachmanovitch 2024).

Chapter Summary

Improvisation is often associated with performers—musicians, comedians, athletes, and rappers—who captivate audiences with their spontaneous brilliance. While such moments may seem magical and superhuman, they are grounded in years of practice, self-trust, and a willingness to take risks. Beyond the stage or playing field, improvisation subtly influences everyday life and work. From Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic unscripted speech line to astronauts resolving crises mid-spaceflight, improvisation empowers people to respond creatively and effectively to unexpected challenges.

This chapter expands the understanding of improvisation, showing that it is an artistic and essential skill across various professions, from healthcare and engineering to education and law. Common personal tasks, like substituting ingredients or making homemade tools, often rely on the ability to improvise.

Scholars and artists alike emphasize key themes, such as presence, spontaneous adaptation, the use of resources, and making meaningful

decisions in the moment. Improvisation fosters personal growth, emotional resilience, creativity, communication, and deeper relationships. The chapter encourages readers, particularly educators, to recognize and nurture improvisational skills in themselves and their students.

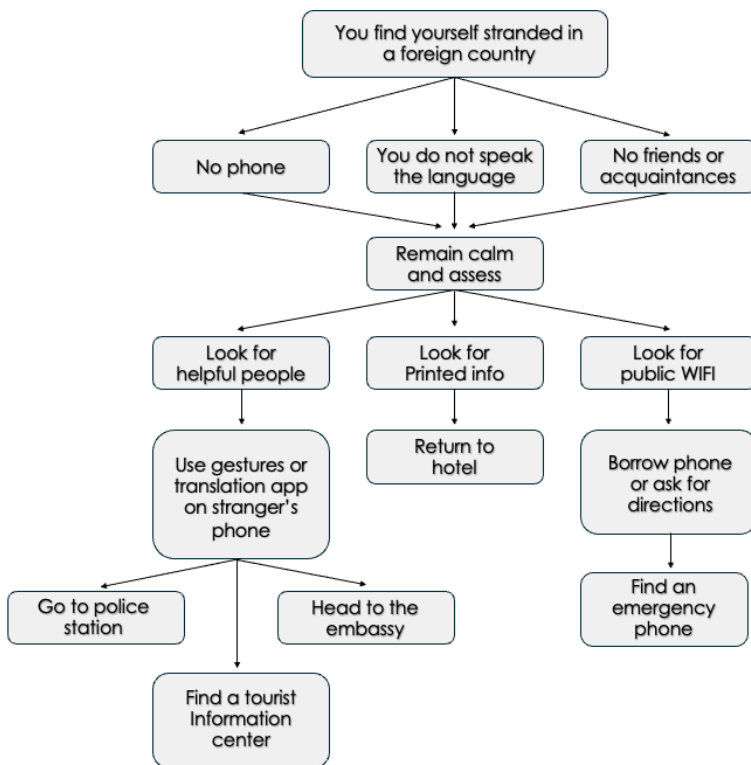
Improv Interlude³

Consider the scenario shown in 1-1 to show how improvisation can intersect with your daily activities. In this situation, you find yourself in a foreign country where you do not speak the language, lack a phone, and have no friends or acquaintances to contact for help. That could be a frightening experience. As you can see, the first order of business is to remain calm. From there, you develop various strategies for navigating in your current environment.

To give you a sense of direction, consider how this example could assist students in practicing improvisation in real-life situations. For instance, students could be presented with the outlined scenario (i.e., stranded in a foreign country, unable to speak the language, lacking a phone, and having no friends or acquaintances) and then work in small groups to develop improvisation methods.

³ ChatGPT was used across this text to brainstorm ideas for the “Improv Interlude” features, designed to give readers a chance to practice the presented skills and concepts. These ideas were modified into their present format.

Figure 1-1. Finding Your Way Through Improvisation



Reflective Questions

1. When was the last time you needed to improvise in your personal or professional life? What did you take away from that experience?
2. How could embracing the "Yes, and" mindset transform your approach to unexpected challenges in the classroom or workplace?
3. What barriers—mental, emotional, or institutional barriers prevent people from improvising more freely? How can these be addressed?
4. Which professional example of improvisation mentioned in the chapter resonates most with your field or experiences? Why?
5. How can educators show and cultivate improvisational and thinking to assist students in becoming more adaptable, creative, and confident learners?

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF IMPROVISATION

"If you're studying geology, which is all facts, as soon as you get out of school, you forget it all, but philosophy, you remember just enough to screw you up for the rest of your life."

—Steve Martin, comedian/author

Many great concepts we embrace today have roots in the work of ancient philosophers. In this chapter, we will explore the Ancient Greek ideas of *technē*, *mētis*, *Chronos*, *Kairos*, *phronesis*, and *phantasia* and how they relate to the processes and outcomes of improvisation. Understanding these principles provides context for what we do and observe in modern-day improvisers.

Technē and Mētis

There are references to *technē* dating back to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* (1962) and Plato's *Republic* (1998). According to Plunkett (2024):

Technē is technical, scientific, and formal knowledge. It describes methods, procedures, and rules that can be systematically learned and applied. It tends to be codified, explicit, formal, standardised, top-down, abstracted, generalised, and universally applicable.

This description shows how improvisations can arise against the backdrop of a specific skill set. For instance, when listening to a jazz musician delivering an electrifying improvisational riff, it is crucial to remember that the ability to perform that feat stems only from countless hours of practice and mastery of the instrument. Similarly, watching a comedy team respond with a hilarious sketch to suggestions from the audience can only happen when those comedians have mastered the rhythm and techniques of improvisation.

Summers (2024) provided an excellent example of how *technē* can emerge during the learning process:

Over the summer, I worked a job where I watered trees. This involved a lot of new information, about how much living things need water: not just the trees, but also myself. When I first started, I was frustrated, because I was often told to "eyeball" the amount of water I gave trees, and I ended up asking for how long I should water them. This, of course, led to wildly uneven amounts of water making it to each tree: the water flowed at different rates depending on the angle of the truck bed (with the cab pointed uphill, a slope made the gravity-assisted flow stronger; with the cab pointed downhill, the opposite is true), and it would obviously flow faster the more full the tank was. Eventually, I learned to tell if the watering was adequate based on the heat of the day and the color of the soil.

This anecdote shows the level of commitment individuals must possess as they strive to master the knowledge and skills in their field of specialization. In his book *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2010), Malcolm Gladwell claimed that 10,000 hours of deliberate and focused practice are required to master a complex skill. Although there has been some debate over this theory, it is reasonable to assert that extensive and concentrated practice is essential to truly grasp the intricacies of a challenging skill set.

O'Donnell (2022) described the routines of Clifford Brown, the famed trumpeter, pianist, and composer, as he honed his skills, enabling him to improvise with extraordinary ability. His widow, LaRue Brown Watson, described his devotion to music:

We would have breakfast, and Clifford would practice. We would go out, and Clifford would practice. We would have lunch, and Clifford would practice. Clifford practiced anytime he could, and even if we were in a place where he couldn't blow his horn, even with the mute, he would do lip exercises and tongue exercises or he would just simply play his mouthpiece. He played constantly.

This observation underscores Clifford Brown's passion for music and commitment to refining his skills and mastering his instruments. O'Donnell also observed a similar level of dedication from vocalist Frank Sinatra and saxophonist Mark Turner. He concluded, "Beneath the incredible technique and sounds you hear lie the untold hours spent in the practice room."

Mētis dates to Homer's *Odyssey* (1996) and Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* (1989). Plunkett (2016) observed:

Mētis is practical, experiential, tacit knowledge. It's the accumulated wisdom or know-how that comes from practice or lived experience. It entails adaptability and the ability to respond intuitively in context. It tends to be local, situational, informal, decentralized.

Mētis, then, exists in the moment. Individuals who show mētis are equipped to respond to their immediate circumstances and situational contexts.

Hickman (2016) cited the work of Detienne and Vernant (1991) as they examined the role of mētis in our lives:

Mētis is impulsive, swift, but in no way does it act lightly. With all the weight of acquired experience that it carries, it involves thought that is dense, rich and compressed. Instead of floating hither and thither, at the whim of circumstance, it anchors the mind securely in the project which it has devised in advance thanks to its ability to look beyond the immediate present and foresee a more or less wide slice of the future. (p. 8)

Demonstrating mētis requires a deep understanding of the context for action, practical knowledge and experiences, the ability to navigate circumstances in the moment, and a willingness to stay flexible and adaptable. The interplay between technē and mētis is visually represented in Figure 2-1. Examples of technē and mētis across a variety of academic disciplines and professions are included in Table 2-1.

Figure 2-1. The Interaction of Technē and Mētis in Improvisation

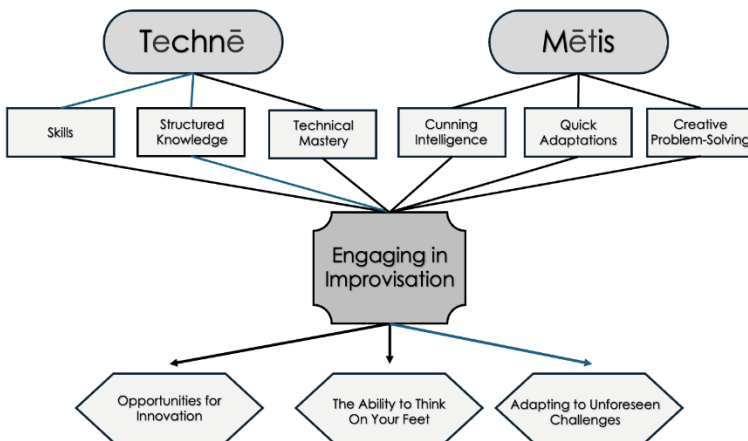


Table 2-1. Application of Technē and Mētis

Discipline	Illustrations of Technē	Illustrations of Mētis
Medicine	A surgeon who has mastered laparoscopic surgery techniques through years of training and experience allows them to perform delicate surgical procedures.	A doctor who can diagnose subtle symptoms based on the patient's history, even when diagnostic testing results seem inconclusive.
Sports	A basketball player who devotes hundreds of hours to perfect their dribbling and foul shooting skills.	The point guard who decides in the final moments of a game to make a risky pass to a teammate after reading the opponent's defense
Teaching	The professor who carefully creates a syllabus and active learning techniques that align with course learning outcomes.	In a classroom, a teacher observes that her students are disengaged. In response, she shares an exciting story that captures her students' attention.
Business and Leadership	A project manager who applies Agile and Six Sigma methods to organize employee workflow.	The CEO of a company who can change standard business practices based on market trends.
Law	A lawyer drafting a contract using established frameworks and precedents.	Observing the jury's body language, a trial attorney adjusts their questioning techniques.
Software Development	A programmer who meticulously writes code using best practices and frameworks.	A developer who works to debug software when the cause isn't immediately observable.

We can see how technē and mētis interact in various contexts. Some individuals may be more inclined to align their personalities and actions with either of these concepts. Table 2-1 shows the differences between technē and mētis in fields such as medicine, sports, teaching, business, law, and software development.

This should not imply that individuals must be categorized solely by their tendencies toward *technē* or *mētis*. In the above examples, doctors, athletes, lawyers, teachers, business leaders and software developers may make extraordinary efforts to refine and improve their technical skills. Their skills may benefit them, and people may see them as highly proficient in their chosen fields from a technical perspective. Others, however, might choose (consciously or unconsciously) to go beyond the technical, be more adventurous, and expand beyond what are basic knowledge and skills.

Copeland (2022) explored *mētis* and the “art of serendipity” and how we engage with unexpected opportunities. She observed:

The art of serendipity is to use *mētis* in the context one is in, to acknowledge one’s own standpoint within that context and use one’s expertise to notice and utilise what others may miss. Thus, the responsiveness of *mētis* translates into an art of understanding how to act and observe, and to bring one’s own unique expertise to bear within a given situation. Such situations begin with surprise, but also or rather with discomfort and unease, when the situation is risky or one’s response is also a responsibility. Or it can be taken up as a more generally positive attitude or approach, so that we find ourselves living in a surprising world. (66)

This concept of “living in a surprising world” encapsulates the essence of improvisation. Moments come and go throughout our lives. The question we each must face is how willing we are to engage in a meaningful and often surprising manner. The element of surprise, arising from Copeland’s sense of serendipity, adds a new texture to our living experience.

When exploring improvisation, *technē* and *mētis* provide valuable insights into the choices and actions of improvisers. Consider this: Are you more inclined to embrace *technē*, *mētis*, or both in your ongoing decisions and actions in your personal and professional life?

Chronos and Kairos

In their characteristic way, the ancient Greeks had two distinct terms for time: *Chronos* and *Kairos*. Aristotle defined *Chronos* in *Physics: On the Nature of Time* (350 BCE) (Barnes 1984) as “the number of motions in respect of before and after” (IV.11, 219b 2-3). This context shows that we understand time to exist because change occurs, and we measure it by a succession of events. In modern terms, *Chronos* refers to time measured by the clock in seconds, minutes, hours, days, and weeks. As Mária (2021) observed, “*Chronos* time will eat us alive if we do not constantly keep track

of it and try to control it." This phenomenon seems simple in the busy schedules, timelines, and deadlines that often dictate our daily lives. Snyder (1969) observed that Chronos helps us answer the question "How Fast? How frequent? How old?" (1) and he observed these questions are answerable in cardinal numbers. This reality provides only a small margin for error.

Some common idioms describing our relationship with measured time reveal our perspectives on Chronos: time flies, in the nick of time, beat the clock, behind the times, better late than never, and borrowed time. These observations seem to portray Chronos as an enemy that must be battled daily.

We typically have a much friendlier attitude toward Kairos. Homer, in *The Iliad* (1998), and in his speech "Against the Sophists," both described Kairos as knowing the "right" moment to speak (Isócrates and Van Hook 1961). Cocker (2015) observed that the etymological root of Kairos is the verb *keirein* which refers to a "temporal opening or critical moment" (2), seemingly directly related to the idiom "in the nick of time."

One compelling example of the relationship between *Chronos* and *Kairos* is the widely reported perception that time slows down during accidents or moments of intense fear. Ancient accounts of this phenomenon came from members of the Swiss Alpine Club, who described a heightened sense of mental quickness and a clear expansion of time during accidental falls (Arstila 2012). Wittmann et al. (2010) termed this experience "subjective time dilation." You may have encountered this sensation in your life in those fleeting moments that stretch beyond the limits of ordinary time.

Improvisers, too, exist entirely in the present moment. Berlin (2018) explored how time feels to improvisers, highlighting the role of the brain's frontal region in relation to time perception, impulse control, and spontaneous creativity, all essential to improvisation. Berlin concluded that "improvisation appears to take place in an altered state of mind," shaped by the intricate interplay of cognitive processes within the frontal lobe. She also cited lyrics from Eminem's song "Lose Yourself" (2002), which capture the elusive nature of these moments in our lives.

You better lose yourself in the music, the moment.
 You own it, you better never let it go.
 You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow.
 This opportunity comes once in a lifetime.

Plake (2021), from the perspective of a musical improviser, described it this way: "You must be able to step into the unknown without relying exclusively upon your habits. No small feat."

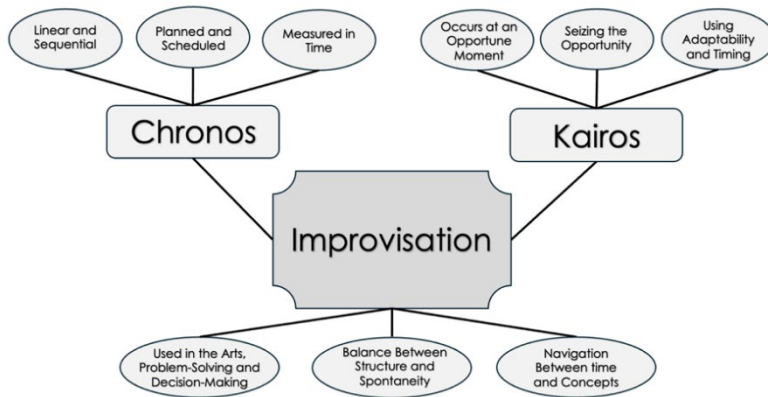
Flow is another related construct that lives between Chronos and Kairos. This psychological concept, introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1994), describes a state of deep immersion and focused engagement in an activity where individuals experience a sense of effortless involvement and lose track of time. Engrossing yourself in a hobby, reading an enthralling book, or engaging in a deep conversation may lead to a flow state. This optimal state occurs when the task challenge matches an individual's skill level, creating a sense of control and enjoyment. Flow is often associated with heightened performance, creativity, and personal satisfaction. Matlow (2019) described it this way:

When you find yourself in Kairos time, you completely lose track of Chronos time. A state of flow is activated, and it cannot be measured but only experienced. Our sailing trips are the best examples of living purely karyologically, for we are moving by the mercy of our collective actions and by the wind, not by any clock or calendar. And it is a week of living in Kairos time that is epically rich in all things that cannot be measured—community, nature, and celebration.

These concepts of time have an intriguing relationship. Although we inhabit a world acutely aware of time's linear progression—the hour, day, month, and year—a tension persists regarding the optimal moment for action or decision-making. Consider, for instance, when someone makes what they believe to be a humorous remark, but others respond, "Too soon," implying that the comment, while potentially funny later, is currently inappropriate. This tension is precisely where improvisers live and thrive. In Figure 2-2, we can observe the intersection of Chronos and Kairos.

Improvisation dynamically and fluidly unites chronological time (Chronos) and opportune moments (Kairos). While Chronos provides a structured sequence of events, each moment unfolding in a linear progression, Kairos governs the timing of decisions, responses, and creative choices. A skilled improviser must navigate both, remaining aware of passing time and sensing the perfect moment to introduce a new idea, shift the energy, or respond to a collaborator. Whether in theatre, music, or conversation, successful improvisation depends on balancing the predictability of Chronos with the spontaneity of Kairos, ensuring timely and meaningful actions.

Figure 2-2. Chronos, Kairos, and Improvisation



Phronesis and Phantasia

The final pair of concepts given to us by Ancient Greek philosophers are *phronesis* and *phantasia*. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1962) defines *phronesis*, or practical wisdom and prudence, as "a true and reasoned state of capacity to act concerning the things that are good or bad for man" (1140b5). Aristotle suggested that one of the key outcomes of *phronesis* is reflecting and making decisions that benefit humankind. According to Kristjánsson et al. (2023), *phronesis* is best understood as ethical expertise, with its "various functions viewed as sub-skills" (7). These authors identified several sub-skills, including courage, generosity, honesty, humility, justice, and temperance. Hadjimichael and Tsoukas (2022) went so far as to identify *phronesis* as a "master virtue."

Noel (1999) articulated four elements of *phronesis* in action. These elements portray a logical and sequential approach to "practical wisdom" in real time:

- **Perception:** Citing Wiggins (1980) and Pendlebury (1990), there are often several available courses of action in our daily lives and circumstances. The person with practical wisdom perceives these alternatives and is drawn to what best promotes human good.
- **Discernment:** Here, individuals begin a more detailed examination of the situation's specific elements.