ABSTRACT

Improvisation has been an integral component of music practice throughout a variety of world musics, such as the Indonesian Gamelan, Japanese Kabuki Theatre, African drumming, Australian Indigenous music, Klezmer music, the Indian Raga, Jazz and Popular music. Instrumental tuition, within the present system of Western school music education, on the other hand, tends to emphasise an early and ongoing commitment to the reading of notated music. Some of the literature in the area suggests that the emphasis for instrumental music tuition should be concerned with improvisation thus producing opportunities to achieve a more personalised and independent result with music expression. By including improvisation within regular tuition the student instrumentalist could feel more at one with his or her own voice and imagination, rather than attempting to take on the role of reproducing the character and style of another person’s notation.

This thesis focussed on the development and provision of improvised music activities with high school music students from Years 10 and 11. Consideration was given to how these improvised music activities might have impacted not only their improvisational skills but also broader attitudes to music. The study included a specifically designed curriculum emphasising improvisational techniques. It was constructed and implemented over a ten-week period with accompanying interviews, questionnaire and video. The aim of the study was to assess the impact of the implementation of this curriculum and how it could assist the learning and teaching of improvisation.

The study’s performance-ensemble consisted of rhythm and lead instrumentalists where all participants had the opportunity to engage with specific instrumental techniques that assisted the expression of improvisation. Simultaneously, all participants had the liberty of managing the lesson-content with original extemporised melody and composition. The results showed the participants experienced increased confidence with improvisation. The conclusion suggests that improvisation be viewed as an integral component within the teaching and learning of instrumental music.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

1. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters.
2. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other references.
3. The thesis is 20,000 words in length exclusive of tables, list of references and appendices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was very much encouraged by my original lecturer, Andrew Swainston, when I completed my Master of Music Studies at The University of Melbourne in 2008. Andrew convinced me to present my views on improvisation by conducting the appropriate research requirements for the Master of Education Degree. I was then in turn introduced to Dr. Neryl Jeanneret, who in party with Andrew became my Principal and Associate Supervisors and Researchers. Dr. David Forrest, Dr. Helen Farrell and Dr. Judy Rogers have been supportive and encouraging, as have all the local and interstate members of the Australian Society for Music Education. Members of the Victorian Music Teachers’ Association have also been supportive colleagues. Acknowledgement must also go to my parents, Robert and Merle Dipnall.

The participants in this research and the many students that I have taught have stimulated the origins of this inquiry. All my music students, whether they have been beginners or very advanced, have experienced times when they have been called upon to musically improvise. Their humble, courageous faces and optimistic disposition towards the unknown elements of improvisation, requiring a spontaneous musical expression without the assistance of notation, have made a lasting impression.
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CHAPTER 1

Introducing Instrumental Students to Improvisation

Improvisation is a practice that appears to be universal and cross-cultural. The ability to elaborate and improvise upon a melody was seen as the norm in ancient Greek music (Grout, 1973) as it was with the musicians of the Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque periods. As the printing of music grew, the skills, expectations and requirements of improvisation tended to disappear in the world of art music. Musicians gradually became bound to notation. It wasn’t until blues and jazz music emerged between 1870 and 1900 that improvised music reappeared.

Within Australia, the 2005 National Review of School Music Education (DEEWR, 2005) strongly advocated the teaching of improvisation. The review suggested that the teaching and learning of improvisation should be prioritised and targeted. The evidence suggested that the teaching of improvisation in Australia was well intentioned but by no means thorough and failed to provide a progressive pathway from primary to secondary sectors. Within the UK context, Ross (1995), Small (1999) and Swanwick (1999) have also suggested that music education would benefit with a less formal approach.

Swanwick (1992) and the National Review of School Music Education (DEEWR, 2005) have noted that instrumental music students tend to give up during year eight, or when they leave school. Data from the Australian Music Association’s market report (2007, 2008, pp. 2 - 3) noted that there had been a “dive into negative growth” in the purchase of orchestral wind and brass instruments, indicating less enthusiasm for school music programs. The growth area had been with “popular” instruments such as guitar and drums. Perhaps this negative growth is related to how music programs are taught and managed? If improvisation were perceived more broadly as an essential and overarching component of school music education, then perhaps the participation experience would be more enjoyable, progressive and meaningful for all concerned. This was one of my central concerns in this thesis aligned with an inquiry into an informed pedagogy relevant to the teaching and learning of improvisation.
In order to teach improvisation various influences were examined. Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (2005) concluded that the most effective way of teaching was to employ a student-centered, holistic, collaborative and constructivist model of pedagogy. Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde’s (2005) model of best practice arose, in part, from the researchers sifting through more than 45 national curriculum reports published between 1989 to 2005 covering such diverse areas as mathematics, science, arts, reading, social studies, health and teaching standards. All the reports supported that classrooms should be student-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging (Jeanneret & DeGraffenreid, 2012).

Green (2002) reached a similar conclusion after examining how popular musicians learn. A central component of popular music is the use of improvisation. According to Green, popular musicians became fully enculturated by observing, mimicking and assimilating the idiosyncrasies of this idiom. They adopted an enthusiastic and relaxed approach to their studies in their natural setting (Green, 2005). Adding to this, Sloboda and Davidson (1996), McPherson (1993), Folkstead (2005) and Green (2008) concluded that a healthy mix of formal (deliberate) and informal pedagogy and practice tended to produce the most proficient instrumentalists capable of expert improvisation.

Alternatively, Mills (2005) noted that “best practice” is not always seen in music lessons where teachers often instructed without an inquiring and original pedagogy. Similarly, Ross (1995) observed that some music teachers acted like martinets whilst Wiggins and Wiggins (2008) suggested that others acted as tyrannical and chastising prima donnas. These approaches would not assist the teaching of improvisation.

Various additional theoretical perspectives on improvisation have been advanced. Gordon (1989), Priest (1989) and McPherson (1993) stressed the importance of aural development to pre hear, discern and anticipate sound when improvising. Similarly, Kemp (1990) refers to the kinaesthetic, whole of body requirements to articulate improvised sound so as to be immersed in the energy of its context. Flavell (1979) and Pintrich (2002) speak of the metacognition required for improvisation whilst Webster (1990) and Sawyer (2007) examined the convergent and divergent thought
processes that enable creativity. Self-efficacy and positive thoughts (Bandura & Locke, 2003) also contribute towards a disposition for improvisation. All of these aforementioned considerations are important ones within the context of instrumental music teaching, as the improvisational process emanates from an informed ability to create music.

Within the school setting, the stage band (big band) provides opportunity for improvisation where instrumentalists perform ‘solos’ as a feature within the main compositional entity. The improvisation text that musicians rely upon within this iteration is either a suggested “written” solo by the composer and /or free interpretation from a set of guiding chord structures. I have observed that most instrumentalists tend to opt for the composer’s written solo as they tend to feel “anxiety” (Wehr-Flowers, 2006, p. 339), when relying on their intuitions for a “free” solo. Similarly, the syllabus within the Victorian Certificate of Education’s (VCE) “Music Performance Solo” and “Music Investigation” gives students the option to improvise to pre-recorded backing tracks, yet again, it is my experience that most students tend to choose the reassuringly less anxious suggested written (scripted) solo over the unscripted and unknown alternative of chord interpretation.

In response, the aim of this study was to devise a way of assisting students to become creative in their thoughts and processes when delivering improvised musical expression. It seemed educationally unsound to me that musicians experienced “anxiety” when attempting to improvise. This impacted me so much that it became an imperative to regularly incorporate improvisation within my teaching practice. I went further and examined this teaching within a research context.

Within this research, I set out to investigate what happens when a teacher systematically incorporates improvisation into their curriculum. I considered the following questions:
1. Would the inclusion of improvisation have an impact on the students?
2. Would a curriculum approach to improvisation enhance student engagement in music?
3. Would the inclusion of improvisation enhance commitment and interest to school music programs?
4. Does improvisational skill enhance progress in “formal” music?
5. What are the sub texts and group dynamics involved with the expression of improvisation?
6. What is the place of role modelling in the teaching of improvisation?

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 sets out to examine various definitions of improvisation and provides an overview of the historical origins and practice of improvisation. Chapter 3 discusses music education curricula, practice and pedagogy informing the teaching of improvisation as a way of foregrounding the research undertaken in this thesis. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology and Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research positioning them within the broader literature. Chapter 6 discusses the assumptions and limitations of the study and presents conclusions with response to the research questions.
CHAPTER 2

Improvisation: A Literary Overview

As a foreground to the research in this thesis the next two chapters discuss (1) various definitions of improvisation, (2) the historical origins and practice of improvisation and (3) music education curricula, practice and pedagogy informing the teaching and learning of improvisation.

2.1 Defining Improvisation

There are a number of definitions and shades of meaning for the word “improvisation.” These definitions will be presented with the view to summarising their meaning so as to draw upon a generic meaning applicable to this thesis. Some of these definitions are as follows:

(1) “Improvisation takes place when a musician's aural and technical facilities combine to create a spontaneous form of musical expression” (Hinz, 1995, p. 32). The Harvard Dictionary (Apel, 1944, p. 240) defines improvisation as (2) “the art of performing music as an immediate reproduction of simultaneous mental processes, that is, without the aid of manuscript, sketches, or memory.” Tirro (1974, p. 287) insisted, however, that (3) “memory” is an integral part of the schemata and syntax of improvised expression. Additionally, Sarath (1996, p. 3) stated (4) “improvisation is the spontaneous creation and performance of musical materials in a real-time format.” Expanding this point, Moore (1992, pp. 66 - 67) defined improvisation as (5):

A performance and event-based musical act deriving its structure and characteristic style from a combination of longstanding cultural models and individual interpretations of them. The models are so familiar to the performer(s) - and frequently other participants - that they have been internalized and are understood on both conscious and intuitive levels. Thus, no notated guidelines, rehearsals, or specific idea of the music to be played are necessary prior to a given performance. The instrumentalists may freely express themselves in any fashion within stipulated and communally coherent aesthetic parameters.
Similarly, Kennedy (1987, p. 37) defined improvisation as (6) unencumbered and more clearly delineated when there is an absence of notation in its execution. Thus, when performing the highly improvisatory model of jazz, it is to the instrumentalist’s benefit to memorise melodies, harmonic changes and forms so as to realise “the possibilities of elaboration” (Kennedy, p. 38). Abramson (1980, p. 67) referred to the music and movement of improvisation as (7):

Improvisation’s function is to develop rapidity of decision and interpretation, effortless concentration, the immediate conception of plans and to set up direct communication between the soul that feels, the brain that imagines and coordinates the fingers, arms, hands and breath that interpret thanks to the education of the nervous system which unites all the particular senses: hearing, seeing, feeling, touching and thinking in time, energy and space.

In addition, the musical context of improvisation, for all of these definitions, is assisted by a creative spirit of performance that is (8) “imaginative – purposeful - original and valuable” (Jeanneret, Swainston & Watkins, 2009, p. 200).

2.2 Improvisation Summary Definition

Drawing on all of the references above, improvisation, as a working definition, is now understood in this thesis as, (1) an elaborative and creative musical practice, (2) usually performed without the assistance of notation and (3) effected from a spontaneous attitude of mind so as to create a brief or extended original composition governed by the syntax and schemata of its musical parameters. The syntax and schemata reflect the language and stylistic conventions (such as the use of embellishment and ornament in Renaissance and Baroque music) relevant to the setting and culture of the improvised expression.

2.3 Historical Overview: World View, Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque

Improvisation is a feature within all musical cultures including Western Art-Music. Improvisation occurs within the Ragas of India, the Gamelan Music of Indonesia, the Kabuki Theatre of Japan, the stylized Opera of China, the Indigenous Music of Aboriginal Australia, Klezmer Music, Arabic Music, the Drum Calls of
Africa and Western Popular Music - including Blues, Folk, Country, Jazz and Rock Music.

Whilst improvisation has been embraced by many different cultures, the present discussion examines it through the lens of Eurocentric and North American jazz traditions. Thus improvisation was manifest in early Italian Florentine Art music. In 1320, “civic heralds” were employed to sing on the occasions of official ceremony, visiting dignitaries, court entertainment or for social and political commentary, framed at times within a civic conscience and sung with an improvised approach using poetry as the text. This courtly and heraldic role was replicated within the general community by bards (cantimpanca), who sang weekly from their platforms (piazzas), within the locale of the city. The whole approach to this method of improvised singing was called Cantare all’improviso (McGee, 2003, pp. 31 - 34).

Later, in 1529, Martin Agricola’s Musica instrumentalis deudsche (Bechtel, 1980, p. 110) described improvisation as consisting of either “embellishments” or “ornaments.” Embellishments were elaborative drawn out passages of melodic subdivisions contained over the main beats of the original melody. Whereas, ornaments were simply the devices of trill, mordent, appoggiatura (leaning note) and turn (gruppetto). Furthermore, by 1535, Sylvestro Ganassi (Bechtel, p. 110) had written the first printed treatise Opera Intitulata Fontegera on embellishment. Specific techniques for these early forms of improvisation were known as passagio and diminution that were written as partimenti improvisation exercises (Schulenberg 2008, p. 477). Ganassi formulated these exercises as basic examples of melodic and rhythmic improvisation and it became the convention for performers to appropriately add these techniques as they saw fit.

Diego Ortiz consolidated further discussion on embellishment with his authoritative 1553 Spanish treatise Trotado de Glosas published in Rome (Schulenberg p. 478). As such, improvisation in the Renaissance was well entrenched. It acted as a segue to the following Baroque period exemplified by the extended recitative passages heard in Monteverdi’s Late Renaissance/Early Baroque operas “Orfeo” and “The Coronation of Poppea.” Similar manifestations of improvisation were evident with the practice of
Renaissance/Baroque composers (G. Caccini, C. Monteverdi, J. S. Bach), employing a “figured bass”\(^1\) with an implied decorative melody.

Thus it was generally accepted that musicians could improvise in the Baroque era. Frescobaldi (Whitmore, 1991, p. 9) continued to refer to embellishments as early as 1637 by giving advice on the speed of rendition and interpretation of the “rallentando cadenza.” Similarly, the late-baroque flautist and composer Quantz, (Reilly, 1985, pp. 182, 186) provided a very detailed and elaborate treatise about the art of flute playing combined with the aesthete of performance and embellishment. Four of the eighteen chapters (written in 1752) were devoted to the ornamentation of melody with shakes (trills), appoggiaturas (accented, passing, half-shake, mordent, turns), grace notes, extemper variation on simple intervals and rules for cadenzas which were freely extended passages of ornamentation at the dominant point of a cadence. Quantz (Reilly, 1985, pp. 182, 186) notes “cadenzas must sound as if they have been improvised spontaneously (implying that improvisation is sometimes prepared) ... because of the necessity of speedy invention, cadenzas require more fluency of imagination than erudition.” C.P.E. Bach (Lawrence, 1978, p. 74) affirmed the value of improvisation: “A good future can be assuredly predicted for anyone who can improvise.” Excessive and poorly mannered improvisation, however, irritated Joachim Quantz:

Some persons believe that they will appear learned if they crowd an Adagio with many graces, and twist them around in such fashion that all too often hardly one note among ten harmonizes with the bass, and little of the principal air can be perceived... Finally, they are ignorant that there is more art in saying much with little, than little with much (Bechtel p. 110).

Where there is excess (particularly in the late Baroque Rococo period) there is the polarity of restraint. The imminently transcending period of Classicism satisfied this dualism.

---

\(^1\) A figured bass was the compositional method of placing numbers beneath a bass line so as to indicate the placement of upper note harmonies.
2.4 Cadenza Improvisation in Classical and Romantic Periods

By the end of the Renaissance and Baroque eras the art of improvisation was well established, yet it quickly became more restrained within the standard formal repertoire of Classical music. Classical music’s style and ethos of rounded phrases, melodically and harmonically smooth contours, and the detailed formulation and exploration of sonata form evidenced this. Nonetheless, improvisation continued to be performed recreationally with composers such as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert (and later) Chopin, Brahms and Liszt (Moore, 1992, p. 62). These composers often improvised at social and court occasions where they would freely elaborate on a theme, employing witty fugal and contrapuntal techniques, for the amusement of others.

Notwithstanding this, the performance of the Classical period cadenzas (mostly unaccompanied passages in concerti, without notation, displaying technical, thematic elaboration and/or musical skill) provided a continuing opportunity to improvise and elaborate upon principal melodic themes. These cadenzas employed motif references of principal themes that were extended melodically, rhythmically, and harmonically within the conventions and parameters of Classical style (the evolution of these cadenzas came from the previously referred to partimenti passages of passagio and diminution, which transcended into the final elaboration of the Baroque cadence). There were, however, rules and dictates required for the formulation of these cadenzas but the intention was that the result sounded as though it was improvised.

Turk’s School of Clavier Playing (Klavierschule) written in 1789 (Honea, 2007, p. 28), with some guidance from Quantz, advised ten rules for improvised cadenzas in Classical style. Most of these cadenzas (short or extended) were played without accompaniment and without reference to notation. They were in fact a form of improvisation and freedom. This freedom of cadenza interpretation and improvisation also sat comfortably with the melodic conventions of Baroque and Classical composers (such as Bach, Stamitz and Mozart) who expected performers to add their own decorative ornamentations and articulations to their compositions.

2 Beethoven had started to write his own versions of concerto cadenzas as suggestions for the performer and had also completely notated his cadenza in the Piano Concerto no. 3, op.37.
Paganini (1782 - 1840) affirmed the continuing practice of improvisation as “My duties require me to play in two concerts each week and I always improvise with piano accompaniment. I write the accompaniment first and I work out my theme in the course of the improvisation” (Bailey, 1985, p. 30). Improvisation reached a further apex within the ornate “Fantasia” art form of Chopin, although, by this stage, even with the inclusion of an elaborative creative music title such as Fantasia and a rich heritage of improvisation, it became manifest that eventually the strict rules of adhering to notation became the dominant vernacular, as the decorative elements of Fantasias had become specifically notated in every compositional element. The consequence was that the performing musician’s role tended to become more restrained and rigorous with the premium concern for a faithfully accurate realisation of the composer’s notation.

Similarly, improvisation became curtailed within the concert performance repertoire of the Romantic, Nationalist, Impressionist, Atonal and Modern periods. Cadenzas, in particular, as heard in the compositions of Franz Liszt, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Richard Strauss, Rachmaninoff, Max Bruch and Carl Nielsen were specifically notated so as to maintain the composers’ voice, authenticity and authority. Insistence on perfectly realising every component of notated text (including notated cadenza) became thus much more the norm for the performer. The role of the musician was increasingly typified as a vehicle of expression, or as a conduit for the composer’s dictated, prescribed and copiously notated text. Moore (1992, p. 63) testifies to this when he says starkly “the mandates of compositionally specified interpretation now supersede those of the instrumentalist.” As a result, the practice of improvisation had become seriously diminished and marginalised.

It wasn’t until the advent of New Orleans jazz, around 1895, that improvisation noticeably reasserted itself with a style of music deeply rooted in oral and aural traditions. Jazz, comprising syncopated themes, syncopated rhythms, informal presentation, tonal variations, exotic harmony and, above all, improvised melody, steadily influenced Western Art-Music composers such as Stravinsky (Ragtime for Eleven Instruments, Ebony Concerto) Gershwin (Rhapsody in Blue) and Copland (Concerto for Clarinet). At the same time there appeared to be little integration of the teaching of improvisation within formal music education. This was accompanied with
some scepticism from music educators and conservative society at large who viewed improvised jazz as the devil’s music (Oakley, 1997).

2.5 Jazz

Jazz discourse has several elements. Sarath (1996, p. 8) views jazz improvisation and composition as primarily the same, except that temporal differences of spontaneous utterance and considered thought emerge as a distinction between the creative inner-directed voice as being either unbounded or personified. As such, when the voice is unbounded (in jazz) it establishes a condition of heightened awareness that is able to clear away obstacles so as to represent itself as an unencumbered transcendence capable of freely improvising. Further to this, Sarath (1996) unites Flynn’s (2005) two schools of “scripted (formal) and non-scripted (informal)” musicians as having one common purpose:

While interpretive performers do not change the pitches or rhythms delineated by the composer, they certainly do deconstruct personal interpretive patterns in seeking spontaneous renditions of pieces they have already played countless times. Interpretive performance might then be seen to involve temporal principles similar to those defining improvisation within a highly detailed referent (Sarath, 1996, p. 21).

Kennedy (1987, p. 42) also reaches a similar conclusion after deciphering the components of jazz improvisation:

In the final analysis the differences between improvised jazz music and written music are not as great as one might initially suppose. Improvising musicians and composers alike inherit the tools of their trade. The differences are more a matter of time constraints in the process of music making. Improvising musicians must make choices instantaneously, while the composer has more time to consider, think about and polish his options. Except for this difference, the performer, improviser and composer use identical processes – they create, work with, and shape musical materials within the dictates of their inherited styles.

Brown (2000, p. 115) supports this with reference to jazz and its cross-cultural connections with improvisation:
Musicians in the classical tradition of Iran must first learn some three hundred elements that make up the repertoire of what is called the radif. Similarly, jazz improvisers must master a stock of musical figures and phrases out of which they gradually learn to construct solos of their own. They also internalize a cache of musical forms, e.g. meters and chord progressions, that function as frameworks for the direction that improvised solos will take. Improvisers do not create ex nihilo.

Nooshin (1998, p. 70) also referred to the tools of improvisation when discussing Persian music as having a foundation of radif (a syntax of aurally memorised improvisational clichés inherent to the mores of Persian music):

And yet whilst creativity lies at the heart of this music, it is almost paradoxical that such creativity requires a musician to spend many years memorizing the central canonic repertoire, known as radif, which forms the basis for all improvised performance. Only after many years of studying the radif is a musician considered ready to start improvising, and whilst musicians talk readily of improvisation, there is a clear understanding that this is in no sense “free” but always based on a musician’s knowledge of the radif. A musician has to respect tradition by demonstrating his (her) knowledge of the radif; yet at the same time, a certain level of creativity over and above the memorized repertoire is required for a successful performance.

Consequently, Zack (2000, p. 232) charts the growth of jazz improvisation and its inherent stylistic characteristics. Zack, like Nooshin, views improvised expression as conforming to established patterns relative to the style or period. Zack sees jazz as linear periods of improvisatory conventions and descriptors styled within the metaphors, clichés and conventions of traditional, swing, bebop and post bebop iterations. He views the descriptors for each style as correspondingly predictably flexible, organic and chaotic. Zack (2000, p. 232) views these jazz styles as permutations and levels of conversation:

Ordinary conversation is pervasively improvisational. It is more interplay than dialogue, lodging people together in an inter-subjective world in which participants mutually and iteratively create meaning out of interaction... preallocating the order and length of turns is characteristic of ritualistic or ceremonial interaction. Spontaneous conversation, on the other hand, implies a local, unpredictable, emergent, and mutually constituted allocation of turn taking, complete with interruptions, digressions, side quips, nonverbal cues and remarks made out of sequence or embedded within other sequences. Bebop approaches this notion of conversation, but it is most fully constituted within the free jazz genre.
Similarly, Monson (1996, pp. 82 - 86) and Brown (2000, p. 114) allude to improvisation as nuances of storytelling, yet Zack (pp. 232 - 233) only confers the post bebop iteration as a truly “maximal” improvisatory genre encompassing “functional anarchy with emergent, spontaneous and mutually constructed (musical) conversation.”

This maximal, chaotic or “nonconformist” (Brown, p. 117) improvised expression as heard in Ornette Coleman, Thelonius Monk, Roland Kirk, Albert Ayler, Yusef Latef and Don Cherry evolved simultaneously within the early popular and “rebellious” blues and rock music of the 1950s to contemporary rock music where Green (2002, pp. 100 - 101) disputed Scruton’s (1998) assessment that popular musicians acquired their expertise through osmosis (see also Berkley, 2004, pp. 141 - 143). Green showed that popular musicians relied heavily on absorbing the performance mores (syntax and schemata) of their music culture so that they deliberately and enthusiastically practised the riffs and clichés of their chosen style. These views were synonymous with the conclusions reached above with Sarath (1996), Kennedy (1987), Brown (2000) and Zack (2000).

Green (2002, pp. 23 - 24) also referred to the conscious and unconscious ways that “popular” musicians acquired their ability to aurally imitate recordings with purposive (task oriented), attentive (perceptive) and distracted (entertainment, enjoyment and cultural absorption) listening. The sourcing of readings, recordings and films, within a congenial setting of social interaction, whilst exchanging knowledge and observing others’ skills was intrinsic to an outcome of informed self education. These practices created a successful learning climate conducive to an informal and culturally informed improvised expression. As such, Green asserted that this type of enjoyable, self-motivating informal learning, embracing an encultured ownership, as a vital part of pursuing the skills required for expressing popular music and its associated contexts of improvisation. Green championed the inclusion of an informal approach to teaching and learning as a successful educational strategy for popular music and inferred that this approach would also assist the more formal interpretative or “classical” method of teaching. Reid (2007, pp. 117 - 118) similarly supported Green’s understanding of self-directed learning as an integral component for accelerated learning in small groups.
Again, all of these comments alluding to the synthesis and immersion in the aural and traditional styles of improvisation point to a successful way of teaching and learning this subject. Further specific strategies for improvisation are espoused by Sowash (2007/2008) and Berliner (1994, pp. 221 - 242) referring to the vernacular and idioms of improvisation using appropriate scale elaborations, syncopated rhythms, polyrhythm, chord substitutions, exotic harmony, call and response, ornaments, target notes, chromatic connections, blue notes, repetition, inversion, turnarounds, pauses, silences, formal designs and tonal variation. Similarly, Aebersold (1976) gives valuable commentary on improvisation with his discussions on scale formations, design, theory and discography in his 93 volumes of jazz standards.

All of the above specific techniques provide frameworks for the potential of a curriculum design to enhance students’ proficiency with improvisation. As a result, this thesis investigated the merits of a curriculum approach to improvisation. “Standard” melodies, including original composition, were studied in a variety of styles, ranging from blues, ballads and modern jazz, so as to provide scope for improvisation.

In summary, the teaching and learning of improvisation is an integral component within creative musical cultures. Improvisation is an all-embracing term relevant to the practice of all styles of music and forms a common link between formal and informal music. Memorization and the application of idiomatic syntax define some of the characteristics of improvised expression. This expression is usually spontaneous but frequently functions within prepared schemata. It has metaphorical nuances of speech, conversation and storytelling mimicking call and response, questioning and spontaneous statement. Improvisation can be taught and learnt. Much of this learning emanates from students’ self-directed (non supervised, voluntary) inquiries for knowledge. Self-directed inquiry requires a resilient, creative, open-minded, responsive, generative and effective attitude to improvisation. Further extended contexts upon this thesis’ case study and curriculum design for the teaching and learning of improvisation are explored in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3

Teaching Improvisation

3.1 Models of Teaching Improvisation

To this point, improvisation has been clarified as a definable practice that can be taught. Specific instrumental, theoretical and decorative techniques can be formulated that enhance the art of improvisation. Other ways that inform and assist the teaching of improvisation will now be discussed.

An alternative approach to improvisation is articulated by Hickey (2009). Hickey (2009, pp. 291 - 292) notes that curriculum-based improvisation is constructed in stages upon models that encompass gradual development. The characteristics of these models are that 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 then 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.

Hickey suggests that this type of learning is counter productive to the original intent of improvisation (Latin root - improvus – unforeseen, unprepared) in that she advised the first outcome of this expression should always emanate from free, unrestricted and unclassified practice. Her argument is that students are naturally inquisitive, “eager improvisers and experimenters” (Hickey, 2009, p. 296) and that it is restrictive to introduce prescribed curriculum as the instigator of improvised expression. Her belief is that all devices of improvised procedure, such as specific techniques and modelled idiomatic cliché, should regularly return to the consistent statement of free improvisation and that the ultimate driver of this learning is the encultured student.

Hickey (2009, pp. 287 - 289) refers further to Pressing’s (1987) observation of the teaching of improvisation as one that tends to be historically informed, classified and imparted in five different models embracing:
(1) Embellishment, ornamental devices:
In practice this results in a nuts-and-bolts approach with few implications for the modeling of improvisation beyond basic ideas of (melodic) variation, embellishment and other traditional processes of musical development (Pressing, 1987, p. 142)

(2) Patterns and models, riffs, clichés:
Pressing’s second example 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 memorise the stylistic riffs over common chord patterns (e.g. 11–V7–I) in order to improvise over the requisite patterns when they appear in jazz solos (Aebersold, 2000).

(3) Problem-solving, standard interpretation of repertoire with chord progression:
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 mastering of the “tune” and chord changes (steps which may inform improvisation but may lead to an overly theoretical or technical approach).

(4) Play-by-ear, aural imitation:
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” (Pressing, 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.
(5) **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 (Hickey 2009, p. 294).

Hickey asserted that most of the teaching of improvisation in schools emanated from a tendency to view these five points above as a sequential study that finally aimed to produce free improvisation, but in fact only resulted as “product” or a clichéd style of creativity. Hickey viewed this overly rigid and prescriptive procedure as a formulaic antithesis to the origin of liberated musical expression and one that inhibited a natural disposition to improvise. Hickey suggests that improvisation should be free and unrestricted. Bailey (1992, p. 83) offered a vivid description of this free improvisation as:

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.

Whilst acknowledging the viewpoints of Hickey (2009) and contrasting those with the observations of Sarath 1999; Kennedy 1987; Moore 1992; Brown 2000; Nooshin 1998; Brophy 2001 and Berliner 2004, it is, however, the intent of this thesis to investigate whether improvisation *can* be taught utilising a curriculum. The thesis posits that with the provision of specific tools of expression, within that curriculum, improvised expression remains a more informed choice of possibilities and is applicable to all genres of expression, whether they be traditional, modern or free. The provision of a curriculum with specific tools and vernacular for music language and style surely enhances the depth and means of expression for improvisation whether that process is “informed” or intuitively naive.

Another example of curriculum-designed improvisation, leading to “free” improvisation, is observed by examining the United Kingdom’s Key Stage 3 music
classroom syllabus consisting of eight levels or “schemes” (structured clusters of concepts). This curriculum is detailed with call and response techniques, riff creation and modification, trading in fours, discussion and reflection of comparative genres and original composition. It is structured similarly to the Pressing model as being an idiomatic acquisition of improvisational skills and withholds the final creation of original composition (free improvisation) until the end of the study sequence. A further requirement is that students are sufficiently literate in order to write a review of the course content and performance utilising the appropriate terminologies and educational language of improvisation (Department for Education, 2012).

Within Australia, the National Review of School Music Education (DEEWR, 2005) recommended the study of improvisation be targeted and included within curricula. Improvisation had been identified as an essential component within music teaching that required high priority:

The Australian Government:
• R.6.1 Initiate and lead a music curriculum development project focusing on
• Providing a cohesive approach to music across Australian schools.
• Targeting specific priority needs3 identified by this Review:
  music technology, indigenous music, gifted and talented students, creativity, composition, improvisation4 and inclusive repertoire.

State and Territory school systems and sectors, in partnership with professional associations, industry and professional and community music organizations:

• R.6.14 Provide curriculum materials supporting creativity, composition and improvisation5 in music (DEEWR, 2005).

Within the State of Victoria’s “Victorian Essential Learning Standards” (VELS), under the governance of the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA), a general approach (from Preparatory Years to Year Ten) encourages students to:

• Develop a personal style as they perform, improvise6 and compose instrumental and/or vocal works with imaginative and aurally perceptive approaches in the use of music skills, techniques and processes.

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3 Author’s emphasis
4 Author’s emphasis
5 Authors’ emphasis
6 Author’s emphasis
• Compose and improvise works exploring abstract ideas and complex issues, using innovative approaches to explore ideas in musical ways and solve musical problems (VCAA, 2010).

The VCAA also includes the performance and assessment of improvisation within the last two Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) senior years of schooling in Units One, Two, Three and Four. These units and assessments establish and certify preparatory studies for potentially more advanced tuition in improvisation within Victorian tertiary music institutions. Alongside this, examples of other examination authorities, such as the Victorian Technical and Further Education Centres (TAFE), the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) and the Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts Limited (ANZCA), include improvisation within their syllabi.

Whilst these external examining authorities include the choice of improvisation in their syllabi it tends not to be structured with any specific, progressive and detailed curriculum. Similarly, many schools offer Years Seven and Eight the study of Classroom Music for one semester only and continue to proceed in the following years with an “elective” component that substantially reduces the size of the class. A curriculum for improvisation is usually absent. As discovered in this thesis, even students with an “advanced” music background admit to little experience in the study of improvisation yet when the opportunity arises to express themselves in this medium they are significantly under prepared and may experience “anxiety” (Wehr-Flowers, 2006).

The import is that this thesis addresses the opportunity for designing an appropriate curriculum for improvisation relevant to the needs of instrumentalists at a secondary school level. The thesis proposes improvisation as an imperative to be studied within this curriculum. The way to help impart this subject was then for the researcher to devise a suitable and flexible syllabus relevant to the age, background and expertise of students. Other ways of informing a broader context for the application of this curriculum design are as follows.

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7 Author’s emphasis
3.2 Extended Contexts

Having discussed some of the pedagogy, policy and established curricula involved with teaching improvisation, the following discussion around seven key themes will consider broader issues in music education and how these influence the teaching and learning of improvisation:

1. Self-Efficacy
2. Informal/formal learning
3. Advanced skill acquisition
4. Best practice teaching
5. Audiation
6. Kinaesthesis
7. Metacognition

3.2.1 Self-Efficacy

The way a teacher imparts the knowledge and practice of improvisation strongly determines the potential educational and practical growth of a musician. Additionally, an informed and resilient student attitude towards the study of improvisation will noticeably influence the pedagogical outcome. Bandura and Locke (2003, p. 920) noted, “Resilient belief that one has what it takes to succeed provides the necessary staying power in the face of repeated failures, setbacks, and sceptical or even critical social reactions that are inherently discouraging.” Bandura (2006, p. 2) states that:

Efficacy beliefs influence whether people think self-enhancingly or self-debilitatingly, optimistically or pessimistically; what courses of action they choose to pursue; the challenges and goals they set for themselves and their commitment to them; how much effort they put forth in given endeavors; the outcomes they expect their efforts to produce; how long they persevere in the face of obstacles; their resilience to adversity; how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands; and the accomplishments they realize.
Self-efficacy factors (where a student’s morale, independence, motivation and wellbeing are considered) were included within the design of the curriculum for this case study. The curriculum (viewed in full detail in Chapter Four) set realistic and achievable goals that tended to engender a positive outlook that was rewarding both at the individual and group level. Part of this positive outlook was achieved by the independent choices that the participants were able to make, by creating their own moments of original composition and spontaneity, when performing improvisation.

3.2.2 Formal/Informal Learning

Green (2006, p. 106) also discussed the efficacy of teaching music and summarised the two main learning approaches as being either formal or informal. Green (2008, p. 131) viewed it as important to incorporate both practices within the teaching of music/improvisation. Green saw five ways of delineating the two practices. I have summarised these in table 3.2.2.

Table 3.2.2 Characteristics of Formal and Informal Learning (Green, 2006, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Repertoire Selection</th>
<th>Performance Practice</th>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Learning Environment</th>
<th>Performance Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learners expand their repertoire by seeking advice from superiors to choose their music.</td>
<td>Music is studied from notation.</td>
<td>Music learning is supervised from an adult with superior skills and knowledge.</td>
<td>Music is progressively, systematically learnt in stages involving syllabi, graded assessment and drill.</td>
<td>Music expression tends to be reproduced from the authorship of a composer’s intentions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Learners select their music of choice. They choose to copy others and/or create original compositions.</td>
<td>Music is performed with aural and visual copying from recordings and video.</td>
<td>Music skills tend to be self-taught. Music is performed in peer groups with conscious and unconscious general discussion, observation, listening to and imitation of each other.</td>
<td>Music is learnt in haphazard and non-systematic ways.</td>
<td>Music expression emanates collectively from the learning environment and learning style so as to produce a creative result.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within this thesis, the design of the applicable curriculum for improvisation was influenced by both learning approaches. The thesis explored a study design that was informed by the seven extended contexts including the formal and informal aspects of teaching and learning improvisation. These two polarities of formal and informal learning were also addressed by Brophy (2001, pp. 34 - 35), when referring to Kratus’s (1991) observations, as an example of teaching improvisation comprising:

- **Exploration**: Random sounds at an early age (informal)
- **Process-Oriented**: Spontaneous uninhibited non-structured improvisation without an audience. This is achievable by the age of nine (informal)
- **Product-Oriented**: Improvisation to an audience with more elements of structure such as tonality and rhythm (formal)
- **Fluid Improvisation**: Automatic and relaxed technical skill on an instrument for upper primary levels (informal)
- **Structural Improvisation**: Ability to evoke structural techniques such as call and response, question and answer. This has been evident in twelve year olds (formal)
- **Stylistic Improvisation**: Skillful improvisations of styles such as swing and/or blues incorporating melodic, harmonic and rhythmic characteristics (formal)
- **Personal Improvisation**: Original composition with a personal style and free of stylistic restraint (informal)

Brophy (2001) viewed parts of this method as particularly useful for primary school children with a sequence of learning activities designed through improvised “imitation, consequence, variation and origination” (Brophy, 2001, p. 35). This is set alongside the expressive medium of an instrumental, vocal, melodic or rhythmic setting and placed in the appropriate context such as responding to words or musical cues whilst using the materials of songs, games, stories, poems or short rhythms and melodies (Brophy, 2001, p. 36).

As such, the music making of very young children are telling examples of uninhibited totally informal and spontaneous improvisation. Pond identified their improvised “musicking” (Small, 1999) as “the heart of the matter in the development of the innate musicality they evidently possess” (Pond, 1981, p. 11). After a long term study
of very young children, Flohr (1979, 1985) concluded that between the ages of two and eight there were three stages of creative growth from naïve random sounds to the experimental discernment of patterns, drones, repetitions and sequences to the third level of formal properties characterized by an identification and preference for tonality and repetition of larger patterns.

It remains clear that consideration has to be given to the pedagogy of contemporary improvisation where both formal and informal applications are embraced much as they were in the earlier Mediaeval and Baroque times relying again upon a curriculum leading to innovative improvisation. The thesis curriculum design was influenced by these factors.

3.2.3 Advanced Skill

As discussed, a close relationship exists between formal and informal learning in music. Consideration is required, however, as to whether a balance of these two approaches, working alongside each other, instills a high-achieving performance result. Sloboda and Davidson (1996) asserted that high-achieving instrumentalists learn well by devoting time to formal “deliberate” practice combined with a healthy dose of recreational informal practice. Green (2008, p. 131) also endorsed a balanced approach to formal and informal learning:

I am strongly of the opinion that to give children and young people the best possible music education, they need access to both formal and informal realms, both aural and written forms of transmission; and they need to be able to understand music theory and how music is put together at both an intuitive level and a conscious, theoretical level (whether written or aural or both).

McPherson (1999, p. 153) reiterated this acknowledging that, formal and informal practice “are essential ingredients for continuing success.” Folkstead (2005) similarly indicated that there is no dichotomy between formal and informal learning in that they both represent two poles of a continuum in most learning situations. Thus the presence of this continuum led Sawyer (2008, p. 2) to describe factors that led to expert performance as:
2. Integrated knowledge: knowledge is highly interconnected; everything known is related in an integrated framework.
3. Adaptive expertise: flexible adaptation and modification of memorised procedures and possible solutions as appropriate to the new problem.
4. Collaborative skills: expert (performers) work together in teams with fluid boundaries and in complex organizational structures.

Expert skill in improvisation, chamber music, solo recitals, symphonic performance and popular music embraces these collaborative skills. The inclusion of memorisation in improvisation was also an essential factor for expert performance as described by Tirro (1974), Moore (1992) and Kennedy (1987). So in order to embrace an “integrated framework” and “possible solutions as appropriate to the new problem” with “fluid boundaries” this thesis examined how specific techniques of improvisation, incorporated into a curriculum, would assist towards these outcomes.

3.2.4 Best Practice

The question then is what is the best way to teach improvisation? According to Ross (1995, pp. 185 - 201) music in general cannot be taught. Ross prefers a student-centered approach to music with greater opportunity for authentic musical exploration and expression. Ross observed that what passes for music lessons tends to be what he labels as the study of pseudo arts teaching dominated by a “martinet” (Ross, 1995, p. 185) in which curriculum is prescribed as wholesome, popularly falsified and essentially politically dictated in order to create a passive culture of students unable to think for themselves and who become bored. Perhaps part of the solution to this would be to teach students how to improvise.

Wiggins and Wiggins (2008, p. 14) also observed that music lessons became a somewhat tyrannical process with some teachers taking on a chastising prima donna role that unnecessarily encourages notational emphasis thus limiting a student’s creative disposition towards improvisation. Swanwick (1999) similarly commented that music curricula are far too often overly prescriptive, especially in regard to
concert band programs that rely on limited and repetitive repertoire. Students tend to give up and not pursue music once they have left school because music has been a less than authentic self-empowering experience (Swanwick, 1992, p. 38).

The 2005 Australian National Review of School Music Education also noted that this tends to happen, not in the final years of secondary education, but during and at the conclusion of year eight. Perhaps the study of improvisation would improve this situation? In order to correct this tendency Swanwick prefers small group interactions with music, which promote authenticity (improvisation). Music classes, in all forms, should be engaging occasions that complement individuals’ creative identities, so that they are perceived experientially, thus contributing to maximal and personal musical enrichment. Swanwick and Tillman (1986) posit the theory that effective learning is produced from play, which is rewarded with pleasure and positively referenced acknowledgement. For Swanwick and Tillman all growth stages of learning are reinforced as a spiral by seeking this pleasurable acknowledgement.

Swanwick and Tillman (1986) analysed 745 children’s notated compositions and improvisations with the conclusion that music learning gathers progressively in an eight-stage spiral. These stages were classified as:

- **Sensory (up to three year olds)** - Fascination with timbre and extremes of volume with random uninhibited and unstructured improvisations.

- **Manipulative (four to five year olds)** - Evidence of musical pulse, more advanced technique with instruments using glissandi and trills and a general pleasure at being able to improvise over longer periods with repetitive techniques.

- **Personal Expressiveness (four to six year olds)** - Ability to sing: change tempo and dynamic at will. Phrasing tends to become more identifiable but structure not apparent.

- **Vernacular (five to eight year olds)** - Compositions become more predictable. Patterns are more complex with repetition. Structures are grouped evenly. Evidence of syncopation and ostinati.

- **Speculative (nine to eleven year olds)** - Unexpected and imaginative surprise elements added to previous styles of repetition. Alternative experimentation
with music structures.

• **Idiomatic (thirteen to fourteen year olds)** - Ability to imitate popular styles. Ability to originate contrast and variation into music expression.

• **Symbolic (fifteen year olds)** - Music is strongly allied with emotional connection. Musical experience becomes more holistic enabling reflection and dialogue.

• **Systematic (young adult)** - More objective assessment of music abilities and resources. Original composition derived from multiple sources.

These eight stages were viewed as a progressive cycle of rewarded learning that embraced components of mastery, imitation, imaginative play and meta-cognition. Swanwick and Tillman’s views of spiral growth acknowledge those of Piaget (Duckworth, 1970) who clearly laid out the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete and formal stages of cognitive growth from infancy to young adulthood. In terms of improvisation it is manifest that the teaching and learning of this subject has to be relevant to the age group in focus. This is why the thesis, in this context, embraced a “systematic” study of learning improvisation relevant to young adult school musicians.

Mills (2005) commented on this discussion of effective/ineffective teaching styles with the suggestion that well-intentioned efforts often produced unmusical results. Mills addressed similar conclusions to both Ross and Swanwick. Mills (2005, p. 93) defined factors that contributed to ineffective teaching styles:

- Published schemes of work
- Bandwagons
- Dogma
- Not daring to be different
- The difficulty of analysing one’s work
- The difficulty of analysing one’s own musical development
- Under expectations of students’ musical development

Mills asserted that many teachers unconsciously adopt methods that they have modelled on the way they were originally taught. Mills suggested that schemes
(methods, concepts, curricula) can tend to be accepted by teachers, without analysis, and are devoid of authentic expression. By the time some of these schemes (such as Kodaly) are generated, they mutate over the years into dogma (advocated by disciples), which precluded the original ethos or intent of the author. Mills stated that undue emphasis upon notation is like “teaching students to read before they have learnt to speak” (Mills, 2005, p. 100) and sometimes this was accompanied by misplaced emphasis upon a bandwagon mentality where, for example, the “Mozart effect” (Mills, 2005, p. 94) had been erroneously advocated as a pedagogical resource. Mills (2005, p. 98) preferred a unique and “idiosyncratic” curriculum choice that suits the socio economic, geo political and synergistic relations that exist between the teacher and the class.

Novelty of purpose and an open mind to pedagogical conventions are paramount motivators for an effective model of teaching. In terms of this thesis, the design of the intended curriculum of specific techniques for improvisation was premised upon creating novel opportunities for authentic expression, empowering the participants with a resourceful digest that could be implemented within a variety of improvised styles.

Furthermore, Zemelan, Daniels and Hyde (2005) investigated methods of best practice in curricula, having examined 45 national curriculum reports between 1989 and 2005. Their conclusions were that best practice teaching was student-centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist and challenging (Jeanneret & DeGraffenreid, 2012). Thus the teaching context of this thesis is informed from the views of the above commentators. Best practice teaching for improvisation has to be structured according to the age group of the students with an emphasis upon establishing enjoyment and reward for this activity. The activity needs to be an engaging one that gives the student a sense of authenticity and personal ownership. The means to establish this in this thesis was to empower the student with specific techniques of improvisation that could be applied to multiple contexts such as within an idiomatic solo or by contending with freely improvised expression within a congenial group format.
3.2.5 Audiation

In order to teach improvisation effectively several other components will be addressed. “Audiation” is the ability to pre-hear without sound. This assists the imagery or conception of sound before it is manifested. Gordon (1989, p. 78) states:

Unless one can audiate what one is going to create and improvise before he performs it or even attempts to notate it, all that may be heard at best are the mechanics of scales and arpeggios, and at worst mere exploration.

If the ability to audiate is established then this will assist the ability to “play by ear” (McPherson, 1993) and to pre-intone notated sound:

The crucial link between ear, eye and finger, or between sound, action and symbol is stressed, and even when the aural experience is placed first in importance the written form invariably follows (“the sound before the sign”), for it is said to be that this is what makes the sound “conceptual” or “consigned” (Priest, 1989, p. 177).

“Playing by ear” consigns the way sound is expressed. The ability to improvise, as in all music making, requires the participant to audiate; except improvisation usually produces novelty of melody, rhythm, timbre and phrasing.

3.2.6 Kinaesthesis

Similarly, once sound is pre-intoned, a whole of body kinaesthetic application is required:

The neuromuscular sensations involved in the making of sounds, or responding gestural to sounds, become fused with the actual memory traces or images of the sounds themselves. In this way recall of sounds and musical thinking processes are multi dimensional, providing a powerful amalgam of sensory/perceptual knowledge acquaintance (Kemp, 1990, p. 224).
Thus, improvised sound creation is aligned with the physical associations and execution aligned with the depth, intensity, nuance and evocative emotion of the improvised composition. This kinaesthetic association coincides with a person finding their improvised voice empowered through knowledge, intuition, confidence and passion.

3.2.7 Metacognition

The final components to address in teaching improvisation are the consideration of expressive nuance, aesthetic judgement and craftsmanship. Metacognition embraces these aspects. Metacognition is the general self-perception and awareness of comprehending personal thought processes. Pintrich (2002, p. 220) referred to Flavell (1979) as being the one who said metacognition was “… knowledge of strategy, task and person variables…” Pintrich (2002) expanded this metacognitive disposition into personal knowledge that embraced three components:

- **Strategic knowledge** - The “what and how” of knowledge comprising memory, repetition, elaboration, organization, summarising, paraphrasing, rehearsal, problem solving and rational conclusion.

- **Cognitive task knowledge** - The “when and why” of knowledge with the ability to discern alternative choices in learning strategies and to rationally apply these strategies to the context and culture of the situation.

- **Self-knowledge** - Knowledge of one’s strengths and weaknesses. Expert status is achieved by being aware of learning factors that require attention. Awareness of these conditions improves motivations for solutions. Realistic and accurate perception of strength and weakness is required to solve problems thus promoting self-reliance rather than falsely encouraging self-esteem.

Learning improvisation is thus not necessarily an intuitive process. It is a process that involves metacognition informed through curriculum (in this case) and can be provoked at several levels, depending upon the executant’s level of experience.
Additionally, Webster (1990) pointed to how metacognition (involving improvisation) comprised “divergent” and “convergent” thought processes, originally attributed to Wallas’s (1926) four stages of creative thought:

1. **Preparation** - gathering information and all other requirements to achieve the task.
2. **Incubation** - allowing time for the unconscious to work through the material.
3. **Illumination** - the moment when all ideas come clear.
4. **Verification** - refinement of the solution.

Wallas’s concepts were central to Webster’s divergent thought process that involved “the generation of many possible solutions to a given problem” (Webster, 1987, p. 165). Divergent solutions with improvisation included:

- **Fluency** - flow between ideas, musical expression, spontaneity and technical skill.
- **Musical Syntax** - rhythmic feel, melodic sense, tonal organization, phrasing and form.
- **Creativity** - musical flexibility, musical inventiveness.
- **Musical quality** - general musical appeal.

Simultaneously, convergent conditions, thoughts and reactions informed the successful outcomes of the divergent process. Convergent thought is characterized by the presence of:

- Prior musical experience
- Prior musical knowledge
- Audiation ability
- Kinaesthetic factors
- Playing by ear
- Environment, group or solo
Webster thus viewed the ability to improvise as informed by an amalgam of convergent and divergent conditions contextualised within Wallas’s four stages of creative thought. The previous points discussing self-efficacy, informal/formal learning, advanced skill, best practice, audiation, kinaesthesia and metacognition add to perceptions involved in the teaching and learning of improvisation. These factors are manifest within the learning and teaching contexts that influenced the case study of this thesis.

3.3 Summary Conclusion

Chapter two addressed a three-point definition of improvisation as applied to this thesis, having established the Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque precedents for this and how composers eventually completely notated the full detail of improvised intention within cadenzas and ornamented melody. Thus the independence and creative role of the instrumentalist became diminished. Early Jazz re-established the opportunity for improvisation and influenced later composers such as Stravinsky, Gershwin and Copland (who still notated their cadenzas) to adopt some elements of this practice, yet, improvisation remained largely ignored as a formal music teaching subject and was held in some disdain by music educators.

Chapter three clarified a need for teaching improvisation in Australian schools as it was targeted as a priority in the DEEWR 2005 National Review of School Music Education. The discussion emphasised that improvisation can be taught incorporating a curriculum approach with opportunities for students to freely express themselves. The presence of an overly prescriptive, narrow and teacher-dominated approach was to be strongly discouraged.

Nonetheless, it became apparent from this research that improvisation had received little attention in schools. External authorities for assessment had incorporated improvisation into their syllabi yet the limitations of school music programs relying on “elective” enrolment limited the opportunities for learning improvisation where the curriculum often embraced a very broad format. Seares, (2005, p. i) supported this saying that “Australian music school education was patchy, had cycles of neglect and inequality, variable quality in teaching and low status in curricula.” Geake (2009, p.
163) also inferred that more significant emphasis be given to music education (embracing improvisation) noting that “despite its importance in popular culture, music plays a Cinderella role in most schools’ curriculum and timetable allocations.”

As such, I have argued that improvisation be considered as a key component within the teaching, learning and practice of music. Part of this teaching can be informed by the broad literature (Brown 2000; Sarath 1996; Berliner 1994; Kennedy 1987) that informs the roles that improvisation can play in music education. These roles encompass the importance of encultured informality (Green, 2000, p. 106), advanced skill acquisition with the inclusion of formal and informal practice (McPherson, 1999, p. 153; Green, 2008, p. 131; Folkstead, 2005; Sloboda and Davidson, 1996; Sawyer, 2008, p. 2) combined with best practice teaching and a concern for the holistic musical development of the human being (Zemelan, Daniels and Hyde, 2005). The methodology that informed these contexts is discussed in chapter four.
Chapter 4
Methodology

4.0 Introduction

Previous chapters have argued that improvisation can be taught, however, little of this has been incorporated within low status music curricula at the school level (Seares 2005, Geake 2009). Inherent to this is that this thesis investigates the acquisition of practical skills that assist with improvisation. This ability to improvise is informed by actions and thoughts that intend to produce an outcome consigned within a cultural model or style that has an emotive content. It is rendered further within an environment that usually, but not necessarily, relates to transacted behaviours with other people. When people engage in these transactions of communicative behaviours there are elements of agreement, sought in the articulations of those agreements, which are an attempt to provide a consensus of direction. Within the context of improvisation these transactions are informed by a process of divergent and convergent metacognition (Webster, 1987) that is stimulated by spontaneity. The metacognition (Pintrich, 2002), kinaesthesia (Kemp, 1990) and audiation (Gordon 1989, McPherson 1993, Priest 1989) aspects of improvisation set up a drama within the utterance of the musical phrase that aims to be truthful to the self-presentation intentions of the performer.

From the above, in the context of methodology and communicating ideas in teaching and performance skill, the thesis makes reference to the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1984). Habermas described “communicative action” as a language comprising “the teleological”, “the normative”, “the dramaturgical” and “the communicative” (Rahn, 2001, p. 157). Teleology is the seeking of an outcome that aims “at getting someone to form a belief, intention or the like” (Rahn, 2001, p. 157). One outcome of this study was to examine the ability to teach improvisation (to students) so that it was accessible and understandable and to present this subject as a desirable and normal experience within a “normative model of action that ... transmits cultural values and carries a consensus that is merely reproduced with each additional act of understanding” (Rahn, p. 157). In this normative model the thesis addressed
informed ways of acquiring skill (acts of understanding) in improvisation that would assist students to express themselves in a variety of genres. The process for this was to engage students in study with the assistance of a researcher-designed curriculum that enabled original and authentic improvised music. This dialogue of curriculum-informed techniques for improvisation was realised through a dramaturgical approach that “presupposes language (music) as a “medium of self–presentation ... in favour of the expressive functions” (Rahn, p. 157). This expressive function was incorporated within the curriculum by studying evocative melodies and how to improvise them with modifications in tone, ornamentation, dynamic, rhythm, structure and sentiment. Thus the “communicative model of action presupposes language (music) as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers (improvisors) and hearer ... negotiate common definitions of the situation” (Rhan, p. 157). The common definition of the situation was to introduce instrumental music students to improvisation so that these voluntary participants experienced music discourse that was mutually engaging, “collaborative” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 578) and challenging, embracing ways of expression that provided a high degree of autonomy that could be shared, discussed, performed and validated through acts of musical, authentically original improvised performance.

Hence the aim of this study was to investigate what happens when a teacher systematically plans to incorporate improvisation into their curriculum where it has not existed previously. The specific research questions that guided this investigation were:

1. Would the inclusion of improvisation have an impact on the students?
2. Would a curriculum approach to improvisation enhance student engagement in music?
3. Would the inclusion of improvisation enhance commitment and interest to school music programs?
4. Does improvisational skill enhance progress in “formal” music?
5. What are the sub texts and group dynamics involved with the expression of improvisation?
6. What is the place of role modelling in the teaching of improvisation?
In order to investigate these questions an “intrinsic” (Stake, 2005, p. 445) case study approach was adopted as it involved participants (students and a teacher-researcher-observer) in a specific investigation of a way of teaching improvisation that aimed to “evaluate” (Stake, 1995, p. 3) the uniqueness of the case and its findings. The case study method was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth qualitative review of the participants’ experience through the involvement of the researcher-observer using the instruments of questionnaire, filmed interviews, filmed class work and a researcher’s diary of field-note observations. The focus of the project was on the development of improvisation skills through the implementation of a researcher-developed curriculum. This focus adopted an inductive approach to the data where the interplay of the participant’s performances and their perceptions and realisation of improvisation, within a weekly class schedule, produced analysis from raw data that elicited common themes and interpretations leading to a meaningful and lucid summary of the results, so as to present “a coherent, consistent picture” (Neuman, 2006, p. 159) with conclusions.

4.1 The Setting

The setting for this research was located within the Music Department of a selective entry Victorian Government High School. The Music Department, of which I have been a member of staff for twenty-seven years, has a large number of performance ensembles including an orchestra, large concert band, string orchestra, guitar ensemble, brass ensemble, flute ensemble, saxophone ensemble and clarinet ensemble. Other ensembles include a big band, stage band, a marching and ceremonial band, rock bands, contemporary electronic performance ensemble, chamber music ensembles, massed singing for the whole school and specialist choirs. Specialist tuition in all wind, brass, string, guitar, percussion, pianoforte and singing is also available. The department also administers a classroom music programme, from years nine to twelve, studying the fields of music history and styles, composition, theory and music analysis combined with preparation for all aspects of the VCE. The schedule of performances within the school calendar is very intense. Most instrumental music lessons concern themselves with details concerning the instruction of ensemble repertoire, examination preparation, accompaniment, assessment, attendance, interpretation of performance repertoire, technical
instrumental advice and preparations for interpretative performance presentations that centre around the Music Department’s school calendar.

4.2 The Participants

The research involved the participation of five high school music students, with at least a moderate level of accomplishment, who were able to form the nucleus of a performance ensemble. One participant who was interested in being involved took the lead and asked others if they would like to participate. The resultant cohort was then represented as a pragmatic example of “purposeful sampling that enabled an information rich case study that would illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The relatively homogeneous nature of this small sample lent itself particularly well to focus group interviews and in depth study (Patton, 2002, pp. 235 - 236).

After the five participants had volunteered, there was further explanation that they would be involved in ten weeks of a research project involving classes in improvisation and that this “noninterventionist” (Stake, 1995, pp. 46 - 47) approach would not impinge upon their routine classroom attendance or study. I explained what was involved with the project and that participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. It was explained further that there would be no school-based assessment nor would there be any reward for participation and that they were able to leave the project at any time.

The five instrumentalists then organized themselves independently into a rhythm and lead instrument combination including a “doubling” vocalist/instrumentalist. For the purposes of the research, the participants are referred to anonymously by pseudonym reference to the instrument on which they performed. Thus there was Oscar (Piano), Bird (Saxophone), Artie (Clarinet, Vocalist), Bootsy (Bass) and Buddy (Drums). Four of the instrumentalists were from Year 11 and one was from Year 10. Two of the five students received weekly instrumental clarinet tuition with the researcher. These two students did not perform their improvisation on their clarinets but voluntarily chose to perform on tenor saxophone and voice/clarinet respectively. The remaining three all performed on their instruments with which they were most adept. The participants had
variable degrees of instrumental skill, however, all shared a desire to know more about improvisation. All of the participants had experienced little ongoing teaching and learning with improvisation. The following table provides a profile of the participants.

Table 4.2: Profiles of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Instrumental Skill</th>
<th>Improvisational background and styles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Advanced multi instrumentalist, very advanced piano and moderate standard in trumpet and voice, commenced piano at four years of age.</td>
<td>Little formal tuition in improvisation, self-inquiry, rock, pop, jazz, funk, classical piano, family influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird</td>
<td>Saxophone</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Moderately advanced multi instrumentalist, specialized tuition in clarinet, self-taught saxophone. Specialised tuition in bassoon and piano, commenced music at the age of seven.</td>
<td>Brief semester of improvisation tuition in Year 10, school big band, marching band, community band, little formal tuition in improvisation, family influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artie</td>
<td>Clarinet &amp; Voice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Moderately advanced multi instrumentalist, has learnt for eleven years, specialized tuition in clarinet and voice.</td>
<td>Primary school jazz ensemble, family influences, <strong>no formal tuition in improvisation at secondary level.</strong> School musical, marching band, barbershop quartet, orchestra and choral singing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootsy</td>
<td>Electric Bass</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Specialised tuition in electric bass, previously saxophone, has learnt bass guitar for one and a half years.</td>
<td>School Big Band, own rock band, blues, funk. <strong>Little formal tuition in improvisation, family influences.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddy</td>
<td>Drums</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Advanced multi instrumentalist in piano and specialized tuition in drums. Self-taught in guitar, bass guitar and ukulele, commenced at six years of age.</td>
<td>Primary school piano improvisation, secondary school recreational ensembles in jazz, funk, school marching band, stage band and orchestra, family influences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Data Collection

The instruments for the recording and collection of data will now be discussed. An initial questionnaire, three sets of interviews, filmed classroom activity and a researcher’s diary of field-note observations generated data. The questionnaire was chosen to indicate the general background of the participants in the areas of experience, influences, intentions and perceptions of improvisation (Neumann, 2006, p. 160). The questionnaire was issued to all the participants, in hard copy, with the
original letters of consent to participate in the research. The responses to the questionnaire were collected in the third week of active research. The generated data were contextualised into the overall analysis from this point.

4.3.1 Background Questionnaire

The following questions formed the basis of the background questionnaire:

1. How long have you been learning a musical instrument?
2. Do any members of your family play a musical instrument?
3. List the musical styles and traditions you have learnt.
4. Would you like to learn any other musical styles or traditions?
5. What do you like best about playing music?
6. What is the most difficult or challenging aspect of learning an instrument?
7. Describe any previous experience you may have had in musical improvisation?
8. How do you think you might best learn to develop your improvisation skills?
9. What would you like to achieve from this program?

Information was required as to how the participants understood improvisation and what influences they had experienced with this. What and who were the family influences in music practice that influenced the participants’ interest in improvisation and why did the participants want to be involved with this study? In what degree of detail would the participants advise how they would like to improve their abilities with improvisation? The answers to the questionnaire thus assisted the researcher in providing data for an individual and collective picture of the participants and how they would potentially relate to the project schedule. Was the schedule realistic or did it need to be modified?

Similarly, three sets of individual interviews were incorporated to gain a chronological overview of how the participants were responding to the study. The interviews were framed to evaluate how the participants perceived and experienced the project, and whether there were indications that this experience had assisted their ability to improvise. Additionally, this process sought to establish if the participants
were motivated with their commitment to continue their interest in improvisation? The structured interviews gave opportunity to compare the participants’ responses and enabled a major source of data in “multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 64). The same questions were asked of all the participants within a congenial atmosphere that encouraged rapport, yet the researcher maintained objectivity throughout (Fontana & Fry, 2005, pp. 701 - 702).

4.3.2 Interviews

As per the schedule these interviews were conducted in the third week. They were filmed independently with audio and each participant was not aware of the other’s response. The questions were issued in advance with the earlier letters of consent. A hard copy of the questions was also referred to during the time of the interview to clarify any potential misunderstandings. The initial interview questions were designed as a follow-up to the questionnaire, seeking further validation and explanation of the participants’ comprehension, influences, experiences and motivations for the study of improvisation. Extra data were generated by inquiring how external factors such as a role model’s qualities might influence the participants’ perceptions of improvisation. The following questions formed the basis for the initial interviews:

1. What does the phrase “improvised music” mean to you?
2. What bands do you perform in that use improvised music?
3. Have you had any training with improvised music?
4. Who would be a role model for you that uses improvised music in their performances?
5. Can you say what things make this person a good role model?
6. What was it that made you volunteer to be involved with this research project?

4.3.3 Mid Cycle Interviews

The mid cycle interviews were designed to investigate how the participants were relating to the project in terms of comprehending and enjoying the curriculum, their musical identity and progress within the ensemble as well as whether
improvisation provided identifiable links and preferences between formal and informal lessons. The mid cycle interviews thus enabled the researcher to gain a broader picture of the participants’ profiles and whether they had become more assured with their improvisation. The following questions formed the basis of the mid cycle interviews:

1. Now that we are half way through our project can you tell me what sorts of things have made an impact on you?
2. In what ways do you think you are contributing to the development of the lessons?
3. What areas of improvisation are you most interested in?
4. In what ways do you think you are relating to the other members of the improvisation class?
5. Do you think there are any links in these lessons with your normal weekly instrumental lesson?
6. If you had a choice would you concentrate on improvisation skills or emphasise your instrumental music lesson skills?

4.3.4 Final Interviews

The final interviews inquired as to the effectiveness of the project. Asking the participants for a rating of the project indicated this in addition to questioning them as to what had been of significant impact throughout the study. An assessment for the participants’ self-appraisal was also sought seeking to inquire into what areas of improvisation they would like to concentrate. Further questions were asked if the participants could recall the specific techniques of improvisation via a viva voce summary. This again helped determine in what ways the project had been effective and whether or not it had assisted them with improvisation. What had the participants gained from being involved in the project and what were their future intentions with improvisation? A collective assessment of the responses in the three interviews and questionnaire thus assisted an overall view of the results and findings. The following questions formed the basis of the final interviews:
1. On a scale of one to ten where would you rate the effectiveness of the last ten weeks lessons?
2. What things would you like to keep studying with improvisation?
3. What sorts of things were significant to you in the lessons of the last ten weeks?
4. In what ways have you changed your understanding of improvised music?
5. Are there some areas of improvisation that you could combine with your more formal lesson?
6. Can you summarise the procedures that were used in the last ten weeks’ lessons?
7. What will you do with your studies in improvisation?

4.3.5 Field Notes

Field notes were also recorded in the researcher’s diary. These field notes were dated on the days of activity and commented, with reflection, upon observations such as the participants’ mood, body language, tone of voice and levels of confidence in performance. Commentary and reflection were included within peripheral contexts such as identifying the emergence of group dynamics in the roles of leader, supporter and follower. Indicators for successful improvisation were identified, including personal assessments and reflection upon the outcomes and events from the weekly lessons. Personal reactions and the researchers feelings to events were also recorded, for instance, the teacher-researcher felt empathy for the participants in their individual ways of addressing improvisation (Patton, 2002, p. 303).

4.3.6 Video

Filming both the weekly class and interviews proved to be a very rich source of data (Perakyla, 2005, p. 875). The camera was placed statically and unobtrusively during the classes and interviews. The filmed interviews gave a precise account of the participants’ speech, which greatly assisted with transcription and validation for assessable data (Patton, 2002, p. 415). The film and transcripts of interview were shown independently to the participants to verify and confirm their accuracy. The film also provided a clear chronology of the participants’ journey throughout the project as
well as again indicating their body language, eye communication, facial expression and reactions involved with improvisation. The participants felt comfortable with being filmed, as they were aware of their anonymity. It was also observed that during class performances the presence of video recording, acting as a third party, encouraged the participants to extend their involvement and commitment to the challenge of improvisation.

4.4 Resources

The resources involved in the data collection were (1) teacher-provided resources of CD and DVD examples of improvisation (Wayne Shorter and Miles Davis with invited objective commentary from the participants to identify specific techniques and approaches as discussed and studied within the curriculum); (2) video and recording with the use of a Mac Book I Movie HD; (3) an external USB microphone to enhance the recorded sound and (4) a folder issued to each participant containing the ten week schedule of activities, sheet music examples in preselected transpositions, questionnaire and interview questions.

4.5 Teacher Researcher Participant Observer

The researcher’s role, besides initiating, designing and implementing a curriculum, recording interviews, issuing a questionnaire and establishing a project schedule, was to act as a teacher-researcher-participant-observer. Neumann (2006) indicates that this role requires an expert perception and ability with the subject at hand. Patton (2002) describes the degree of expertise required for participant-observation as that of being a “connoisseur” which Eisner (1985) views as particularly appropriate for researching the practicing arts. In this context the research involved “being pragmatic at using an assortment of odds and ends in an inventive manner to accomplish a specific task ... having a deep knowledge of one’s skills, and the capacity to combine them flexibly” (Neumann, 2006, p. 159).

Thus, the teacher-observer, as a precursor to the participants’ performance, explained the weekly schedule of improvised specific techniques and then correlated this by demonstrating the schedule’s melodies and their potential for elaboration. The
demonstration was performed in a way that was manageable for the participants without any extreme virtuosity. The participant ensemble was then invited to perform as per the schedule. This gave opportunity for the researcher to be in the lives of the participants and to see and hear at first hand their experiences with improvisation (Farrell, 2006, pp. 143, 145). After this, the researcher would frequently withdraw from overt class participation, so as to observe and allow free reign for the participants. The researcher would then unobtrusively rejoin and perform with the whole class or individual members to encourage a point of technique, however, this involvement was simply to clarify a specific technique so as to lead by example or to invigorate a lapse in the aims (not entirely syllabus-based) of the workshop. The primary concern as a teacher was to impart the curriculum whilst objectively accumulating data for research.

4.6 Curriculum/Pedagogy

The project schedule was constructed to give the participants a way of studying improvisation, which provided a set of devices (specific techniques) that would assist them to improvise melody. These devices were given common terminologies (mordent, trill, dynamic, scale, grace note, etc). The schedule provided many learning opportunities for the participants to adopt new resources of expression without undue haste or pressure and provided many opportunities for feedback and group discussion. The design of this schedule also worked from a premise of initially creating a workable and achievable way of improvising. As a result, it was intended that the participants would acquire a realised potential and vernacular for “idiomatic” (Paye, 2003) expression, such as in rock, bossa nova, blues, bebop and “non-idiomatic” (Paye, 2003) expression, involving an unbounded style of free improvisation. Thus an additional element to the curriculum was to establish opportunities for students to create new compositions using riffs, extending them without any notation and exploring them further with improvisation.

Given the lessons took place in lunchtimes, it was important not to over-crowd the schedule with excessive content, but rather to concentrate on the main domain of improvised melodic embellishment. The interpretation and role of harmony was
discussed whilst rhythmic extension and elaboration simultaneously asserted its own synergy within the progression of curriculum-informed melodic extemporisation.

The melodies included in the schedule of improvisation were *Autumn Leaves, C-Jam Blues, Blue Bossa, Angel Eyes, My Funny Valentine and Impressions*. These “standard” melodies satisfied vocal and instrumental opportunities for the expression of Ballads, Blues, Latin Jazz, Modern Jazz and original composition. Despite the melodies being well known they were, however, not necessarily known by all the participants and all were effectively read at sight. After the initial sight-reading the melodies were then sourced as opportunities to apply specific techniques in improvisation as per the schedule. The specific techniques were introduced progressively from week to week and the participants were encouraged to aggregate these into a practical instrumental vernacular for improvisation.

The schedule integrated a partly formal element of supervised curriculum itinerary. The informal elements were per se the participants’ creative performances of improvisation, discussion of CD/DVD examples of improvisation, encouragement of original composition and the relaxed approach to the subject at hand. The schedule also addressed an aesthetic approach to music education informed by communicative action. Reimer (1970, pp. 153 – 154) adds to this stating that aesthetic education (involving improvisation) comprises the role of creator, re-creator and experiencer “where expressive and aesthetic qualities are embodied and experienced into actuality.” The components of that actuality involve improvised procedures that require “perception ... that reacts to produce a concept of naming and classification ... that can be analysed ... creating modification or rearranging ... so as to be evaluated, accepted and valued” (Reimer, 1970, pp. 153 - 154). The following table 4.6, summarises the chronology of events throughout the ten-week period of the project schedule:
Table 4.6 The Project Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Focus……………………………</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Specific techniques……………...</td>
<td>Continuation of week 4 with addition of the gruppetto. Aural perception and chord recognition. Improvisation: As above</td>
<td>As above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Specific techniques and interviews………………………</td>
<td>Target notes. Improvisation: <em>Blue Bossa.</em></td>
<td>As above. Mid Cycle filmed interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Data Analysis

The inclusion within the curriculum of on-going repertoire, interview schedules, questionnaire, video recording, field notes and the multiple opportunities for self-expression, reflection, performance, spontaneity and original composition generated the relevant data for the research. The analysis involved eliciting emergent themes, interpretations and observations (such as body language, spontaneity, demeanor, voice inflection) from the questionnaire, interviews, filmed class activity and the researcher’s diary. This process of combining all factors in the data produced an aggregation of detail that presented information for interpretation and conclusion (Stake, 1995, p. 74). The data were summarised for their “essence” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10), for instance, the transcript of the interview sometimes demonstrated that the responses to the questions were not always direct; the researcher had to navigate the circuitous ways that the participants were attempting to provide meaningful answers to questions. Sometimes the participants’ responses were examples of thinking or rationalising aloud (musing) until the participant had finally clarified their full answer.

This “essential” interpretation of data also applied to the video. The video was not just simply film with sound and image. The filmed classes and interviews presented data in multiple contexts as recorded in body language, facial gesture, posture, authority and confidence in performance, lack of confidence in performance, hesitation and realisation of objectives in performance, evidence of response to the curriculum’s specific techniques, celebration of achievement etc. The overall aggregation of these multiple contexts was also assisted with the “display” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 10 - 11) of summary tables 3.2.2, 4.2 and 4.6. These summary tables informed viewable data alongside the transcripts of the questionnaire and interviews, providing a broad picture of the participants’ background and how they were adapting to improvisation. These interviews, field notes and video data were also appraised and summarised seeking main themes and co-related interpretations that had been cross referenced and validated. The display of data helped the researcher understand the participants in how they were reacting to the project. The research questions were then aligned with repeated phrases and themes in the transcript of interviews.
including aggregated data in film and field notes. This produced the results and conclusions in the next two chapters.

4.8 Data Storage

The University of Melbourne and the Victorian Government Department of Education, Employment and Early Childhood Development consented to the ethical approval for the research. Plain language statements and consent forms for parents and participants have been stored as well as all recorded data from the video, field notes, questionnaire and full transcript of interview.
Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research data with commentary upon the results of the questionnaire and interview schedules. Further results are discussed concerning the video and field-note data.

5.1 Background Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the cohort of participants could be described as one that possessed relatively moderate to advanced skills within a multi instrumentalist background commensurate with Years 10 and 11 standing. All participants were able to perform on at least two instruments, one was able to perform on five instruments and three of the five could perform on three instruments. Two had been learning music over respectively eleven and twelve years while one had been learning for ten years, another for nine years and the other for one and a half years. All the participants had members of their immediate or extended family that also performed on musical instruments. Their musical ability and participation had been influenced through the example of family members:

Yes. I come from quite a musical family. My mum plays flute and piano, my brother sings and plays piano and my dad sings and plays guitar. My extended family, including grandparents, cousins, aunts/uncles, play an assortment of instruments including piano, guitar, trumpet, trombone, drums, flute and singing. Buddy

All the participants had varying degrees of experience with improvisation ranging from very limited to moderately advanced exploratory levels. They had participated in a very wide variety of ensembles genres including classical, jazz, rock, pop, latin, marching band, orchestra, musical theatre, big band, blues, funk, choral singing and barbershop quartet:
Jazz, orchestral music, military marching band, classical singing, musical theatre, barbershop singing, choral music. Artie

With the exception of one, all wanted to learn more styles and traditions ranging from funk, fusion, folk, big band, blues, Klezmer, Gaelic and Romani. The one exception was Oscar who was more interested in the theoretical knowledge of styles. Overall, the participants emerged as an adventurous and inquisitive cohort:

I’m interested in learning more about the many styles of folk music, such as Romani, Klezmer and Gaelic. I’d also like to expand my knowledge of various jazz styles such as big band. Artie

The participants liked the social elements of fun and friendship in combination with other enjoyable attributes such as the experience of self-expression, compositional freedom, creative musical interaction and positive social communication:

The thing I like the best about music is the way it can bring people together as a “band” or “group”, replacing words as another form of communication. Buddy

The participants felt the most difficult aspect of learning an instrument was the application of theory to practice including notation, scales, chords, technical mastery, deliberate practice, advanced tone control and advanced articulation. These components of instrumental progress were viewed as necessary tools of procedure to enable artistic expression:

I find theory and advanced theory particularly difficult while learning an instrument. Bootsy

Most of the participants had not received detailed tuition with improvisation. Although it was determined that most had some experience with improvisation it was clear that despite the many years that these students had been learning an instrument, little formal and systematic attention had been devoted to the teaching of improvisation. Oscar and Bootsy commented:
I really have no prior experience in learning or performing improvised material. Oscar

I've only used improvisation while playing in my rock band during solos. Bootsy

The participants viewed improvisatory ability as having an educational component that could be learnt. This involved the learning of specific techniques and fundamentals, which would be enhanced with self-directed practice including performance opportunities with broader exposure to more diversity of styles:

Learning the basics and then attempting to improvise a lot. Oscar

Most participants desired to improve their confidence with their ability to improvise. In order to achieve this confidence the acquisition of more knowledge and skill in this domain was seen as highly valuable. By gaining this knowledge a higher standard of personal and group performance would eventuate thus creating a more spontaneous result:

I would like to improve my confidence when improvising, and become more comfortable with following chord markings when soloing. Artie

As a closing summary to the background questionnaire it may be of assistance to again view the detail of profile data in table 4.2, p. 37.

5.2 Interviews

The interviews of the participants followed the background questionnaire. They were conducted during the beginning, midway and final weeks of the research.

5.2.1 Beginning Interview Questions

The participants’ comprehension of “improvised music” was that it did not require notation, and that there was novelty, originality, freedom and ownership involved in its expression. This was indicated clearly during the filmed weekly lesson where the participants were relaxed, humorous, witty and openly communicative with
each other. Bird and Artie indicated that they understood improvisation as a liberating form of expression yet there were boundaries:

I immediately think of jazz and soloists and soloing - one person playing and no other forms of improvisation of themes or backing up and that sort of thing. The phrase “improvised music” has changed for me in the last three weeks – where I thought it was one person soloing and now its changed to where I’m playing a counter melody on my sax – basically it means making something up that goes well within the group – not necessarily by yourself. Bird

I suppose being able to be creative and express yourself within a piece of music and not being confined about what’s written on the page and to play what you want to play within the boundaries of the chords. Artie

Improvisation appeared to be more comprehensible and achievable when performing within a school performance ensemble. Bird felt more assured:

The school big band that I solo in – listening for background cues. The big band at school – it’s brought on a whole new thing now listening to the rest of the band when I’m soloing. Bird

The participants identified role models within their immediate and external settings and were able to articulate their names and personal qualities. Emotional charisma, stage presence and stylistic confidence were impressive factors for the participants. Expressive content and assurance plus role model comparisons, gave participants opportunities to learn from example and to express their own individuality. Mimicking role models was not seen as a desirable attribute. Bird and Artie described role models as examples of how they would like to perform but their intentions were to be unique and to individualise their performances:

They’re very successful in their playing and successful in their musicianship. They know what they’re doing, they do it well, they sound good, they’re nice to listen to - they give emotion to the music. When I listen to it, I feel what they’re trying to portray, which is what I believe improvisation is all about and that’s what a good role model is to me – that’s what I want to be like. Bird

Frank Sinatra and Harry Connick Junior – their talent and their freedom with their confidence - they’re amazing performers—and their stage presence. Frank Sinatra’s tonal quality is amazing—great. Listening to different interpretations of pieces is always good because it sort of gives you the
confidence to sing it your way as opposed to just copying. You don’t need to copy one person - you can do it your way. Artie

Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra— the crooner himself—there’s a lot of voice soloing that he adds in, to make it, shall we say, more interesting and therefore a bit of feeling to it – which is what improvisation is about. Bird

The participants found there was opportunity to participate in a fun activity that hadn’t occurred within the usual high school context. The video data demonstrated this. Improvisation satisfied a need for personal improvement within a learning area that was viewed as not having been addressed in scholastic depth. The activities were viewed as having a social and pragmatic value. Oscar liked the social element; Artie enjoyed the opportunity to perform whilst Bird and Bootsy valued the practical element.

I think a lot of it is that I really like music. You get closer to people that you don’t normally play with musically. So every opportunity that comes up you have to take it to keep learning if you want to learn different things. I’m pretty proficient in classicism but improvisation has never come along. Oscar

I’ve always loved improvising jazz music and –um –but it’s been a while – ages—since I’ve had a real opportunity to get involved with it and it provides an opportunity to play some jazz. Improvising is fun and cool. I’ve been wanting to get back into jazz music for a while and this has provided the opportunity to do that. Artie

To be honest the main reason was to improve my soloing. I used to think it was one person improvising and soloing all the time and not the little things like counter melodies and things like that. I’ve learnt to solo and while others are soloing not to steal their thunder. I’m taking as much as I can. I’m trying to get all the information in my head to keep it for later. One thing I’d like to develop is my vibrato. I want a very strong vibrato – tonal work. Bird

A lot of the music I play in does require the use of improvisation so I’d like to learn how to do it properly and how to do it without having to sit down and write what I want to play – just to be able to do it going off the chords and doing it. Bootsy

The themes that emerged from the background and initial interviews were that improvisation was learnt well within a sociably enjoyable and relaxed environment. This assisted the awareness and acquisition of specific techniques for improvisation,
which were employed both as a soloist and as a member of an ensemble. The additional awareness of role models assisted individualised perceptions of performance that contributed to a more resilient outcome of ownership in personal expression. This was assisted further through the scheduled curriculum of improvisation.

5.2.2 Mid Cycle Interviews

The mid cycle responses revealed an emerging confidence with improvisation amongst the participants. They had progressed and were more assured with their comprehension of specific styles and techniques within the curriculum. This was helping them with their improvisation. Their social cohesion and unity as a band had developed further with improved confidence and depth of expression. Buddy, Artie and Oscar gave clear understandings that they were enjoying the project:

*It’s always good to receive a basic understanding of the different musical terms like the mordents, gruppetto, acciaccatura etc. even though I don’t play a pitched instrument I can apply the rhythmic qualities of them to my soloing. It’s been great to just receive like insight into different styles of music like Jazz and Latin music which is not something I would normally listen to and it’s interesting to hear that type of music and to play that type of music.* Buddy

*Firstly it’s just improved my confidence in improvising and learning all the tricks and devices to improve your solo to make it more interesting – which is good.* Artie

*Something I didn’t expect to be important but it really has been is how- un-important it is for the group mentality - it is to still be really solid - to not just facilitate the melody but to know where everybody is at – to have the same mindset - that’s so important. The improvisation is always connected to the band – it’s not two separate things.* Oscar

The participants were functioning in an environment of creative interaction where some members had assumed a leadership role for planning and direction whereas others were there to positively frame the lesson with a disposition towards encouragement and support. This became manifest with a more assured action and statement from the participants. The levels of confidence had been sustained. Some elements of a “personal voice” (McMillan, 1996) were also emerging. Buddy had emerged as an organiser, Bird was an enthusiastic motivator and Oscar was aware of
his role as part of the rhythm section. This was clearly manifest from the data recorded on video. All the participants had taken on particular roles within the band that were mutually supportive:

*Well I think – um I don’t know – I think I am able to explain some terms that you talk about if you ever ask. I also try to help structure the pieces before when we play and bring up discussion about how we are going to play them – who’s soloing first and what we’re going to do with them and how we’re going to develop them once we’ve finished playing them. I lock in pretty well with the rhythm section. I try to provide a basic groove and like when I play I’ll change the dynamics-say- bring it back for a clarinet or a piano solo and look at getting other people involved or something like that. Buddy*

*I feel I’m being a cohesive member of the group so I feel that I’m there and being positive and trying to help everyone – sort of thing – like I’m there to better myself. It’s not just about yourself and making yourself better – it’s about getting better as a group which I feel like we are. We’ve bonded really well and we’re tight together musically and we play off each other really well. I try to be positive to make it just fun – more enjoyable. Bird*

*On the piano I vary the rhythms and I know the drummer does a lot and we follow each other to the variety of the rhythms and I like to think that keeps it interesting and that gives the lead instruments something more to work with – yeah- I just try to always think of ways to create interest - as a support system. Oscar*

The participants were not just concerned with expanding their knowledge of specific techniques, but were also trying to see the bigger picture of an improvised artistic statement through informed choice. Bootsy, Bird and Oscar were demonstrating discernment with their ways of improvising and choice of specific techniques:

*I’m most interested in just flat out soloing. The way that we’ve um started soloing for “Impressions” where we’ve got – um a very long solo – I’m quite interested in that because so far I think it’s pretty difficult to keep a solo that long interesting. So it does put more pressure on you and really forces you keep it from going really boring. Bootsy*

*I feel personally I need to work on my tone a bit more and tuning - which is always an issue in the group – but towards improvising I personally think I need to use – um – silence – a bit more instead of playing the whole time and don’t not be afraid to add in the silence. Silence to me is thinking too much – it’s the whole nervous thing – and what am I going to do next. Bird*
The area that is most important to me is not the note choice – because I know the scales that go with the music – but how can I use them more effectively – trying not to repeat too much and provide a variance especially on piano octaves – and again how to work that within the group and the phrase. I know a lot of it has to do with trial and error. Oscar

The participants had identified their various roles within their group interactions. The consequent rapport that occurred produced a feeling of security, knowing there was a unity of purpose and direction. This produced a less inhibited atmosphere, which was gained through trust, security and support. The consequence produced more confidence and greater freedom with improvisation. This was particularly noteworthy to the researcher as these factors in group dynamic and rapport indicated that the participants were “in the flow” with their improvisation and that they had taken significant responsibility for their own direction. Field note observations greatly assisted these perceptions. Some preliminary elements of “authentic selfhood” and “inspired” performance (Genoux, 2009, pp. 39, 13) were emerging. Oscar, Bootsy and Bird were aiming to improvise with more freedom whilst maintaining rapport throughout the ensemble:

I think our communication is really good where, as a rhythm section and connecting to the lead instruments, our communication has got a lot better and that’s also facilitated a lot better improvisations as well as solos. We’re trying to get in visual cues – with each other – and I think – but also - there is that subliminal kind of vibe going through and we know what each other’s going to do and we can anticipate that. Oscar

I think that now we’ve been going for quite a few weeks we’ve all started to trust each other in our ability. So I’m quite happy with the way in that we’re relating. We’re starting to become more confident with one another. We’re starting to play more freely. Bootsy

The social cohesiveness has grown. I feel like I’ve got to know the band members better because I’ve gotten the chance to play with them. Now we can relate to each other on this because that I feel I know how they work and their tendencies on their instrument. Everyone has – like – a sort of tendency or a safe place on their instrument and once we know that about each other then we can go along with it to help them either to explore out of their comfort zone or to help each other sound better. Bird

Formal instrumental lessons and the improvisation class were linked with an enhanced ownership of performance through having experienced improvisation. The
participants were able to contextualize between the influences of scripted (formal) and non-scripted (informal) performance. Being informed of the nuances and possibilities of contrasting stylistic idioms had developed their overall sense of assurance and comprehension with improvisation. Artie, Oscar and Buddy commented that the improvisation classes had clearly assisted their formal instrumental classes with confidence, memorisation and general performance:

"Um – yeah – with my vocal lessons there are (links). It’s sort of encouraging, it sort of helped me to be a little more free with my rhythm and my rhythmic interpretation when I’m singing. It sort of makes me realise I can do it and can get away with it a lot of the time. It just gives you the confidence—it’s given me the confidence to do that. Artie"

"My weekly lessons are classically based and I’m learning strictly to what the page says. I definitely think these (improvisation) lessons are influencing what I’m doing and how I’m playing – whether this directly correlates or influences my classical technique I’m not so sure it’s affecting that. I just view improvisation lessons and my more formal lessons as just kind of two separate spheres of playing. I think there is, especially when it comes to performance, in general, I think the (improvisation) class is really helping that because there are lots of things - ’cause when you are doing strictly from the page you gonna worry that you’re going to forget it – like – there have been performances since I’ve started doing this where I’ve lost where I am and I’ve just kept going and kind of used the (improvisational) knowledge that I’ve learnt here ’till I’ve got to the point that I was comfortable and I’ve become a lot less nervous in performance – yes even in classical performance - I’ve forgotten a whole page of music and just did something (improvised) and got to the point that I was comfortable with – which was an experience! Oscar"

"Yes, say for example, when soloing you use a lot of the main rudiments. You learn different jazz beats in your instrumental lessons and I can then use that in the different pieces that you play and different styles learnt in the instrumental lessons correlates to the improvisation lessons. Buddy"

When given the choice between lessons in improvisation and formal instrumental classes, all participants indicated their preference for improvisation. The reasons for this were explained that improvisation classes were regarded as an enjoyable, sociable and happy activity that was personally satisfying and provided a positive opportunity for the expression of practical knowledge. Bootsy, Bird and Artie felt that the improvisation classes were uplifting:
I think I’d prefer to focus on improvisation. I think that what I learn in my weekly lesson is seen because it’s mostly theory. You can usually teach yourself that, but the group that we’re in now - that’s a pretty unique opportunity to have musicians that are like that all playing in the same group - so I prefer to take more opportunities like these where you can learn to improvise. Bootsy

Ideally I’d like to do both together. If I had to choose between the two I’d choose the improvisation skills as I’m really enjoying the jazz and that’s where I want to go. Bird

Probably improvisation. It’s what I enjoy and it’s fun. It’s good – it makes me happy. It makes me more positive. Artie

The mid cycle interviews thus indicated that the cohort had matured with the acquisition of specific techniques in improvisation. This had generated a disposition that enabled informed choices in improvised expression that created greater confidence and discernment in artistic judgements. The qualities of enjoyment in the task and rapport, stimulated by mutual trust, enabled the emergence of flexible leadership and supporter roles amongst the participants. The emergence of these midway contexts enabled the progress towards the final stages of the project schedule.

5.2.3 Final Interviews

The final interviews sought to inquire as to the effectiveness of the project. This was indicated by way of a rating system, a viva voce summary, future intentions with improvisation and overall comprehension.

The participants endorsed the project schedule with a very high rating out of ten. There was satisfaction with personal progress and a desire to extend the length of the lessons with high value placed upon learning improvisation within a group context. Bird, Bootsy and Oscar felt they had made significant progress with improvisation:

Oh – ten - I really enjoyed it and the effectiveness was great as well because I feel I’ve got a lot better on my saxophone and my skills have developed a lot better and the techniques as well that have been coming through the playing have been most productive and beneficial. Bird
I’d rate them highly. I’d rate them an eight or nine. I think if each lesson went for a longer time we’d get a lot more out of them. Usually after we’re taught a technique the time will run out and we’ll only be able to use that technique once or twice in one or two pieces before the time runs out. They (the lessons) were very good. They were very effective. Bootsy

About eight, maybe seven, but definitely towards the higher end. Um, there have been a few things that I know that and how to do – even still I did know what something was, I’d never done it in a group setting before - and I think this is really important... Improvisation in general—you get those books on learning how to play jazz but it’s not the same as trying it within a group, trying it within a group setting. That’s what I think is effective. Oscar

There was a uniform desire to keep experiencing improvisational activity with a focus upon practised knowledge and expression. The concept of seeking the bigger picture through group participation was reiterated. Bootsy, Buddy and Artie valued learning specific techniques for improvisation and highly valued the opportunity to exercise choice and judgement so as to express these within the spontaneity of their improvisations:

I think it’s not just individual areas but just about all of it in general such as what we’ve been doing here. We’ve learnt the techniques but then we get to experiment with them in a band where we say it’s not going to – um – hold the rest of them back... I’d like to keep studying in a group. Once you’ve learnt the techniques, which I think I have a fair understanding of now—in a group you can experiment with them and if you make a small mistake you don’t have to stop the rest of the group – you can find out what you did wrong, work on the error and then you’ve learnt the technique. So yeah, I’d like to keep studying within a group. Bootsy

Um I don’t know about the use of the word “studying” – um – but I’d like to keep playing and improvising with people and playing in groups that improvise and work together that way – um – because I just believe that you can’t really study improvisation – there’s no set characteristics to it really like there are set techniques that you can use but not characteristics – um – I just think that improvisation is just some thing that just happens – but you don’t really “learn” it ...I don’t know—you can’t really study something that’s spontaneous except basic beats – latin - samba - jazz beats etc. – just so you can play with those beats and make them fit. Buddy

I’d like to continue actually playing jazz and improvising because I’ll not let it fall by the wayside again. But just to continue working on – getting used to different key signatures and that – following the chord marking – yes – it’s getting there but I’ve got a lot of work to do. Artie
The participants valued the specific techniques of improvisation incorporated into the curriculum. Similarly, the curriculum design was valued including the presence of the teacher researcher who encouraged freedom of expression and facilitated the explanation of terms. The unforeseen opportunity for the ensemble to perform in public was seen as a significant moment that produced confidence whilst ensemble members were able to enthusiastically reflect on their personal and chronological progress. The field note data testified further to these observations. Bird, Oscar, Buddy and Bootsy kept reiterating the importance of performing in a group and being immersed in the experience of improvisation. What had initially been a slightly daunting task proved to be a positive experience:

*Um – learning all the techniques of the syllabus was a perfect example of the significance because without them there really wouldn’t be much of a course. Another big thing of significance was to make sure all band members were there. I felt that if some were away I felt that then we were out of sync - in that sense - so it was significant to have everyone there. I felt it was also significant to have you there to help us interpret the syllabus and all the information and techniques within the syllabus. I felt it was very significant that you were there to teach us the exact meaning of the technique and how to execute it. There was freedom with our interpretations as well as working within the guidelines as well. In each song you suggested we add in the newest technique that we played for the lesson and we did that as well as used the personal ones that we use a lot and it felt like it was fine – yeah there was freedom. Bird*

*Not just knowing the techniques and learning the new techniques but trying them out with the group and the interaction within the group and how that works was really important to me especially when we performed live in the group - we did that once*[^8] *- that was quite a unique experience. I’ve performed a lot but performing in an improvised jazz group is a little frightening for me and it went really well! That was really beneficial to me. Oscar*

*Um – I just really enjoyed it as an individual – as the weeks went on we started – um – meshing as a group and we started – um – being able to read each other - while we were playing more and working with each other to take like the various solos, dynamics or - um - say tempo or some thing like that – just the way we worked better as a group and jelled better as a group. As the weeks went on I really enjoyed the way that happened. Buddy*

*Well before we first started I didn’t actually know much about improvising or playing in a smaller group like that. I’d only known about playing in a big group such as the big band or a very small group such as my own band, which*

[^8]: There were two later occasions at which the group performed as entertainers, namely, the school’s Spring Breakfast and the Premier’s Reading Challenge Awards at the National Gallery, Victoria.
doesn’t play any jazz – so what was significant was being in a group like that and just being thrown in and told to play the music (smiles) and to sort most of it out yourself. I thought that I - that was good for me and I got quite a lot out of it - that was just from being put in that situation. Bootsy

There were indications that the participants were able to improvise and instill original composition within their principal melodies. The participants had also learnt how to structure the roles of how and when to lead and to support melody during performances. This was demonstrated clearly in the participants’ body language and interactions recorded on video. The involvement in improvisation was further enhanced through access to a diverse palette of improvisational techniques. Artie reiterated again that this had given him confidence. Bootsy had learnt how to be a band member within an improvisation context and Buddy was aware of how structure played an important unifying role within improvisation ensembles:

Well before when we started I thought it was more to do with just soloing. I thought it was a bit more “out there” than what we’ve done. Now I’ve learnt that when we’re improvising most of the time - I’ll just be playing a mostly steady line and hold it back a bit until I’ve got my own individual solo but otherwise it’s just playing your own lines but not going over the top and trying to be in front of the band or not trying to show off really – just playing as part of the band. Bootsy

Um – well – now I have knowledge of certain techniques which were used such as gruppetto, acciacatura and um things like that – ah – and just how improvisation in a group and passing the melodies around and like having that underlying melody or have someone do an extended solo over the top – and stuff like that. Buddy

I’d say I’m a lot more confident with improvising and it’s just the greater understanding of techniques that will make your improvisation better. It will take it up a notch or two from an ok improvisation to a good solo. It’s just learning the little tricks that you can use that will make it sound so much better. Artie

The participants expressed a desire to integrate improvisation into their more formal instrumental music lessons. They were keen to study some of the repertoire of jazz and to explore the improvisational possibilities. There was also an endorsement that the study of improvisation enhanced the performance of formal music. Oscar repeated that improvisation had assisted with his memory loss in classical performance and felt there was a connection between formal and informal styles. Artie could clearly see the
connection and wanted to integrate both approaches within his general study in instrumental music lessons:

I think I’m still exploring that and – um – because improvisation is still like a foreign thing to my classical formal training – and I’m not sure as to how they connect, although, I think I’ve told you in the last interview before – when I was performing and I kind of forgot an entire page and I just improvised a phrase and kept going and that was a direct descent from this (improvisation course) and just there are things like that where they do connect and again. I’m exploring how they connect - but I know they do. Oscar

Um – certainly – um –with my singing lessons – I’d like to look more at some jazz singing and sort of bringing the improvisation into that would create having the freedom to play with the rhythm, which is good. Instrumentally, well obviously I’d like to keep playing jazz on my clarinet if I can, which would be good – yeah – I mean when you’re playing, as I said with the voice, being confident to play with the rhythm and things like that it still – you know – bringing some of the improvisation into it – you’re altering the song there – even if it’s slightly when you’re playing with it – especially if you’re playing solo works – you can bring that into play. Artie

The participants indicated they had a very good recall for the specific techniques of improvisation as listed in the project schedule. This suggested that not only were specific techniques imparted and comprehended but also the language of improvisation had been assimilated into the participants’ discourse and vernacular. Bootsy particularly liked the study of riff creation. Oscar had an interest in “call and response” and “target notes.” Artie had a clear overview and was drawn to “integrity in phrasing” with instruments. Bird also had a clear overview:

What I remember the most is pretty well what you can apply to any piece which is to take into consideration the integrity of the piece, the mood and if we’re playing even an original or a cover you’ve got to take into consideration what the original artist was trying to send across to an audience – and then we’ve got the group of ornaments - they play a large part but not as large a part – as the integrity of the piece. Acciaccatura, gruppetto, trill, mordent, variety of tone, trading in fours, eights, extended solos, cliché, writing own riffs and making them catchy and backing – that went well – that went quite well (smiles). Bootsy

We did the integrity of phrasing, we did different types of trills, we did the target notes and we did the call and response. I think that personally those were the most influential ones – the one I took in most - especially the call and response – as a solo performer you still hear that – you still do it like in pieces.
by yourself but to trust someone else with that call and response – and I felt – um yeah that was really developed in this group with me and the bass and the drummer – the other people in the section – the people that was really gaining with me that trust – and um target notes and integrity of phrasing kind of go hand in hand – where do you put the target notes in the phrasing? – So they um force you to look at the phrase – um - more in depth before – and eventually with it before going into improvising. Oscar

We looked at ornamentation with things like trills, mordents and turns and – um- tonal variation – ah – rhythmic variation, mirroring – ah – we looked at – ah – trading in fours and eights and various things – we looked at – um – extended solos – um – what’s the word - um – oh yeah – target notes – but um – integrity of phrasing which was a big sort of thing – a new thing that I hadn’t thought of so much with my instrumental playing – well – when you’re singing it’s kind of hard not to do, obviously, because you’ve got the lyrics – you kind of can’t not have it, whereas with the instrument it’s not necessarily the first thing you think about. Artie

Oh – um – the trill – um - the gruppetto – um - the acciaccatura, the appoggiatura – um – oh – um – target notes, creating the riffs, light and shade, tonal development - pitch bends – those sort of things, common notes and working at your solo around these with scales – yep – um- trading in fours, trading in eights – that sort of thing with your solos and another player and then the extended solo – yep. Bird

There was a common intention to maintain a performing interest with improvisation. It was evident that improvisation provided an enjoyable and satisfying recreational and learning activity. In one case improvisation was seen as a life long pursuit and another incorporated this into daily technical warm-ups. The participants enjoyed the study and wished to at least continue in the improvisation group for their final years at school. Oscar found the connection with his formal lessons by integrating improvisation into his daily warm-ups. Buddy was committed to continuing improvisation into adult life. Artie wanted to share his newfound skills in improvisation with others:

I can’t really say for certain because I do a lot of things. I know – I think – we all want to keep this group together – at least for next year and – um – I think improvisation will always kind of, will always try and keep it part of my regular practice and I do that now – now I do finger exercises, a little bit of improvisation and then my pieces. It’s something I’ve tried to integrate to becoming more and more a well-rounded musician. It’s some thing I’m keen to work on. Thank you for inviting me to do this. It’s been a lot of fun! Oscar
Um- I think I’ll always be improvising at the piano or the drums or whatever. I’d like to keep up this group because I think we work well together and I can see us doing something next year as part of school and obviously with this gig coming up it obviously is a big step in keeping together – um – so I’d like to keep improvising because I enjoy improvising. It’s been lots of fun! Buddy

Um – I certainly hope we will keep this group going, obviously, which will be good to keep going next year – um – maybe expand it and see if I can join some of the other jazz groups at school with an instrument of some kind – which would be good – I’m not sure – if I was to keep studying – I’d probably talk to you. Well thank you very much for running this – it’s been great – it’s been fantastic – a learning curve for all of us – yeah definitely – thanks very much – yep – cool! Artie

The data from the final interviews indicated that the cohort highly valued the design and implementation of the project schedule, which included the input and demonstration of specific techniques by the teacher-researcher-participant-observer. The project schedule enabled continued discernment in artistic choices for improvisation that had been assimilated within a group context and identity. The ability to perform with spontaneity had also emerged with continued confidence in leadership and supporter roles embodied within a group environment.

The ability to articulate a confident discourse in the language of improvisation was demonstrated by ready reference to the intricacies and vernacular of the project schedule. Music improvisation was viewed as a continuing element in the lives of the participants who also desired that improvisation be regularly incorporated into their instrumental music lessons. The reasons for continuing with the practice of improvisation were for the enjoyable social benefits that included further practical and academic inquiry incorporating an enhanced development and potential for future artistic pathways.

5.3 Video and Field Note Data

The video and field notes generated data that could be immediately and retrospectively assessed. Like the text of the interviews the data was always available for scrutiny and verification. The video offered real-time in situ recording of the class and the interviews, whereas the field notes provided additional data. For instance, the static video camera did not necessarily record the mood of the participants or the
general atmosphere within the classroom. Sometimes the participants were tired from previous activity or the heat in the room was oppressive. All of these aspects, including the researcher’s reflections, were recorded in the field notes, which added to a more complete repository of data. The aggregation of the data with the background questionnaire, project schedule, video recording of classes, the three interviews and the recording of field notes produced the following conclusions in the next chapter.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Overview

This chapter will present an overview of the project. The assumptions and limitations involved with the research will be discussed followed by conclusions that respond to the research questions and the data.

6.1 Assumptions and Limitations

A number of assumptions and limitations had a bearing on the interpretation of the aggregated data. It needs to be repeated that the choice of participants was voluntary and impartial without any offer of reward or contingency for school assessment. This is clear when the transcripts of interview are seen, as all transcripts captured the uniqueness and individuality of the participants. The impartiality of the participants was demonstrated, as the transcripts are candid accounts that read as individuals primarily concerned with improvisation. The participants’ transcripts confirmed their intrinsically spontaneous responses about the issues of improvisation and were not premised upon seeking favour, neither with the teacher, nor with each other.

Further to this, the participants belonged to a small sample from a selective entry school, which could infer the participants possessed uniquely high intelligence and exclusivity, thereby limiting the research; however, this was not a governing condition in the design of the project schedule. Another limitation is that this sample participated over a ten-week process of inquiry, which is a relatively short period of assessment, however, the data that were generated were sufficient and thorough, within the confines of this case, to forge conclusions. The sample was chosen for practical purposes only. There was a pragmatic element involved with the research due to the restrictions on time, choice of location and availability of students. Thus
the small sample group and the research in the context of a teacher-researcher guided curriculum represented *per se* the intrinsic case under study.

Another assumption is that all the participants had at least a moderate degree of instrumental expertise, which proved true, however, this did not confer expertise with improvisation due to variations in the extent and breadth of previous experience. A further assumption was that the participants were sufficiently literate to comprehend and answer interview questions whilst possessing a personality trait that was able or at the very least interested in being able to improvise. This also proved to be true, however, it was an assumption as also it was an assumption that the participant-observer-teacher-researcher possessed the necessary “deep knowledge” (Neumann, 2006, p.159), background, ability, qualification and experience to impart and monitor the suggested curriculum.

### 6.2 Conclusions

In describing the participants we have seen from the background questionnaire that the cohort consisted of five selective entry students who were multi instrumentalists with relatively advanced skills commensurate with their years of learning. Family and extended family members had musically influenced the participants and they were relatively experienced with different genres of performance but not extensively informed about improvisation. They possessed adventurous and curious minds and enjoyed the resultant social bonding and freedom of expression that was experienced with the project schedule of improvised music. The finding in this context responds to and clarifies the research question one – would the inclusion of improvisation have an impact on the students?

The cohort was prepared to address ways of improving their confidence in improvisation by assimilating, valuing and practising the knowledge required to assist performance in this domain. In these terms Bandura & Locke (2003, p. 920) and Bandura (2006, p. 2) accounted for the necessity of self – efficacy and a resilient attitude for engagement in new and challenging tasks. It thus emerged that the participants had a reflective approach to their situation and were prepared to experience the implementation of a guided curriculum with opportunities for self-
expression and direction. The findings in these contexts respond to and clarify the research question two – would a curriculum approach to improvisation enhance student engagement in music?

By the third week of the project schedule the participants had progressed with their learning activities. There was an indicator that the participants approved of the design of the schedule as an enjoyable designated curriculum of specific techniques. The importance of experiencing fun and enjoyment was reiterated within this setting with the participants identifying the importance of what it was that constituted desirable attributes within a role model (stage presence, confidence, audience rapport, skill, charisma). Elements of Lucy Green’s (2002, pp. 23 - 24) references to encultured learning were clearly manifest in this context. Simultaneously, whilst acknowledging the importance of role models, the participants agreed it was necessary to be independently assertive with informed self-direction and creativity, whilst honing the practical skills that enhanced improvisation. The findings in these contexts respond to and clarify both the aforementioned research question two - and six – what is the place of role modelling in the teaching of improvisation?

The middle stage of the case study indicated that the participants had become a confident, socially cohesive group with subtexts of assumed leadership and motivational responsibilities throughout. The cohort functioned in a context of high morale based upon mutual support and trust. These qualities created rapport between the participants. The findings in these contexts respond to and clarify research question five – what are the subtexts and group dynamics involved with the expression of improvisation?

Trust, rapport and the fluctuation of leadership-follower-supporter roles amongst the participants demonstrated the importance of how positive behavioural interactions assisted the improvisation, thereby enhancing the productivity and effectiveness of the project. The participants’ commitment and enjoyment of the project suggested an overall enthusiasm, which in turn positively influenced their attitude to the school’s music program and their intention to keep on studying improvisation. Integrating improvisation into the weekly “formal” instrumental lesson was viewed as an important way of enhancing “classical” technique and overall performance. This
contingency was an integral component within the acquisition of advanced instrumental skill as advocated by McPherson (1999, p. 153), Folkstead (2005) and Green (2008, p. 2). Thus in the above contexts the findings respond to and clarify research questions three – would the inclusion of improvisation enhance commitment and interest in school music programs - and research question four – does improvisational skill enhance progress in “formal” music?

The participants gave the final stages of the research project a very high approval rating. The schedule of activities was highly valued through group decision-making within a congenial setting that was further enhanced with occasions of public performance thus producing even higher levels of confidence with improvisation. Important collaborative, student – centered, authentic and self directed factors of best practice teaching had thus been addressed as advocated by Zemelan, Daniels & Hyde (2005). The ability to create, lead and or support melody with improvisation had been imparted so that all participants had a working and practical knowledge that enabled them to feel confident and suitably informed.

The guidance of the teacher-researcher was also acknowledged whilst recognising that freedom of expression had been emphasised and prevailed throughout. Individual members of the group were able to summarise the specific techniques of the previous ten weeks, which indicated a high level of comprehension with all indicating their enthusiasm for continued study and participation. There were frequent expressions of appreciation for being involved with the research. Thus per se the project schedule demonstrated a successful way of teaching improvisation to instrumental students. The design of the project schedule addressed a means to an end with a content that could be achieved by moderately advanced musicians. The factors that further assisted the participants’ achievements were through the encouraging presence of family influences, the possession of an adventurous and curious intellect, the enjoyment of the task within a group format, the development of rapport through trust and support, the importance of identifying and studying role models, the importance of public performance and the influence of a suitably experienced and informed teacher capable of imparting and demonstrating specific techniques embracing improvisation.
There are clear pathways to teaching improvisation to instrumental students. In this case the pathway chosen was to consider an informed and appropriately designed curriculum relevant to the needs and experience of the participants. The project schedule’s curriculum of activity addressed the prioritised and targeted recommendations of the 2005 National Review of School Music Education. Given that this research represented a single site bounded case study it would be desirable to complete further research over multiple sites with contrasted demographics.

The ability to improvise is not a mysterious phenomenon. It is an accessible, progressive, tangible and rewarding music activity. Because of its flexibility, the specifically designed curriculum within this thesis has the potential to serve as a model for teaching improvisation to varying school levels of different age groups, backgrounds and musical experience. This is encouraging as it offers a considered pathway to others who so feel the desire to learn and teach improvisation.
References


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