Can improvisation be 'taught'?: A call for free improvisation in our schools

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is to present the idea that the music education profession's current drive to include improvisation in school music is limited in its approach, and that *teaching* improvisation, in the traditional sense, is not possible. These beliefs are based on an examination of current methodologies and texts in light of the historical evolution of both improvisation and the teaching of improvisation. The article provides an examination of Jeff Pressing's historical conceptions of improvisation as a continuum model and then briefly looks at the short history of improvisation in American music education in the 20th century. Current methods are examined in light of free improvisation techniques. This leads to a final argument for more free improvisation in school music balanced with the current skills approach used in the USA. The conclusion of this article examines the issues and realities for current practices in music education in light of the beliefs set forth.

Key words
creative music education, free improvisation, improvisation, jazz

> Nothing seems to raise a heated debate among musicians faster than the question of whether improvisation can be taught. (Borgo, 2005, p. 8)

In the beginning of his recent book titled *Sync or Swarm*, free improviser David Borgo recalls a conversation with noted improvising musician George Lewis about the unease he faced when first presented with the prospect of having to actually 'teach' a course on free improvisation at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD). Noting that he was very comfortable actually *doing it*, Borgo realized that the practice of *teaching* free improvisation was not common in any university setting that he was aware of:

> Entering into this new pedagogical terrain I had no immediate models on which to draw. So I contacted George Lewis, the noted improviser, researcher, and the professor at UCSD in the Critical Studies and Experimental Practices Program … In his response to my query, George mentioned that he often begins the class in much the same way that they used to teach swimming – throw them in the deep end and work with what naturally happens. (2005, p. 9)

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The purpose of this article is to present my beliefs that the school music education community's current drive to include improvisation in school music is limited in its approach, and that *teaching* improvisation, in the traditional sense, is not possible. These beliefs are based on an examination of current methodologies and texts in light of the historical evolution of both improvisation and the teaching of improvisation. Current school methods and approaches to improvisation simply do not encourage or facilitate true creative thinking and growth, as will be outlined later in this article.

With the growing and relatively recent push toward more improvisation activities in schools in the USA, there is a need to challenge the assumption that improvisation is a skill that, in fact, needs to be 'taught' and then to imagine alternative ways of facilitating creative music growth through improvisation in schools. Specifically, there are three beliefs that prompt the writing of this article:

- What we claim to be 'teaching' as improvisation in schools is not *true* improvisation.
- *True* improvisation cannot be taught – it is a disposition to be enabled and nurtured.
- Children do not need 'building blocks' to be 'successful' improvisers; methodologies that emphasize tonally centered, rhythmically simple, short and uncontextualized patterns are more likely to hamper the growth of creative musical thinkers than to elicit true creative thought.

These tenets are purposefully extreme, meant to provoke thought and, hopefully, productive dialogue on how we might push the balance in improvisation in schools away from musical control and closer to musical freedom – a 'throw them in the deep end' approach. The intent of this articleis *not* to condemn other 'improvisation' methodologies, but with all due respect to my Orff-Schulwerk, Music Learning Theory, Dalcroze and jazz colleagues whose goals are to *teach* improvisation, it is to critically examine what improvisation means in light of an enculturation view of teaching within the perspective of authentic and current improvisation practices. In the end I propose a balance between structure and freedom; a stance that balances teaching of skills (the current approach) along with encouraging freedom.

I begin by setting forth my working definitions of teaching and improvisation in order to clarify the arguments to follow. I follow this with a historical background of improvisation that provides a scaffold for a continuum model of improvisational practices. Next I provide a short history of improvisation in the 20th century of American music education and then briefly critically examine today's practices. This leads to a final argument for more free improvisation in school music balanced with the current skills approach. The conclusion of this article examines the issues and realities for music education in light of the beliefs I set forth.

Definitions

Myriad definitions of 'teach' span a spectrum from the very narrow, direct transmission approach to the more broad view of teaching as 'enculturation'. A dictionary definition offers the more didactic version: 'to impart knowledge of or skill in; give instruction in' (teaching, n.d.), while Tishman, Jay and Perkins (1993), in their essay on how to teach thinking dispositions, offer a less didactic view. The enculturation model presented by Tishman and colleagues focuses on teaching thinking as a disposition rather than any one skill or set of skills to be learned. That is to think of teaching in terms of enculturation through exposure to cultural exemplars and the subsequent development of a disposition to understand. Figure 1 illustrates a continuum that moves from the more structured transmission model

Figure 1 Continuum of 'teaching'

to the freer enculturation model. Traditional schooling more often falls closer to the left end of the continuum in Figure 1, while more broad experiences through apprenticeships, exploration, and the development of creative and critical thinking dispositions fall toward the enculturation end of the continuum.

The Latin root of improvisation is *improvisus*, or unforeseen, unprepared. A dictionary definition for 'improvise' includes:

> a creation spoken or written or composed extemporaneously (without prior preparation)
> an unplanned expedient
> a performance given extempore without planning or preparation
> (improvisation, n.d.)

The simple pairing of the words 'teach' and 'improvisation' presents a problem. How can one teach something that requires no preparation? Is it really possible to teach, in the didactic sense, extemporaneity, unpreparedness, in-the-moment music-making utilizing didactic approaches to teaching? I will argue it is not; that the most creative and true improvisation is a *disposition* to be encouraged, facilitated and modeled in our classrooms, along with the musical skills that need to be taught. And if we think of teaching in the broadest sense, that of 'enculturation', whereby we provide exposure to cultural exemplars and stimulate the *disposition* to think critically and creatively, then improvisation will likely look different from current methods in our traditional music classrooms. 'In this view, teaching thinking means more than inculcating particular thinking skills; it means teaching students to be disposed to think creatively and critically in appropriate contexts' (Tishman et al., 1993, p. 148).

An historical continuum of improvisation practices

The late Jeff Pressing, a pioneering scholar on the study of improvisation as a cognitive process, provides a historical summary of broad categories of improvisation teaching and connects these categories to current teaching practices. Pressing's (1987) historical and categorical account of approaches to improvisation pedagogy provides an interesting and useful continuum of pedagogies that move from structured to free. Figure 2 provides Pressing's (1987) categories in five 'stages'[1] superimposed on the continuum of teaching presented in Figure 1.

The focus of improvisation as a skill to be taught came to the forefront seriously only in the last century. As Pressing asserts: 'In the 20th century prescriptive teaching texts on Western music improvisation are legion' (1987, p. 141). Pressing describes the very first stage of western improvisation however, as dominant in pre-Baroque times. It consisted of 'real-time' composition in which performers embellished lines or created variations to existing melodies or patterns. 'In practice this results in a nuts-and-bolts approach with few implications for the modeling of improvisation beyond basic ideas of variation, embellishment and other traditional processes of musical development' (Pressing, 1987, p. 142). Perhaps an equivalent approach today would be the types of embellishment exercises now common in

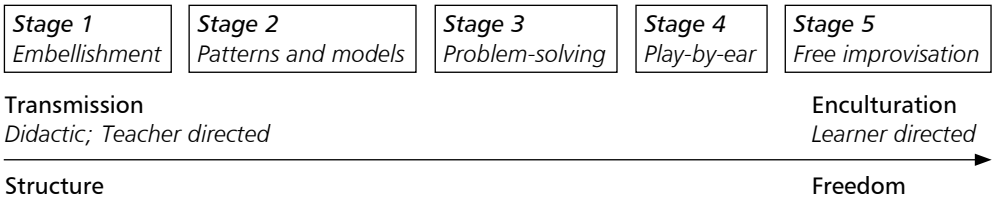

Figure 2 Pressing's stages of improvisation and the continuum of teaching

beginning instrumental method books whereby a simple melody is notated, with some notes missing, and students are to fill in different notes as they play (or notate).

Pressing's second stage is a 'patterns and models' approach that he describes as the figured bass and melodic keyboard improvisations of the 17th and 18th century as well as the current 'riff' approach to jazz improvisation. This approach, if 'followed by those possessing a solid enough level of musicianship, will produce stylistically appropriate music' (Pressing, 1987, p. 142). Current examples include, for example, the Aebersold 'riff' approach to teaching jazz improvisation. In this highly popular improvisation series, learners memorize the stylistic riffs over common chord patterns (e.g. ii–V7–I7) in order to improvise over the requisite patterns when they appear in jazz solos (Aebersold, 2000). Other jazz methods that use this 'patterns and models' approach include texts by Baker (1988) and Coker (1997). An example of the 'patterns and models' approach in non-jazz improvisation pedagogy is the improvisation method based on Gordon's Music Learning Theory (2003b) as illustrated in improvisation texts by Gordon (2003a) and Azzara and Grunow (2003). One might also consider approaches to Orff-Schulwerk exercises, where patterns are used as prerequisites for imitation and then on which to improvise. In the traditional Orff-Schulwerk model, imitation precedes exploration and improvisation (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006; Frazee, 1987).

The third category involves 'the setting of a spectrum of improvisational problems or constraints' (Pressing, 1987, p. 143), which is labeled 'problem-solving' in Figure 2. Pressing credits Emile Jaques-Dalcroze as the pioneer of this approach, based on Dalcroze's improvisation exercises for the piano. With this type of improvisation the teacher does not model but instead intends to provoke personal response such as through musical 'problems' to be solved. Pressing points to present-day jazz 'fake books' as illustrative of this category in current practice. In a fake book, the problem to be solved is the 'tune' and chord changes.

Pressing describes the fourth stage as an 'imitative self-discovery' approach, where learners are confronted with 'the presentation of multiple versions of important musical entities' (1987, p. 143), with which they must grapple and experiment on their own. Pressing contends this is essentially a play-by-ear approach such as in the Persian radif or Ghanian musical traditions, as well as in the current approach to learning jazz solos by ear from recordings and eventually extracting common riffs as improvisation patterns. 'Song-form based improvisations, in which solos consist of a number of choruses which repeat the same underlying chord progression, are particularly suitable' (Pressing, 1987, pp. 143–144). To this category I would add the informal learning methods depicted in Green's recent work with garage bands (Green, 2002, 2008). In this 'informal' style of learning, students learn by 'copying, playing by ear and self-expression' (Musical Futures, 2008). Five key learning principles form the basis of this new 'Musical Futures' curriculum, as gleaned from Green's research:

1. Learning music that pupils choose, like and identify with
2. Learning by listening to and copying recordings
3. Learning with friends

4. Personal, often haphazard learning without structured guidance
5. Integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing, with one or more (though not all) of these principles present in all stages of the project. (Price, 2006)

The final category, and I would argue the least constricted, is, as Pressing describes, 'allied to the self-realisation ideas of humanistic psychology' (1987, p. 144). Free improvisation, the most open kind of improvisation, is based on concepts of creativity and expressive individuality and most closely aligns with the 'free improvisation' genre of current times. Pressing cites the work of Orff, Kodaly, Suzuki, Jaques-Dalcroze and Murray Shafer as foundational to this approach. In particular, Pressing cites Abramson's description of Dalcroze-based improvisation as most aligned with his own conception of this category: 'the student should come to music without the teacher's preconceptions. Thus students find music through their own movements, singing, and playing. Improvisation becomes a way of finding music for yourself and by yourself, a discovery rather than an imitation' (Abramson, 1980, p. 62).

Pressing's categories are organized historically as well as through types of improvisation that move from structured to more free. Other researches have acknowledged the dichotomy, or continuum, that exists between structure and freedom in improvisation and composition. These are illustrated and superimposed over the teaching continuum in Figure 3. This set of dichotomous terms may be useful for music educators to examine where they stand in their approach to improvisation.

Improvisation in school music

Improvisation as a real learning outcome in American schools first appeared in the early 1970s, mostly in the form of jazz improvisation, as jazz was beginning to be accepted as a legitimate music ensemble in public schools (Mark, 1996). Outside of jazz, Satis Coleman was perhaps the first to publish materials for, and experiment with composition and improvisation in American music education. She taught music at the Lincoln School, in New York City, which was the laboratory school for Columbia University Teachers' College, where

Control	*Borgo (2005); Montouri (2003)*	*Chaos*
Tonal – Eurocentric	*Bailey (1992)*	*Non-idiomatic*
Formal	*Price (2006)*	*Non-formal, informal*
Work	*Green (2002, 2008)*	*Play*
Teacher's focus	*Thomson (2007)*	*Sound focus*
Individual	*Sawyer (2006, 2008)*	*Group*
Repetition	*Attali (1985/2006)*	*'Composing' – non-repetition*
Composition	*Nettl (1974, 2005)*	*Improvisation*

Transmission — **Enculturation**
Didactic; Teacher directed — *Learner directed*

Structure — **Freedom**

Figure 3 Dichotomies of improvisation

she was able to experiment freely with ideas in interdisciplinary methods, creativity and cooperative learning (Volk, 1996). She published several 'how-to' books on creative music and instrument making for school as well as for home (e.g. Coleman, 1922, 1927a, 1927b, 1939). Not long after Coleman's work was the pioneering research of Moorhead and Pond (1941/1978) who observed children over several years in a pre-school program as they freely improvised music. In this study, children were free to choose what, when and how to use a variety of musical instruments. The researchers observed that children improvised and composed successfully both individually and collaboratively without the intervention of adult guidance. 'To produce his own music a young child's first need, we find, is freedom – freedom to move about in pursuit of his own interests and purposes, and freedom to make the sounds appropriate to them' (1941/1978, p. 33).

In 1974, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) published *The School Music Program; Description and Standards* (MENC, National Commission on Instruction, 1974), which included creative activity (titled 'Organizing') as one of the three curricular areas along with 'performing' and 'describing'. 'Organizing' in this document included composition as well as 'the spontaneous development of musical ideas through improvisation' (p. 9). This document also acknowledged the concurrent development of creative curricula such as the Manhattanville Music Curriculum Program, Orff-Schulwerk and Dalcroze methodologies. These developments in improvisation and composition activities for school music during this time were an important step forward.

Initially, as improvisation first became part of formal school music materials, it was approached as a skill, mostly devoid of any cultural context, that teachers needed to learn themselves in order to teach their students – who were assumed otherwise incapable. In a text to help teachers bring improvisation into their classrooms, Konowitz (1973) offers 'You can learn to improvise on some musical "instrument" and subsequently teach the skills to your students, whatever their age, grade, or level' (p. 1). Another similar book of this time period, *Teaching Creative Music in Secondary Schools* (Lasker, 1971), also promotes a carefully prescribed technique centered around tonal harmony and regular rhythm patterns, but is devoid of both context as well as freedom.

In the meantime, outside of formal schooling in the 1960s and 1970s jazz was not only changing into a progressively freer form, but there was a developing movement in a non-idiomatic form of improvisation in the USA and UK that was finding its own way separately from jazz (Bailey, 1992). Interestingly, there seemed to be no connection between the methods of jazz or non-jazz improvisation taking place in schools and the concurrent movement and techniques of free improvisation taking place outside of school music.

Current materials

The current push to 'teach' improvisation in school music in the USA was stimulated by the publication of the 1994 *National Standards for Arts Education* (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994). However, the descriptions and sample activities for improvisation in these standards are no more authentic or free than any of the materials published in the 1970s. To illustrate this point, one needs to look no further than the document that spells out the 'strategies and benchmarks for assessing progress toward the National Standards' (MENC, 1996). This text provides sample strategies and resulting benchmarks to assist teachers with assessing progress in each of the content standards. An example of one of these assessment tasks, and accompanying description of response levels for Content Standard 3 – Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments – is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Achievement task for Content Standard 3

Achievement Strategy Task A (grade K–4): Students improvise 'answers' in the same style to given rhythmic and melodic phrases

Assessment strategy:
The student is asked to improvise a rhythmic 'answer' to a 'question' played by the teacher. The teacher plays a four-measure pattern; the student plays an 'answer' of the same length and in the same tempo. The student should play immediately following the teacher, with no interruption of the beat. The teacher and the student may play on woodblocks or other percussion instruments or may clap the pattern.

Description of response:

Basic Level:
1. There is a hesitation or interruption in the beat between the question and the answer.
2. The tempo of the answer is close to that of the question, though by the end the answer is definitely faster or slower.
3. The rhythm of the answer is not performed with precision.
4. The answer is close but not identical in length to the question.

Proficient Level:
1. The answer follows the question with no hesitation or interruption in the beat.
2. The tempo of the answer is the same as that of the question. The beat is steady.
3. The rhythm of the answer is performed with precision.
4. The answer is identical in length to the question.

Advanced Level:
1. The answer follows the question with no hesitation or interruption in the beat.
2. The tempo of the answer is the same as that of the question. The beat is steady.
3. The rhythm of the answer is performed with precision.
4. The answer is identical in length to the question.
5. The answer includes essentially the same rhythmic patterns as the question, but it is not identical. Any new rhythms introduced in the answer are derived from the rhythms of the question.

Source: MENC, 1996, p. 39

In this example, there is a clearly defined path to the 'improvisation product' and, if done at the advanced level, the product will sound nearly identical to the teacher prompt: 'The answer includes essentially the same rhythmic patterns as the question, but it is not identical' (MENC, 1996, p. 39). Other methods such as Orff-Schulwerk (Frazee, 1987), and Music Learning Theory methods (Azzara & Grunow, 2003; Gordon, 2003a, 2003b) have similar question–answer approaches to improvisation with a clear sense of a 'correct' answer for success. A review of a current elementary classroom music text for grade 4 (Spotlight on Music, 2005) offers little more than a very small percentage of activities that involve any kind of improvisation. The improvisation exercises that are offered provide carefully prescribed directions to fit with the concept, rhythm, melody and form being learned in a particular unit. There are no moments where children are free to simply improvise. Though it is not the intent of this article to critically examine all of the current approaches to teaching non-jazz or jazz improvisation, I would conclude that most current methods have three common attributes:

- There is a carefully defined path set for reaching an improvisational product. This path is one that usually ensures tonal or rhythmic 'success'.

- Students are given limited choices, sometimes not more than allowing suggestions for dynamic, textual or timbral changes.
- The path to the improvisational product is teacher directed and/or carefully prescribed.

The current methods do not 'teach' improvisation per se and, I believe, are more likely to hamper any creative disposition to improvise freely. However, the current approaches to improvisation likely teach problem-solving strategies and certain musical skills such as rhythmic and tonal harmonic understanding, precision in performance, and so on. But I would argue this falls on the left side of the continuum in Figure 1, and rarely crosses over to the student-centered right side. 'School improvisation' is vastly different from the practices of 'real improvisation' outside of school, most especially free jazz or free improvisation.

> Thus, 'improvisations' which appear to consist mainly of unquestioning, rote regurgitation of prepared patterns are viewed by many improvisers as failing to display the kind of independent creative investigation and spontaneous invention that can lead to the discovery of what jazz musicians often call 'one's own sound', or the original creation of one's own musical material and lexicon. (Lewis, 2000, p. 83)

Finding a balance

There is no doubt that the disposition to improvise musical ideas alone, or within a group setting is one that comes naturally to young children (Campbell, 1998; Moorhead & Pond, 1941/1978; Young, 2002, 2008). However the *skills* to do such in genre-specific idioms, or with virtuosic talent on an instrument, need to be learned, and the most efficient way to learn them is through direct transmission from teacher to student. The tension lies in the middle point: efforts to teach skills must account for their interaction and interdependence with the child's natural tendencies. There must be a balance between having a defined 'point of departure' (Nettl & Russell, 1998) or genre-specific model, and complete freedom to respond to the environment through free improvisation. How does one learn skills without hampering freedom? Is it possible to be free without skills? These are the necessary questions for educators to ask when hoping to nurture a creative improvisation disposition. As Moorhead and Pond assert:

> For if technical training is in advance of the child's needs it is unassimilable [sic], and produces (as it does in adult musicians) creative sterility. And if the child has technical needs which are not satisfied his creativity is apt to dry up because of his inability to function at his proper level. (1941/1978, p. 48)

Moving from teaching to nurturing

Figure 4 illustrates the relative starting point and distance educators tend to travel along the continuum from structured to free while 'teaching' improvisation in schools over time. The tendency is to start in a very controlled teacher-directed place, moving slightly toward more imitative and pattern improvisation, and then back to the control area. The distance becomes narrower as students become older; either students become more apprehensive of improvisation or teachers feel less inclined to move beyond the teacher-directed area.

Figure 5 provides a model for a potential approach to improvisation that turns the traditional approach on its head. It begins in the unstructured side of the continuum, developing an improvisatory *disposition*, and while it stretches toward more *skills*-oriented learning over time, it also continues to visit improvisation as a learner-directed activity. As students

get older they begin to learn the skills needed in genre-specific models of improvisation. This is the complete opposite of the methods that assume that 'building blocks' are necessary prerequisites to successful improvisation.

I am not calling for all teachers to completely let go and allow classrooms to run by themselves. Eliott Eisner talks of 'non-teaching' in the art classroom and acknowledges that while it is a real phenomenon, it is not likely to work in a classroom. He argues that the 'challenge to teachers is not to do nothing, but to act in ways that advance students' thinking' (Eisner, 2002, p. 46). What is needed is the development of skill balanced in some way with improvisation flexibility, which would be led by students' impulses and interactions with their environments. The carefully synchronized task of building skill in a traditional sense, along with the disposition to be free, presents a 'paradoxical phenomenon' as described by Montouri (2003): 'Traditionally, we think of them disjunctively as either/or (either you're

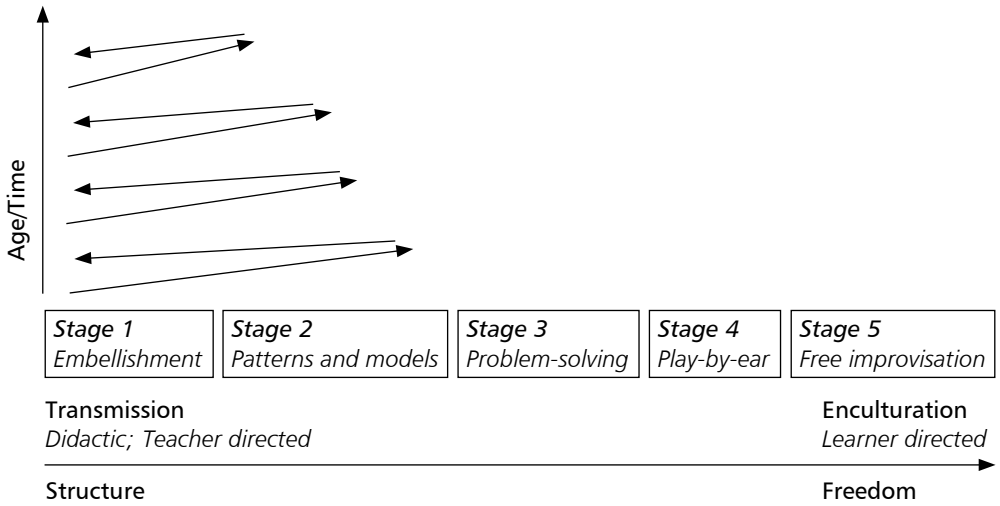

Figure 4 Traditional approaches to improvisation in school music

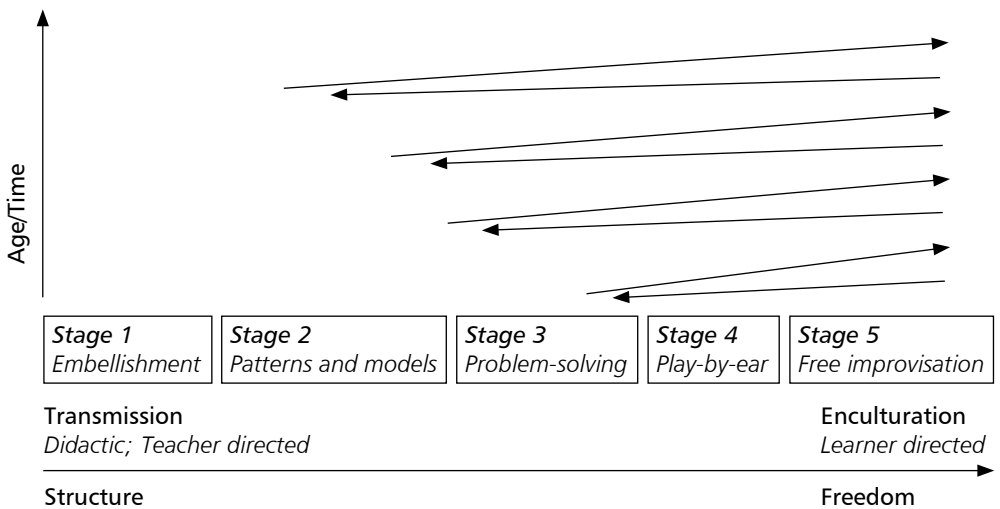

Figure 5 Proposed approaches to improvisation in school music

secure or at risk, disciplined or spontaneous), when in fact in creative persons they might manifest as being secure enough (in one's musical capacities) to take risks, being disciplined enough to be spontaneous (walking the line between being rigid and chaotic)' (2003, p. 250). This is not an easy situation to forge.

Free improvisation

Free improvisation is a form of improvisation that is ultimately the most open, non-rules bound, most learner directed, and, consequently, the least (if ever) approached in schools. It is not a free-for-all approach, as it requires attentive and sensitive listening to the environment and others involved. However, it is an improvisation that *cannot* be taught in the traditional sense, but experienced, facilitated, coached and stimulated. As noted in the opening quotation, George Lewis advises: 'throw them in the deep end and work with what naturally happens' (Borgo, 2005, p. 9). There is no right way to do it, and the process often requires more attention than the product. Derek Bailey, a prolific free improviser himself, provides the most succinct definition of this free improvisation:

> Diversity is its most consistent characteristic. It has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it. (1992, p. 83)

As in the discoveries found in the informal learning research by Lucy Green (2002, 2008), children will learn as a result of this freedom, though just what they learn is not completely known at the outset. Green notes: 'The role of the teachers was to stand back, observe, diagnose, guide, suggest and model, attempt to take on pupils' perspective, and help pupils to achieve the objectives that they had set for themselves' (Green, 2008, p. 152). Choice, listening and autonomy become central to the process.

Free improvisation begins with deep listening and reacting to the environment or players involved. Texts by Pauline Oliveros (2005), R. Murray Schafer (1986) and John Paynter (Paynter, 1992; Paynter & Aston, 1970) offer techniques and exercises for facilitating free and creative improvisation in music classrooms with children of all ages. What is needed more than these, however, are materials specifically written for school practitioners by the textbook and method writers to provide useful support and ideas for teachers to begin using free improvisation in their classrooms. The Musical Futures' (2008) curriculum is a current example of useful tools for authentic improvisation learning in the context of a music classroom.

Issues and questions in 'non-teaching' free improvisation

To move away from 'teaching' improvisation to allowing and facilitating free improvisatory activities in our classrooms raises pedagogical questions surrounding audience, evaluation, classroom management, teacher training and research. These issues are especially critical in the current school culture of 'representation and repetition' (Attali, 1985/2006), where students are often asked to reproduce answers on standardized tests rather than being given opportunities to use their creative minds.

The first issue, audience, is one that may be the biggest road block to changing American music education. The sounds of a free improvisation session, if truly free, do not necessarily produce an 'aesthetically pleasing' product, and are certainly something an audience of

parents may not understand, much less enjoy. Though it has been debated whether free improvisation should be intended for audience consumption as much as it is for the participant, this remains perhaps the single issue that may hinder our product-oriented school music programs from moving toward the more free end of the continuum. In writing about free improvisation, Jacques Attali suggests:

> This new activity is NOT undertaken for its exchange or use value. It is undertaken solely for the pleasure of the person who does it (its 'producer'). Such activity involves a radical rejection of the specialized roles (composer, performer, audience) that dominated all previous music. (1985/2006, p. 135)

A closely related problem is that of attempting to assess a product (or process) that is not planned: extemporaneous. Our use of the traditional 'elements' of music (e.g. melody, rhythm, harmony) as a metric combined with emphasis on tonality over non-tonality likely will not work in the case of free improvisation. Thomson argues: 'As a working methodology, improvisation does not proscribe sounds, sound sources, or instrumental techniques and, though the priorities of each performer will inform the aesthetic goals of any performance, strict notions of technical excellence are difficult to locate and assess' (2007, p. 3). In order for educators to embrace the notion of truly free improvisation activities in schools, we need to change our concepts of what is 'good' or 'not good' when faced with assessing the activity.

Classroom management is another very real issue. Borgo labels free improvisation groups 'self-sustaining organisms' that belie hierarchy and demand chemistry among members. Student-led improvisation is reliant upon effective group interaction, free of personality problems, individual differences or aesthetic differences that might get in the way of a smooth group process. The realities of classroom management combined with the artificial randomness of classroom selection make successful group improvisation a challenge in a real music classroom. The teacher, not in charge, must facilitate a trusted group practice. Can this *really* be done in the context of everyday school structures? It is a question that must be addressed.

There is a desperate need for longitudinal research that replicates the work of Moorhead and Pond (1941/1978) whereby students are observed for long periods of time in free improvisation learning environments well into the upper elementary grades. A longitudinal study such as this may provide developmental information about children's natural proclivity to improvise as well as offer a window into their unique musical worlds and the influence of such on their creative expressions.

Another research question would be to follow up with students trained in different methodologies in schools, as well as those who dropped out of the traditional classroom music programs, to determine what they have learned and how they have been affected. There are no data that inform us about the long-term influence of any of the current (or past) methodologies (with perhaps the exception of Suzuki) on music students. Where are the students today that were products of, for instance, the Manhattanville curriculum, or were trained in Music Learning Theory or in Aebersold jazz methods? What do they recall of their improvisation training? What do they still use as musicians today?

Finally, we need to collect pedagogical histories of the masters in the field in order to learn more from how they learned. Two excellent examples of such are legendary improviser George Lewis's *Ethnographic Memoir* of teaching improvised music (2000) and Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* (1994), an in-depth ethnographical study of how the great jazz musicians learn. Information gleaned from these should be made useable by current school music teachers.

Where and how will future teachers learn to break the cycle? Is the university equipped to teach future music teachers how to facilitate free improvisation in music classrooms? There are only a few higher institutions of learning that exist in the USA that offer studies in non-idiomatic improvisation.[2] Will free improvisation become accepted 20 years from now as a serious genre, and as institutionalized as jazz has become? We need to leverage the knowledge of past leaders and current practitioners in our music teacher education programs in order to advance the facilitation of free improvisation in future school music classrooms.

Conclusion

Children come to us as eager improvisers and experimenters. How might schools and music educators capture this proclivity and encourage and nurture the disposition? How might we view improvisation, not as a product to be taught in a strict methodological or pedagogical manner, but as a process to be encouraged on the way to learning freedom and self-actualization? The interpersonal as well as spiritual dimension of free improvisation is only beginning to be explored and may hold tremendous promise for future educators (Borgo, 2007; McCarthy, in press). How might music educators *enable*, rather than inhibit, a disposition of freedom and creativity and intuition of music improvisation?

As in any good curriculum planning we need to come back to a basic question: why and for what reason do we include improvisation in school music? In other words, what skills and/or abilities are we trying to 'teach' and for what reason(s)? Skills to produce a response to a prompt that 'sounds good' in the narrow context of the music classroom so that we can say we have met our objectives? Or a goal to enable students to be lifelong creative improvisers and to give them a sense of freedom when doing so? If it is the latter, then we have work to do as teachers and professors in teacher training institutions to figure out how to balance structure and freedom in our classrooms in order to motivate and inspire students to be free thinkers and improvisers in a way that will serve them for a lifetime.

> May the spirit of freedom embraced by the art of improvisation change the world from one that confines to one that offers choices. (Oliveros, 2004, p. 70)

Notes

1. The term 'stage' as well as titles for each stage are mine, not Pressings. These were titled this way for easy reference in the text. Pressing uses 'category' or 'technique' when describing each of these stages.
2. Examples include the University of California, San Diego ('Contemporary Music Performance') as well as Mills College in California (MFA 'Performance and Literature', with a specialization in improvisation).

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Abstracts

Peut-on 'enseigné' l'improvisation? Un appel pour l'improvisation libre dans nos écoles

Le but de cet article est de présenter l'idée que la commande courante de notre profession pour inclure l'improvisation dans l'école de musique est limitée dans son approche, et que l'enseignement de l'improvisation, dans le sens traditionnel, n'est pas possible. Ces appréciations sont appuyées sur l'examen des méthodologies actuelles et des textes à la lumière de l'évolution historique de l'improvisation et de l'enseignement de l'improvisation. Ce papier fournit un examen des conceptions historiques de l'improvisation en utilisant le travail de Jeff Pressing comme un modèle continu et examine brièvement la brève histoire

de l'improvisation dans l'éducation musicale américaine au 20ème siècle. Des méthodes courantes sont examinées à la lumière des techniques libres d'improvisation. Il défend une improvisation plus libre dans l'école de musique et équilibrée avec *l'approche courante des compétences*. La conclusion de cet article examine les questions et les réalités pour des pratiques en vigueur dans l'éducation musicale à la lumière des points de vue déterminés.

Kann Improvisation 'unterrichtet' werden? Ein Aufruf für freie Improvisation in unseren Schulen

Der Ursprung dieses Bericht ist es, die Idee aufzuzeigen,dass die gegenwärtige Tendenz in unserem Beruf,die Improvisation in die Schulmusik einzubringen, in ihrem Zugang limitiert ist und dass *der Improvisationsunterricht*, im traditionellen Sinn nicht möglich ist. Diese Ansicht basiert auf einer Überprüfung der geläufigen Methodologie und Texte im Licht der geschichtlichen Entwicklung von beiden, Improvisation und Improvisationsunterricht. Der Bericht stellt eine Überprüfung dar, zu Jeff Pressings historischer Vorstellung über Improvisation als ein fortlaufendes Modell mit einem kurzen Überblick der Geschichte der Improvisation im 20.Jahrh. der amerikanischen Musikerziehung. Aktuelle Methoden werden im Lichte der freien Improvisationstechniken intersucht. Dies führt abschliessend zum Argument für mehr freie Improvisation in der Schulmusik in einem Ausgleich mit den gängigen Methoden. Der Abschluss dieses Berichts überprüft die Ausgangslagen und Realitäten für geläufigePraktiken in der Musikerziehung im Blickwinkel der dargelegten Ansichten.

¿Puede 'enseñarse' la improvisación? Una invitación a la improvisación libre en nuestras escuelas

El propósito de este artículo es presentar la idea de que el enfoque actual sobre la improvisación en la música escolar es limitado, y que *enseñar* improvisación, en el sentido tradicional, no es posible. Esta idea está basada en un examen de metodologías y textos actuales a la luz de la evolución histórica tanto de la improvisación como de la enseñanza de la improvisación. El artículo examina las concepciones históricas de Jeff Presing sobre la improvisación como un modelo continuo, y luego analiza la corta historia de la improvisación en la educación musical norteamericana del siglo XX. Se estudian los métodos actuales a la luz de las técnicas de improvisación libre. Esto lleva a una propuesta final de más improvisación libre en la música escolar, que equilibre el enfoque actual de desarrollo de destrezas. En las conclusiones se discuten las prácticas contemporáneas en educación musical a la luz de la idea propuesta.