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Improvisation at Rhetoric Workshops as a Way of Teaching Communication Skills

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Abstract

The paper describes an educational project on teaching rhetoric at the university level as part of practical rhetoric workshops. What makes this didactic proposal innovative and unique is the incorporation of improvisation tools in rhetoric classes. The aim of the article is to demonstrate how techniques from contemporary improvisational theatre help students improve their communication skills. The article begins with a brief overview of rhetorical education at Polish universities and a description of basic rhetorical competences related to the creation and analysis of texts. An introduction to improvisational theatre and the specifics of improvisation workshops are presented. Then, a proposal is made to combine these different approaches to the development of communicative competences in a series of workshops. Two exercises are presented, representative of the entire workshop series and devoted to the categories of ethos and narration. The benefits of using this method are discussed by showing the learning outcomes as a specific connection between communicative competences and the mechanisms of understanding rhetorical categories.

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Keywords: rhetoric, rhetoricl education, improvisational theatre, improve workshops

Introduction

Rhetorical education in Poland is evolving and expanding in several areas: firstly, at universities, where it is combined with scientific research; secondly, in primary and secondary schools; thirdly, in non-governmental organisations and self-education practice; and fourthly, in commercial education, organised by training and coaching companies.

In Poland, similarly to all of Central and Eastern Europe (Aczel, 2019), the relevance of rhetorical education became apparent in the 1990s (Bendrat et al., 2021; Gaj, 2008; Skwara, 2008), due to the processes of democratisation and the need to develop the communication skills required to participate in social life. Considering the centuries-old rhetorical discipline taught at European universities as part of the canon of the seven liberal arts, the modern teaching tradition is a short-lived one (Awianowicz, 2008; Jaeger, 2001; Korolko, 1998; Marrou, 1982; Skwara, 2011; Ziomek, 2000). The contemporary teaching of rhetoric takes place in a variety of academic subjects and disciplines, and it must address and meet new communication issues (Rypel, 2011).

The first rhetoric courses in university departments were based on classic rhetoric textbooks, which provided knowledge about the subject and were the basis for assimilating classic communication standards (Bendrat et al., 2021). Along with the development of scientific specialisations and the advancement of research on new rhetoric as a theoretical discipline, practical methods of teaching communication competences have also been developed. The reflection on teaching rhetoric and didactic methods that would meet the communication needs of the changing world of global and media communication has begun to broaden (Bendrat et al., 2021; Lichański, 2003; Sobczak & Zgółkowa, 2007; Sobczak & Zgółkowa, 2011).

At faculties of journalism and communication, there are courses devoted to applied rhetoric (e.g. practical rhetoric, the rhetoric of public

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speaking or vocal pedagogy), which mainly explore the elements of *actio* (delivery of speeches) (Bogołębska, 2011; Wasilewski, 2011). Such courses can also be found in Polish studies in applied rhetoric at the Catholic University of Lublin (the only university in Poland offering studies in rhetoric at both levels of education) (Tryksza & Madecka, 2011). Rhetoric in literary studies, rhetorical analysis and rhetorical criticism are all part of essential methodological trends in academic education (Hanczakowski & Niedźwiedź, 2003).

It is worth noting that the awareness of rhetorical education in Poland has increased significantly in recent years. Global knowledge-sharing processes via electronic media have provided access to source materials and new educational methods. In terms of communication skills, the traditional teacher–student relationship has been transformed from vertical (a one-way transfer of knowledge) to horizontal (a mutual exchange of experiences) (Lunfdsford & Ede, 1984, p. 40). The increasing awareness of rhetoric and the need for education at the school and university levels – as well as training among adults – have led to the development of new workshop methods that are attractive to students and have the potential to be didactically effective.

Thus far, the methods of teaching practical rhetoric have been based on short, rhetoric exercises (Barłowska et al., 2010), as well as on teaching specific genres. The most popular genre is a speech addressed to different audiences with different purposes and situations (Korolko, 1998). In recent years, debates in various formats have become an element of rhetorical workshops (Coombe, 2018). In addition, dialogue forms were practiced as simulated negotiations, discussions and interviews – interactions typical of institutional life (Budzyńska-Daca & Modrzejewska, 2018). According to the assumptions of practical rhetoric, these exercises aimed to strengthen the communication skills of the participants. Our proposal for modifying the educational methods is to incorporate interactive elements specific to improvisational theatre into the traditional rhetoric exercises to improve communication skills.

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1. What is improv?

Improvisational theatre (improv) is a form in which all or part of what is performed is created spontaneously without a script or a plan. The story, dialogue and characters are created, developed and played at the same time, during the performance (Halpern et al., 1994, p. 7). Improv theatre exists in a variety of styles. In most cases, the performances are comedy plays, but they can also be non-comedic; they can be long-form or short-form plays, a series of unrelated scenes or games.

Performances are based on specific assumptions: the format (structure), which is the foundation of the performance, and the general rules of improvisation. Many improvised performances begin with a simple premise – often via an audience suggestion. The suggestion may be a mere word, a place, a relationship between characters, a part of a text, etc. The players then get inspiration from the suggestion and start the play spontaneously, developing the plot in real time. Therefore, improvisers are simultaneously actors, directors and scriptwriters. Their overall goal during a performance is to collaboratively build a coherent narrative and influence the emotions of the audience (Łukowska, 2020).

In most artistic practices, improvisation is an intentional and autonomous activity; it is an end in itself. The process of creation is shown to the audience during the performance; its outcome is singular, unrepeatable and unique each time. Performers' decisions regarding what to do and how to progress the plot, and how to act or move, are not based on previously defined scripts. Instead, improvisers base their performances on skills, techniques, styles and forms they have learnt (improv formats or any other cultural texts that derive from literature or films, etc.) (Johnstone, 1999). As a result, the performance is not only based on pure spontaneity, but also on knowledge, cultural contexts and past experiences; thus, some elements are not created *ex nihilo*. Another thing worth mentioning is the audience's active participation influencing the performers. Improv is focussed on relations. As Gale (2004) notes, improv is a relational activity; there are 'player–player relationships, the players–audience relationships and the selves-of-player relationships' (p. 3). The audible reactions of the

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audience influence the improvisers (e.g. by making them develop or abandon ideas).

Improv theatre and its techniques are also considered a tool; they have already been applied in various fields such as theatrical training, scriptwriting, coaching, team-building, corporate training, education, social work, design, health care, etc. (Tresca, 2020). The potential seems unlimited. Not only does improvisation require knowledge of the formats and the fundamentals, but also a specific set of skills (such as quick thinking, creativity or effective collaboration). The latter are also developed during courses and workshops and can be used later under different circumstances. Therefore, apart from learning about rules and formats, the goals of such training are to develop creativity, the ability to respond to quickly changing situations, effective communication, thinking outside the box and collaboration with others (Lepovic, 2021).

2. Rhetorical competences

The proposal to include improvisational exercises in rhetorical workshops requires an outline of the area of expected benefits resulting from these didactic modifications. Rhetoric is a field of knowledge and at the same time a communication practice. It is treated as a tool not only for influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the audience with symbols (Burke, 1969), but also for finding everything that has the ability to convince (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1926, 1355b). In this article, we take the Aristotelian perspective of a persuasive influence composed of the elements of the speaker's character (*ethos*), evoked emotions (*pathos*) and argumentation (*logos*) (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a). We treat rhetoric as a communicative ability equipped with ethical, aesthetic and pragmatic rules determined by the situation.

The matter of rhetorical competences (Zgółkowa, 2011) can be analysed in several contexts, depending on the discursive field in which one wants to examine the functionality of rhetoric. We will consider two perspectives on rhetorical competence: critical/rhetorical and social communication.

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2.1. Critical/rhetorical perspective

Critical analysis is the study of the creation and use of symbols in society (Martin, 2014). The competence of critical analysis involves examining persuasive messages. The knowledge of rhetorical categories can result in effective interpretation of media, political, artistic and functional texts. It means that rhetorical competences enable critical thinking, detection of manipulation and separation of reliable messages from propaganda. Such skills allow one to analyse public artefacts and actions and to recognise their symbolic meaning. In practical terms, rhetoric provides a person with the ability to defend themselves.

2.2. Social communication perspective

Rhetorical competences in the area of social life concern the ability to actively participate in public life and interpersonal relations. Rhetorical education in this field means equipping a person with the competences needed to represent their own or their community's opinion, understand and listen to the arguments of others and define goals and potential solutions. These competences allow citizens to publicly express their thoughts and opinions in situations of conflict, which allows them to participate in the democratic processes of co-decision (Flower, 2008). Communication skills that are taught in rhetoric classes are an element of professional education in many areas of political, social, business and artistic life (Zgółkowa, 2011).

Taking into account the critical and communicative perspectives, the competences that can be achieved as a result of rhetorical education, based on the classic canon of rhetoric (*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*) (Lausberg, 2001) are in the following areas:

1. Invention – the ability to create and develop a speech according to the rhetorical situation (determine *stasis* theory and select topics, arguments and emotions)
2. Composition – the ability to choose the appropriate structure of a speech and to plan its parts (identify the introduction's properties and its place in the speech, present a thesis and engage in narration, argumentation, refutation and recapitulation)

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3. Elocution (style) – the ability to express oneself appropriately, bearing in mind the subject and situation (selection of figures and style)
4. Memory – the ability to memorise the material needed for a presentation (in accordance with the presentation method)
5. Delivery – the ability to present a prepared speech in a multimodal way (including body language, paralinguistic, visual and proxemic codes, etc.)

3. Improvisation as a tool in the development of rhetorical skills

Improvisation is a valuable communication and self-awareness tool that can significantly improve one's ability to act confidently and decisively. Improv workshops are beneficial for building creativity, developing quick thinking and improving collaboration in a group (Hamburg, 2014). Improv allows a person to grow on many different levels; it creates a safe and enjoyable setting in which a person can experience self-directed learning. A person can learn on an intellectual, physical and emotional level by participating in interactive exercises and activities. Regular practice allows a person to self-reflect on their experiences and make better decisions (Tresca, 2020).

Improv workshops shape social competences in a different manner than rhetoric. The improvisers are not socially involved, which means that they are not focussed on influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the audience. They fulfil their artistic needs, and while they also acquire the above-mentioned socially important skills, the very activity differs between the rhetorical and improvisational fields. Thus, the two fields may seem disparate, yet there are multiple areas in which improvisation may be useful in developing rhetorical skills. Moreover, by making sure those differences are not blurred, but rather highlighted, we are able to make them a part of the rhetorical training, which will allow the students to learn in a reflective manner.

If we look at the competences of an improviser as we analysed the rhetorical competences, the areas can be outlined as below.

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1. Invention – the ability to create and develop plots in a group, in accordance with the rules of the performance or game
2. Composition – the ability to create a coherent storyline while simultaneously following the rules of the format, which requires narrative skills
3. Elocution (style) – the ability to accommodate style in accordance with characters, story, changing situations and other players in the performance
4. Memory – ability to remember the previous parts and structure of the performance
5. Delivery – the ability to perform without preparation in a way that is understandable to the audience and to demonstrate flexibility and a sense of interpersonal relationships (status) to portray credible characters and relations

Rhetoric is an art, but we can also look at it as if it were a set of tools that allows its user to efficiently prepare and deliver a speech. The differences between the two fields are visible in the two sets of definitions of the competences described above. Due to those differences, training improv for rhetorical purposes would mean working on some – not all – of the tools we have in the 'rhetorical workshop'. The skillset of an improviser differs, but the competences developed through improv are useful for a rhetor as well. Also, our assumption is that the practice of improvisation and rhetoric as well as the comparison of these fields are beneficial for the development of rhetorical skills.

Improvisation at rhetoric workshops

The rhetorical/improvisation workshop course includes exercises to strengthen competences from each of the five rhetorical canons: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*. We propose a set of five workshops that will

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1. increase inventive abilities through exercises focussed on creating scenes,
2. teach about composition by polishing the skills of efficient narration,
3. show style usage possibilities with improv games focussed on style,
4. contribute to better memory skills and concentration by playing games that require multitasking, divided attention and short-term memory and
5. teach about delivery with a focus on ethos and building credibility by using the category of status from improv.

Furthermore, all the exercises and the practice of improv will give the students confidence, help them overcome the fear of public speaking and teach them about appropriate body language (e.g. posture or powerful gestures) (Tresca, 2020). It can equip the group with a collaborative spirit as well as creating a positive, supportive environment in which students can feel safe. This will allow them to focus on exercises and learning instead of being stressed and feeling the need to overcome their fears.

In order to show the significant benefits of the synergy between rhetoric and improvisation, we present two workshop proposals and analyse the relationship between the two fields.

4.1. Exercises developing competences in the area of delivery (actio):

Delivery (*actio*) in rhetoric has common roots with acting (Budzyńska-Daca, 2008). The Greek equivalent of the word *delivery* is *hypocrisis* (the act of speaking and acting, but also pretending) (Korolko, 1998, p. 133). If we combine rhetorical action with acting, the commonality between them is the use of similar means of expression with para-verbal and non-verbal codes (Leathers, 2007). These means are used for different purposes: a public speaker should have the presence of a person 'worthy of the promoter of truth' (Korolko, 1998, p. 134), while an actor expresses the thoughts of others, uses costumes and decorations and plays in an artificial setting; their 'truth' is the credibility of the character they play. The improvisers are in yet another position: they express their thoughts through characters,

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but they adopt them to an invented world. Their words are used to create a scene or play a game, which (as with actors) builds the character's credibility.

In order to teach about delivery and credibility, we propose a set of exercises devoted to the category of *ethos* (Amossy, 2001; Baumlin, 1994; Hyde, 2004; Wisse, 1989). Our goal is to show students a variety of approaches in which one can build their credibility as a public speaker and make them reflect on the possible tools they can use as well as how they can recognise and decode other ways of influencing the audience in this manner. It will also make students look at ethos in a situational and interactive context. This is especially important for the education of dialogical genres such as debates, negotiations and discussions. The students will be able to craft public speeches more consciously, paying attention to the factors and aspects of dominance in interaction (Szurek & Modrzejewska, 2022; Vlašić Duić & Dvoršćak, 2022; Mavrodieva, 2022).

Ethos is the credibility that the speaker gives to their words, a self-image constructed in their speech. It is a psychological construct consisting of three elements: *arete*, *phronesis* and *eunoia* (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a; Baumlin, 1994). The speaker, guided by the principle of appropriateness, expresses their character and personality traits (*arete*), which strengthen the message (*logos*), emphasise competence, knowledge and experience (*phronesis*) and finally signal openness and kindness towards the audience (*eunoia*). It is directly linked to the authority and credibility of the orator: they must be trustworthy and respected in order to achieve their goal.

For the purpose of teaching students about ethos, we use the category of status that is applied in improv theatre and compare it with rhetorical ethos. Status can be defined as a character's sense of self-esteem in relation to another character in a scene. It is a power difference between them (Johnstone, 1992). A person with higher status dominates the lower-status person. Their relationship is perceived as a balance of power: one will have influence over the other, one will dictate the rules, the other will follow, one will act superior and the other will act inferior (Wasilewski, 2006). This dynamic is recognisable in the non-verbal aspects

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of the scene – the manner of speaking, body language, behaviour and actions – and not only in the characters' words and dialogue (Leathers, 2007).

Table 1. High-Status vs Low-Status Behaviour

High-Status	Low-Status
confident	nervous, shy
relaxed demeanour	tense demeanour
upright posture	hunched-over posture
head in an upright position	tilted head
purposeful messages, clear communication	rambling
fluent speaking, meaningful pauses	digressive speaking, breaks in speaking with stammering
speaking in complete sentences	speaking in halting, incomplete sentences
speaking authoritatively, with certainty	speaking hesitantly, uncertainly
powerful, deliberate, meaningful gestures; only when necessary	a lot of uncontrolled gestures; touching the face, head and hair
standing still, minor movements	shifting from foot to foot, nervous movements
keeping eye contact	avoiding eye contact

Note: Based on Johnstone, 1992, 1999; Salinsky & Frances-White, 2013.

As improv performances refer to a fictional world, the improvisers' actions do not go beyond their creation; they do not relate to reality nor do they intend to change it. The art of improvisation influences the improviser, equips them with communication and creation skills and, as a performance, influences the audience emotionally and provides it with an aesthetic experience. Status has an impact on how the characters interact with each other and plays a vital role in shaping the story. It is a tool for building a scene, giving it credibility and establishing the relationships between the characters. Status games within a scene (changes during the course of action, low status of a person with a high social rank or vice versa, etc.) are used for comedic purposes (Salinsky & Frances-White, 2013, p. 95). Status supports the credibility of the character and fictional world being created. In rhetoric, on the contrary, there is no division

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between the self and the character. There is no rule of convention and the speaker relates directly to reality. The speaker's goal is to influence the attitudes and behaviours of the audience and is devoted to action and creating a change in reality.

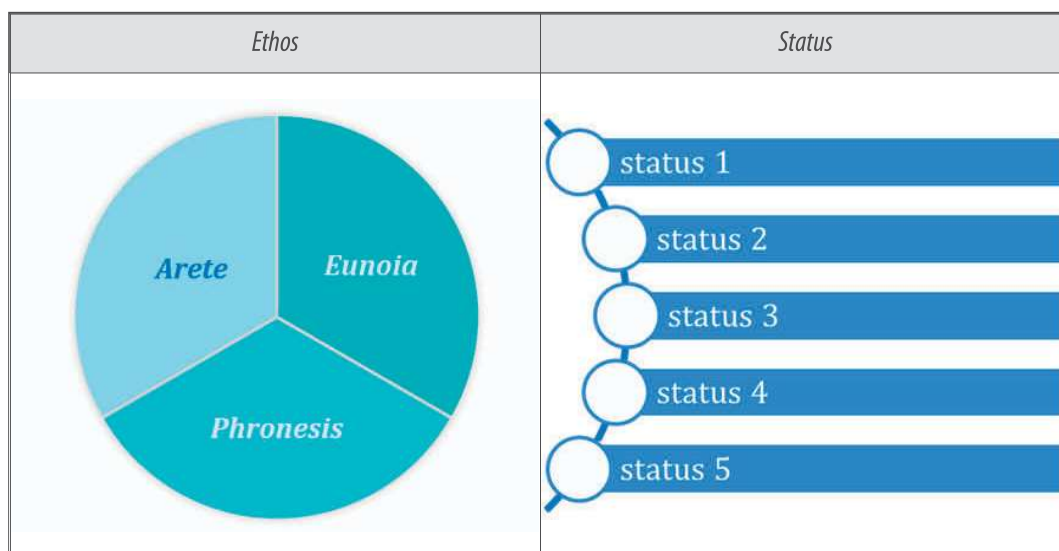To consider these issues, we offer students two exercises.

1. Improv Exercise

The first exercise is called 'Status Party'. In this game, students draw a number from 1 to 5, which determines their status (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest). They do not show it to any other student. Then, they role-play an event of their choosing (e.g. a holiday celebration at university, a party for employees at work). The goal is to act according to the status one draws without disclosing it directly to the other participants. In the end, the students discuss the event and guess the others' statuses. The students are also given time to share their experiences and reflections. How did they feel in different situations? How did they perceive themselves and others? Was it difficult to act according to their status? Was it a challenge to guess others' statuses? What made them act in a particular way and what made them believe a person had a certain status?

2. Rhetoric Exercise

In the second part of the workshop, students put this new experience into practice. Three participants play the role of members of three social groups. Each of them is to convince the city council to vote for an investment project they are promoting, to be financed through participatory budgeting. The audience (group of students) votes for the best project.

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Figure 1. Ethos and Status Components

In Figure 1, the differences between the structure of ethos and status are presented. As shown, ethos is made of three elements, while status denotes the level of domination in relation to other participants of the interaction. While the status can be located on a scale in which one is positioned higher than the other, ethos is rather a sphere of features of an individual and not a balance between two or more people. Another thing worth noting is that ethos and status function partially on different levels (Table 2).

Table 2. Ethos vs Status

Category	Ethos	Status
Relation	Speaker–audience	Characters in a scene
Communication situation	Rhetorical	Scene
Participant(s)	Speaker	Group of improvisers
Purpose	Convincing the subject at hand (*logos*)	Establishing relations between characters; building a believable character
Organising principle	Decorum (appropriateness)	Intuitiveness
Function	Gives credibility to the text/message	Gives credibility to the scene

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The speakers create ethos as belonging only to them and as a kind of relationship between themselves and the audience. Status, on the other hand, is established within the situation, between all characters in the scene. By 'choosing' certain statuses, participants establish relations with individuals in the group on the basis of domination and submission. The audience acts as an external observer. Ethos is created according to the rules of the appropriateness of rhetoric. Status is established intuitively as having more or less power of communication, regardless of the subject of the conversation (*logos*).

Status in improvisation corresponds with the symbolic/interactionist approach of ethos, which is derived from Goffman's (1974) concept of constructing an image of oneself in social interaction. The concept of self-image is similar to the concept of ethos in rhetoric: there is a construction of belief in the social role played by an individual. Self-image in social interactions is constantly negotiated during communication. Meanwhile, in rhetorical ethos, it is the speaker who is responsible for it, creating it in the text as a communication strategy (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a; Wisse, 1989). In the interactionist ethos, self-image becomes a negotiated self-representation and results from a continuous process of symbolic exchange. Status is a kind of self-image towards the participants of the interactions on the stage. Its framework is constantly negotiated during the play. The similarities between ethos and status as tools of influence are as follows:

1. Both concern credibility: the ethos of the message and the status of the characters in the scene
2. Both express the rhetorical energy: ethos towards the audience and status towards the players
3. Both are expressed in words as well as in para-verbal and non-verbal codes

If we look at ethos' instrumental aspect, i.e. influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the recipients, we can place it next to status and compare the two. They can be described as a set of verbal and non-verbal

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practices used for establishing appearance and personality attributes. Thus, we can look at people's status-based behaviour to identify the desired actions of a speaker. Taking some attributes from the scale of statuses, we can place them in a sphere of features needed to build credibility. Improv status games enable us to deconstruct the possibilities of developing ethos and then apply them to a variety of settings where there is a need to build rhetoric credibility in order to influence the audience. By experiencing the relationship between participants acting in high and low statuses, one can understand the potential of different ways of acting when giving a speech as well as what to avoid when building one's own rhetorical credibility. Based on the students' experience from the exercises, they can discuss the attributes of people giving speeches similarly to the statuses in the game. For instance, a high-status person acted confident, but might have been perceived as too dominant – what can one do to find the balance? What is the specific set of behaviours, then, that can be beneficial for building ethos? How is a person perceived in general and how can their credibility be built? Group discussion can also compare improv and rhetoric.

4.2. Exercises developing competences in the area of *dispositio* (arrangement)

In order to demonstrate the possibility of developing and strengthening arrangement skills, we have selected exercises devoted to *narratio*. Narration is an important part of the rhetorical *dispositio* that concerns a detailed explanation of the subject matter. The rhetoric textbooks list three features that the account of events (*narratio*) should have: it must be short (relating to the topic), lucid (appropriately selected intelligible content) and plausible (logically related facts based on available sources) (Lausberg, 2001, pp. 294–295). The function of narration is to relate the thesis with the argumentation that supports it.

Rhetorical *narratio* can appear in three forms: (1) as a biased presentation of facts (in court speeches), (2) as a digression (an anecdote) not strictly related to the case and (3) as a literary story referring either to events or people. A story about people serves to describe the characters

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psychologically. A story about events can come in three variations: (1) plot (an account of an event that did not take place), (2) story (a true account of an event) and (3) argument (an account of an untrue but probable event). There are six elements in the story: person, topic, place, time, matter and thing (Lausberg, 2001; Barłowska et al., 2010, pp. 173–184).

In improv, the narration is the core and basis of the performance. During their journey of mastering improv art, improvisers frequently aspire to develop the ability to construct a long-form, narrative-based performance. Narrative improv involves producing a storyline that not only makes the audience laugh, but also has a complete flow from beginning to end. The narrative takes place on the general level of the performance and in the story-telling parts of the play. The aim is to create a coherent, understandable performance, an engaging story with a specific frame. Storytelling skills and techniques are the foundation of convincingly presenting well-crafted stories. The narrative is the result of applying the elements that give stories shape, cohesiveness and power, but it is also a result of collaborative effort (Sawyer, 2002). For this reason, improv workshops contain multiple exercises and games devoted to teaching storytelling, the construction of narration and composition.

The purpose of the proposed exercises is to help students develop and improve their narrative skills and to understand and explore the place and meaning of narration in speech. The improv games centre on the collaborative creation of short stories with an outline of their flow. By showing the students ways to create a storyline, we will teach them the basics of narratives and narration. By contrasting these categories in improv and rhetoric, students will be able to reflect and learn about their essence and their value in speeches.

1. Improv Exercise

The first game is called 'The Story Spine'. The participants form a circle and, one by one, improvise the endings to each of the following sentence starters to create a short story: (1) Once upon a time… (2) Every day… (3) But one day… (4) Because of that… (5) Because of that… (6) Because of that… (7) Until finally… (8) And ever since then… This can be done

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either in a group, with each student taking the next line, or as an individual exercise where one student composes the whole story.

2. Rhetoric Exercise

Next comes a rhetoric part, in which students first draw a thesis in the form of a statement or a maxim, for instance, 'He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.' Then, they create short stories to illustrate and defend the thesis. They present the stories in front of the group. The audience will evaluate the stories' effectiveness in defending the thesis.

The differences between characteristics of rhetorical *narratio* and narration in improv are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Narration in Rhetoric vs. Narration in Improv

Category	Narration in Rhetoric	Narration in Improv
Approach/ Character	Instrumental	Ludic (focused on entertainment)
Goal	Supporting/defending/illustrating a thesis	Providing entertainment
Creator	An individual	A group or an individual (in games or monologues it can be one person)
Place	Part of the speech	Full play
Audience	Evaluating	Entertainment-focussed

In rhetoric, narration is a part of the speech placed in a specific location within the whole text – between *exordium* and *argumentatio*. Its character is instrumental; it must correspond with the arguments, support the thesis or illustrate the situation that is questioned. The orator takes into account the evaluating audience to whom the message is addressed, formulating the narration with a concrete goal in mind. In improv, on the other hand, narration is the core of the performance. Full-length plays are based on storylines that follow certain rules of composition, but may have alterations and variations within the performance (digressions, retrospections, etc.). Long-form improv builds on a skilfully crafted narrative; the goal of improvisers is to create a coherent, understandable and

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engaging story, providing the audience with an emotional experience (Łukowska, 2020).

The techniques of storytelling that are applied in improv can be implemented into rhetorical practice as well. Through short improv games, the students can develop practical skills of creating narration. After the exercises, they discuss the questions and issues related to narration: What are the differences between synergistic narrative (improv) and instrumental narrative (rhetoric)? How does freedom of narration differ from narration for the purposes of defending a thesis? Is there a specific order of narrative that one should follow? How can improv help develop creativity and inventive efficiency? How does the presence or absence of an evaluating audience influence the performance?

Conclusions

Rhetoric, as theoretical (*docens*) and practical (*utens*) knowledge, is important for the efficient functioning of an individual in society. The increasingly widespread recognition of the importance of rhetorical competences has made this field an important part of education at all levels, highlighting effective tools and possibilities for teaching. This article shows that university-level students benefit from an interdisciplinary approach to teaching rhetoric. The structured course of five workshops described herein combine rhetorical and improvisational practices, focus on the students' active involvement and exemplify the potential of these tools for teaching rhetoric.

The foundations of important interdisciplinary theories in the areas of ethos and narration demonstrate the potential of rhetorical education using improvisational techniques. In the case of ethos, the combination of rhetorical and improvisational exercises can expand the knowledge about rhetorical, interactional and social ethos, based on an understanding of the issues related to status (ethos in the performing arts). The practical exercises help students experience the contextual and situational implications and methods of building rhetorical credibility. In terms

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of narration, the theoretical considerations concern the area of narratology: narration in rhetoric and storytelling in improv. The exercises allow students to practice synergistic narrative (created in a group) as well as a singularly created narration with an instrumental character. The creation of short narrative forms helps them consider the issues of rhetorical *narratio* and essential rules of composition. Students can experience these matters through improv games, which allows them to further reflect on various possibilities of story creation, composition and crucial parts of delivery.

The theoretical grounding of knowledge is only one element supporting the development of communication in these two areas. Here, the focus is on *actio*, the competences in delivery, as well as on *inventio* and *dispositio*, creating and organising texts in specific compositions. The entire series of exercises covers the development of all competences from the rhetorical canons.

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