Improvisation at the Piano: Exploring the Learning Experiences of Music Readers

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Abstract

The theme of improvisation in music is garnering increased attention amongst musicians who otherwise would identify themselves as music-readers. The 21st-century musician who reads music continues to value these skills, but may show greater interest in creative or unscripted music-making. Piano teachers who work primarily within the notation-based realm and wish to explore improvisation lack a conceptual model of how to approach this type of learning for themselves or their students. This action research study explored learning experiences of 2 student learners and 1 teacher-learner as they delved into the improvisation medium. Though at different stages in their development as musicians, all 3 were first and foremost music readers. This project explored learning experiences through 2 components: (a) the student participants created an improvised accompaniment for a short segment of a Charlie Chaplin film and (b) in my dual role as teacher-learner and teacher-researcher, I embarked upon a 10-month course of lessons with 3 different expert improvisation mentors. Improvisational learning experiences were explored through video recordings of student lessons, field observation notes, transcripts from semi-structured student interviews, and a reflective researcher's journal. Theories of creativity and the everydayness of art framed the discussion around the role and significance of improvisation for the pianist who wishes to engage in this form of music-making. Findings contribute to the literature by providing a context for teachers to begin exploring practical pedagogical processes for teaching improvisation, and a theoretical rationale for considering the importance of enhancing the traditional approach to teaching the piano.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Table	Page

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study explored the learning experiences of three piano players (myself, the teacher, and two students from my piano studio) who were experimenting with the art of improvisation. Improvisation is spontaneous music making, without the guidance of notation. There is no score to tell the player what to play, no guidance about what comes next; a musical idea is conceived and executed at the same moment in time. This study was unique because it worked with musicians who were accustomed to reading music. Each of the three participants normally ply their craft through the medium of the printed score, in the domain of the classically oriented piano lesson that focuses on notation reading, with all of its various attendant priorities.

Two elementary level piano students and myself, a professionally trained piano teacher, worked at our improvising. In this action research study, I participated both as a teacher-learner and a teacher-researcher. I undertook a course of 10 months of improvisation lessons with three different teachers, and journaled my experiences during this time. For a period of 6 weeks, the two students engaged in a project that involved the improvisation of an accompaniment for a 3-minute segment of a Charlie Chaplin silent film. During the students' portion of the research, I planned lessons for the students and documented their responses with the learning experience. The results of all of our learning experiences formed the basis of the research analysis and findings, which were grounded in the theoretical framework that posits that art is a type of everyday action (Wolterstorff, 1980). Accompanying contextual frameworks were provided by Burnard's (2012) theory of multiple creativities and Craft's (2015) theory of creativity and possibility thinking.

Personal Story

As a classically trained organist and pianist, my relationship with music goes back a long way. My formal training began at the age of 8, taking piano lessons, and practicing on an old Heintzman piano in the family dining room, to the sounds of dinner and homework, with my four siblings close by, and often also vying for piano time. My first teacher, Olive Bentley, was a remarkable woman, and creative in many ways; as a colourful person, a diversity of pursuits dotted her life. Amongst her list of exceptional accomplishments was the fact that she was a composer of music for children. She not only composed fun music for her students to play but also authored her own piano method books, at a time when females simply did not engage with the profession in such a way. Perhaps her hard work and creativity influenced me more than I was ever aware at the time.

My relationship with Olive Bentley was but the first of many interactions with a host of unique and creative musician teachers who I would encounter over the years. My relationships with these teachers were of all shades and colours: some were peaceful and playful, others were encouraging, and still others were fraught with the stress of tension or expectations. Several of these teachers either composed or improvised, on either the piano or the organ. For a long time I have known that improvising is *out there*, and I have dabbled in it all this time, but never with a sense of satisfaction.

I do not think I am alone when I say that musicians who read music have a sense that they are missing something in their own musical expression. Conversations with countless friends would attest to this, and one of the unintended byproducts of pursing this study has been the opportunity to encourage others that they can improvise, and

enjoy it. So often music readers think this form of expression is outside of their ability, but it truly is not. An oft retold joke revolves around being spontaneously asked to play happy birthday, and being absolutely hamstrung for lack of music! I can attest that this very request came to me within this last month, and that I was able to respond affirmatively, which is a big step for someone previously tied to the page!

My adventure with exploring improvising has intensified during this past year, as I have finally embarked on a series of lessons, with the accompanying regular practice. I am still on this adventure, and I do not know how it will end. One thing I am certain of is that the journey thus far bears great similarity to all of my other learning experiences with music: there are moments of joy and play, times of fun, experiences of failure, stress, struggle, and of course, reward. They all meld together, with each one having its own season. Like life, I cannot seem to dictate which season I will live in at any given time, and if I could, I would probably never choose the difficult parts; but I know that I need even those times, in order to grow, and that with grace, it will all come together for good.

Making music is difficult, demanding work, but the reward is so very great. Part of my journey as a musician is to encourage others as they pass through the seasons of learning. I hope to do this like an improviser: with joy, courage, play, innovation, imagination, creativity, and hard work. In the end, I hope my students will leave my studio with the sense that they too, can add their own musical voices to a world that is blessed by the presence of the amazing gift of music.

Background to the Problem

The art of making music at the piano may take many different forms. Some musicians play by ear and improvise; others read music notation. Usually musicians

cannot do both. For some reason, improvisation at the piano, and music reading, often stand in opposition to each other. Often, a musician can make music in one of these realms, and wishes they could also make music in the other.

Frequently, those who acquire the skill of reading notation do so by learning to play music that is commonly referred to as classical music. The classically trained pianist develops tremendous skills in the area of reading music notation, and this notation is difficult to learn, requiring considerable dedication in terms of time and resources. Several have observed that when this form of musical expression is cultivated exclusively, other modes of music-making are often neglected, perhaps even suppressed (Bailey, 1992; McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002; Sowash, 2009). For those accustomed to performing the music of others, the freedom of exploring with sounds and making one's own music can be viewed as something to be feared, rather than something to be enjoyed.

School music educators are seeking to correct this dominant focus on music reading, along with the emphasis on performance that accompanies it, by teaching various forms of creative expression (Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Niknafs, 2013). In the realm of piano education, such interest is in its early stages, and solid pedagogical approaches for the classical musician are largely absent. This study focuses on the development of this creative musical skill in the reading musician.

Definition of Improvisation

How does one attempt to define improvisation in music? Does it mean to perform music without preparation? Does it involve brilliant inspiration or abundant creativity? Does it assume some, or no, preparatory work? Is it necessary to practice improvising techniques? These are problematic questions to answer, in part owing to the difficulty of

separating the act of improvisation from the influence of previous learning or exposure (Pressing, 1984).

Although there are differing viewpoints about how to engage in the act of improvisation, most agree that its essence is defined by virtue of its relationship to time: it is not totally preplanned, like other forms of music-making. Nachmanovitch (1990) explains that improvisation occurs whenever, at a certain moment in time, we follow our own thoughts and we act without a script. At such times, there is a certain unexpectedness to our behaviour. Begbie (2002) defines improvisation as a type of *musicking* that occurs when the act of conceiving of a creative idea and the performance of this idea occur at the same moment in time. The listener is not sure what the improviser will choose to do, as he or she appears to be simultaneously both creating and performing the created idea. Rather than reproducing or copying the ideas of another, the improviser is generating a new artistic happening in the moment. The ability to fashion something quickly, in the passing moment, is widely regarded as a form of creative behaviour. Many educators, ranging from musicians to math teachers, are interested in nurturing creative, curious students who are able to think independently. Employers are keen to hire creative thinkers who can generate unique solutions to common problems. Perhaps the ability to improvise reveals the ultimate manifestation of these coveted qualities.

Statement of the Problem

This research investigated the learning experiences of three music-readers—one teacher-learner and two elementary aged piano students—as they experimented with making improvised music. The twofold purpose was to seek to understand what nurtures

the activity of musical improvisation, and to explore student experiences with this form of creative expression. Improvisation has been a neglected art in the realm of music education, with teachers instead focusing on the development of music-reading skills (Bailey, 1992; McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002; Nettl, 1985). An exploration of current school curricula and recent research studies reveals that the teaching of improvisation has acquired a new interest and priority within the school setting (Southcott & Burke, 2012). Owing to the lack of curricula available to piano teachers, it is my perception, as a private music educator, that work in this area is in its infancy for traditional piano teachers. Many are interested, but there is uncertainty about how to teach it, especially because most piano teachers are untrained in improvisation themselves. This may be the result of a pedagogic paradigm that is particularly shaped by the Western view of music as essentially a performance-oriented act; musical products exist for contemplative appreciation (Humphreys, 2006; Nettl, 1985; Wolterstorff, 1980) rather than for personal expression, or any number of other reasons. In order to promote a pedagogy of improvisation, it will be important to acknowledge the value of non-performance roles for the place of music within society. As well, there is need to acknowledge the value of multiple types of creative expression, and the value of fostering creativity in the piano student.

Purpose Statement

This study sought to explore learning experiences with improvising, and thereby to find ways to promote both the art and teaching of improvisation within the context of the traditional classical piano lesson. Teachers who work within the domain of the notation-reading based lesson lack a pedagogical approach for teaching improvisation, owing to years of neglect in this area. This research hoped to find a way forward;

specifically, the way forward sought was one that lay outside of the jazz idiom, which is the customary genre for improvising.

The epistemic belief underpinning the study is that improvising, though essentially a creative act, is one that can be learned. A common view among reading musicians is that they cannot improvise; but it is possibly the type of musical education these musicians have received, that has led to a fear of improvising and a perception of lack of skill in this area (Bailey, 1992; MacPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002; Sowash, 2009). This study was grounded in an understanding of all persons as potentially creative individuals, rather than a select privileged few. Burnard (2012) asserts that the classical music world strongly reveres musical geniuses such as Bach and Beethoven, and that this view can lead to a devaluing of the creative worth of the ordinary individual. Several authors distinguish little c and big c creativity (Arieti, 1976; Craft, 2015), and this research was focused on the universal presence of little c creativity, as something capable of being nourished in all musicians (Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Moreira & Carvalho, 2010).

This study employed a pedagogical approach that sought to balance both skill development and creative expression as dual aspects of improvising. Several authors indicate that creativity occurs due to an interaction amongst multiple characteristics including expertise, creative skills, motivation, and self-confidence (Rogers, 2013; Wopereis, Stoyanov, Kirschner, & Van Merriënboer, 2013). During the course of the study, this need for balance emerged as one of the central defining features of learning to improvise. Craft's (2015) theory of creativity highlights the importance of encouraging "experimentation, openness and risk-taking" (p. 161) without taking over or imposing on

the learner. I sought to explore how themes of play and imagination feature within a domain that requires specific skills, developed through work, and an awareness of convention (Craft, 2015; Reimer, 2003). Many who theorize about creativity refer to the importance of work and focus in creativity, alongside aspects of play (Arieti, 1976; Craft, 2015; Stokes, 2005), so this research sought to hold these oppositional ideas in tandem.

A foundational concept for this study was the view that artistic endeavours may fulfill a role that has a meaning and value not encompassed within the usual performance paradigm. Adopting this broad view of the purpose of music-making, as well as an acceptance of the importance of acknowledging multiple musical creativities (Burnard, 2012) was of central importance. Finding ways to encourage play, imagination, questioning, innovation, and risk taking were of prime importance, alongside the development of particular necessary skills.

In this study, the central research questions I explored are:

1. How do both constraints and freedom facilitate learning to improvise at the piano, in ways that simultaneously encourage creativity and skill development in pianists?

2. What are the benefits and challenges for piano students who improvise, as they take ownership of creating a piece of music?

Rationale

As educators reflect upon the progression of emphases in music lessons, there is a clear call for a return to the practice of creating one's own music (Beegle, 2010; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Houvinen, Tenkanen, & Kuusinen, 2011; Rowe, Triantafyllaki, & Anagnostopoulou, 2015). In the 1960s, composers Peter Maxwell Davies and particularly

Canadian R. Murray Schafer began to have an influence on school music programs. They emphasized music as a creative activity, rather than solely as an interpretive act, and their influence was felt most profoundly in Australia (Southcott & Burke, 2012). More recently, this trend has continued with the birth of the Musical Futures program, which began as an action research project in 2003 in the UK. Musical Futures (2015) is based on the research work of Lucy Green (2002), who has extensively studied informal learning models in music education. The 2009 Ontario Arts Curriculum for grades 1–8 employs a slightly different focus, but is also reflective of this increased interest in creativity throughout arts education (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2009). The curriculum states that all children have creative abilities, and that the role of arts education is to encourage growth in the capacity for creative expression (OME, 2009). These aforementioned developments in teaching creativity all pertain to the school curriculum, and although there are some similarities, there are many differences in the work that I do as a piano teacher.

Within the realm of piano instruction, the desire to engage in creative activities has come more recently (Gordon, 2007), but is demonstrated by the presence of composing competitions sponsored by groups such as The Canadian Federation of Music Teachers and the instruction program *Music for Young Children*. Improvising appears to be the more elusive phenomenon to identify, but an Internet search reveals that some piano teachers are marketing themselves as teachers of improvisation. My own difficulty with finding a teacher suggests that there are few classical piano teachers who venture into the improvisation realm at this time. One notable exception would be classical pianists Forrest Kinney and Akiko Kinney (2010), who have authored the improvisation

books *Pattern Play*, and frequently give presentations at piano teachers' pedagogical

conferences. The Kinneys' work is widely known by piano teachers such as myself, and

their books are marketed by the prominent Canadian music publisher Frederick Harris

Music. Despite knowing and working with the *Pattern Play* books, I feel a deficit in my

own growth both as an improviser, and as a teacher of improvising.

There are many reasons for the increased interest in improvisation. These include

not only a strong historical precedent, but an awareness of the role improvising can play

in the development of aural skills, creativity, and increased expressive freedom when

playing one's instrument. These skills can be explored to some extent with any type of

musical training, either popular or classically based, but it is the engagement with the act

of improvisation that allows creative expression to occur in a unique and powerful

manner (Azzara, 1993; Gordon, 2007; Hancock, 1994; Higgins & Mantie, 2013;

Overduin, 1998). I hope that my exploration of this topic can create discussion about how

and why to teach improvisation to piano students who are also learning to read music.

Conceptual Framework

Two complementary conceptual ideas formed the foundation for this research

exploring learning experiences with the act of musical improvisation. First of all, the

theory of art as a type of everyday action, developed first by Wolterstoff (1980), enabled

for an expanded conception of the place for musical expression that is beyond the

common performance paradigm along with its accompanying focus on aesthetic

contemplation. Western music has seen a great focus placed on the centrality of

performance, rather than everyday music-making, and this emphasis is possibly one of its

defining features (Nettl, 1985). For example, piano students often play in competitive

festivals, or for exams, and these can unintentionally become an end in themselves. With this study, I hope to draw attention to a purpose for music education that envisions music's role as being that which draws people together, whether celebrating with friends, or mourning, or praising or dancing, or simply enjoying making beauty. Wolterstorff (1980), in seeking to expand the view of art, describes art as a social practice, our way of "acting in the world" (p. 5), rather than the sometimes espoused view that sees art as a way of escaping from the world. More recently, Begbie (2002) has pursued the idea of everyday art, highlighting "the enormous variety of social roles music can play—establishing cohesion between people, arousing emotion, expressing grief, praising a deity, putting to sleep, and so on" (p. 14). Although the Western music tradition has not placed a strong emphasis on these social roles, an exploration of the music of non-Western cultures reveals that there is considerable variety on this front in other cultures (Nettl, 1985). With this research I hope to bring attention to this everydayness of artistic expression.

In addition to seeking an alternative view for the role of music, creativity theory also informs my perspective. Burnard's (2012) theory of multiple musical creativities challenges preconceived notions of exactly which activities are considered to be demonstrative of musical creativity. This framework allows for multiple ways of being creative, as is reflective of the diverse nature of the musical experiences of the 21st century. Though the Western performance paradigm has had a profound influence on music throughout the world (Nettl, 1985), this study will seek to recognize the value of non-performance musical activities and approaches. One such contrast is provided by allowing oneself time to be free, and to play at the piano, instead of always working, and

always planning, and always seeking to execute a perfect reproduction of another composer's work. A further idea acknowledges the importance of developing the ability to think creatively as a general life skill.

Craft's (2015) theory of creativity provides a link between theories of music and the arts, and a more general conceptual view of creativity. Like the theory of art as action, Craft's theory of little "c creativity" (LCC) espouses a connection to everyday activities; the former deals with the art in everyday, and the latter with the creativity of everyday living. Grounded in "possibility thinking" (PT), LCC is essentially a process-oriented act of self-direction (Craft, 2015). Possibility thinking imagines what might be possible, and requires characteristics that include risk-taking, play, awareness of convention, imagination, and at the most foundational level, questioning. Craft's concepts are applicable to this research project on improvisation in many ways. Improvising also requires risk-taking, play, awareness of convention, and imagination, and the interplay between these concepts, specifically that of play and what Craft (2015) calls depth, or awareness of convention, was one of the central features of this research.

Since allowing for the development of a tension between play and awareness of convention, or working in depth, was a particular focal point in this research, two learning theories were employed to provide a framework for these seemingly oppositional ideas. The cognitive aspects of skill development are outlined in a model of improvisation developed by Pressing (1984), and this approach was used alongside Bruner's (1965) theory of discovery learning. Pressing's model supports an acknowledgement that musical improvisers in particular need to work to develop domain specific skills (Wopereis et al., 2013), which must be automated, in order to allow for

attention to be allocated to other processes such as generating ideas and interacting with other musicians (Beaty, 2015). Pressing (1984) goes on to argue that this automation of skills is especially vital in time-based domains such as music, where planning and execution occur simultaneously in time. Although Pressing's model is convincing, there is debate about whether the creative process is truly about such control, or whether it is about letting go. Bruner's theory of discovery learning, where learning occurs through exploration and problem solving, supports the concepts of learning through creative play, exploration, and innovation. Utilizing with these two contrasting learning theories allowed me the scope to explore the interplay between work and play in some detail.

The conceptual ideas of art as a type of everyday action, and improvisation as a form of creativity, both provide a framework within which to conduct this research project exploring learning experiences with the art of improvising. These conceptual ideas hold in common a high regard for multiple possible ways of being creative, and acknowledge the value of different styles and end goals in music-making. Using these theoretical frameworks as a basis for this research allowed an exploration of a musical practice that is both creative, and an activity for life. There are dichotomies such as work versus play and freedom versus constraint that surface in this thesis, as well as in the research literature. This work uses these dichotomies but also sees them as oversimplifications. Ideas such as work and play, or definitions of Western versus non-Western music are not dualities; they exist on a continuum and are often overlapping. Categories such as these are used because they are helpful in facilitating discussion.

Outline of the Document

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the improvising phenomenon. First is an introduction to the historical role of improvising within the context of Western music, and this is followed by an exploration of some of the benefits of being able to improvise, including a discussion about creativity within the field of improvising. The chapter then examines some of the debate in the literature concerning pedagogical approaches, and also the purpose of the art of improvising. The conclusion of the chapter moves on to explore approaches that seek to balance some of the aforementioned tensions around pedagogy and the role of this type of art. Chapter 3 presents a description of the research design, participants and site, data collection, data analysis, efforts taken to establish trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 provides the presentation of the findings, and chapter 5 discusses the findings within a conceptual framework, and explores some implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter begins by providing a brief historical context for the musical act of improvisation as it has occurred within the Western musical tradition. Following this context is a discussion of the some of the benefits of being able to improvise, and these include the development of aural and creative abilities, and the opportunity for the development of the personal voice in musical expression. Next is an outline of some of the debate to be found in the literature concerning pedagogical approaches to teaching improvisation. This leads to a discussion of the purpose of improvisation, either product or process, and the matter of skill development versus exploratory play. The chapter closes with a discussion of some possible ways to balance the aforementioned tensions concerning pedagogical approaches and goals.

Historical Importance

Although the practice of improvisation has fallen out of use in contemporary times, prior to about 1850 it formed a regular component of a music education and music-making (Gellrich & Parncutt, 1998; Moore, 1992). Liturgical organists regularly improvised, and continue that tradition today. Extant from the time of J. S. Bach are numerous documents demonstrating the importance of improvising on the organ. One such example can be found in historical manuscripts, which contain organists' job descriptions, and provide detailed accounts of the expectations relating to improvising: facility in multiple types of idiomatic styles was required, including the improvisation of fugues, chorales, preludes, figured bass accompaniments, and free preludes. At one such audition in 1727, candidates for a particular position were asked to improvise "a fugue[1]

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[1] Fugue is a multi-voiced composition in which a short melody is taken up (imitated) successively by each voice, and continuously interwoven into a unified whole.

on full organ, with independent parts… a chromatic countersubject is possible (and so a double fugue can be made of it); the main subject can be inverted in two ways: rectus and contrarius… strettos are possible" (Mattheson, as cited in Williams, 1989, p. 46). This was not a simple requirement!

Written material from the 18th century also contained significant reference to virtuosic improvisations (Rowe et al., 2015). Carl Czerny, the famous 19th-century pedagogue, wrote *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte*, and in it outlined how to develop the skills of improvisation. He likened improvisation to the work of an orator, stating that much groundwork must be done, in order for the orator, or improviser, to play almost sub-consciously, "which makes it only so much the better" (Czerny, 1836/1983, p. 43). Although less focused on improvisation, J. J. Quantz's (1754/1985) treatise *On Playing the Flute* gave considerable attention to extemporaneous melodic embellishment, suggesting that alteration of written scores was an acceptable practice.

Perhaps it was the increasing availability of printed material during the 19th century that lead to a change in the focus of music education. Gellrich and Parncutt (1998), in their study of piano methods from the 18th and 19th centuries, suggest the existence of an inverse relationship between the availability of printed technical exercise books, and the practice of creating technical exercises as a type of improvising. Rather than reading technical exercises from a book, piano players actually made up their own drills, and these had a distinctly musical emphasis, as the drills were to be used in the development of unique in-the-moment pieces of music. As the composer rose in importance in the 19th century, power was transferred from the performer, to the

composer, in deciding how a given piece of music should sound (Mitchell, 1983). It is quite possible that the invention of the printing press is linked with this increasing control on the part of the composer. In addition to this, Moore (1992), associates the decrease in improvisational practices in Western art music, with the complex social changes that Europe experienced after the decline of the aristocratic court at the end of the 18th century. Significant societal changes may have lead to important changes in the way that Western art music was both learned and performed

Reviewing the subject of improvising from a different viewpoint, Nettl (1974, 1998) demonstrates that improvisatory practices are quite central to the music of many non-Western cultures. With the growth of the field of ethnomusicology since the 1950s, one may observe an increase in interest in these practices, as well as an appreciation of the value of different cultural practices (Nettl, 1998). One may argue that a rationale for the reintroduction of improvisation, based on an acknowledgement of the historical importance of improvising in Western culture, is further reinforced by the centrality of improvisation in the musical practices of numerous non-Western cultures.

The Benefits of Improvisation

There are three main advantages to nurturing the development of improvisational skills; one of these advantages revolves around the development of aural skills, another involves the development of creative abilities, and a third is the enlargement of the personal voice.

Aural Skills

Although it can be argued that the ability to read notation gives the musician a significant amount of independence, it could equally be argued that the establishment of

this skill often occurs at the expense of aural development (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002; Monk, 2010; Overduin, 1998; Sowash, 2009). Monk (2010), in his experience with teaching group improvisation to undergraduate music students, found that classically trained musicians lack an aural conception of phrase length, have an insufficient sense of their place in an ensemble, and have poor rhythmic accuracy. He suggests that these skills should be developed before any (group) improvisation may begin.

Campbell (2010), in her observation of children's informal music-making in schools, found that children were all making music without reading notation, often improvising chants and songs spontaneously in groups. This behaviour seems to provide an example of an intrinsic form of improvisation, and is demonstrative of the connection between aural skills and improvisation. The children Campbell observed did not require notation to be able to recall the music they were making in the schoolyard. The methods of Carl Orff, Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, and Zoltán Kodály further this line of thinking about aural skills, advocating for children to first experience musical sounds aurally, with the goal of later encountering these sounds in the form of notation. Ironically, this contrasts with the approach of formal music instruction, which often seems to have reversed this process; frequently the child experiences the notational symbol first, with the aural conception following later. This is but one example of training the eyes at the expense of the ears.

The concept of aural ability appears to encompass a variety of different meanings. Researchers interviewing jazz improvisers have found an association between quality jazz improvisation and strong aural skills; the skills mentioned include the ability to distinguish pitches and chords, the ability to hear how to express emotion (Rogers, 2013),

and a willingness to listen to oneself and others (Wopereis et al., 2013). Writing about cognitive processes in improvisation, Pressing (1984) argues that one of the widely accepted marks of a skilled musician is to be found in the ability to hear in advance the music that he or she is about to play. Part of improvising seems to involve the improviser being "able to create organized musical meaning in his or her thought processes in order to be able to manipulate the structures of music into an organized, spontaneous, meaningful performance" (Azzara, 1993, p. 330). These observations all point to a significant connection between aural skills and improvisation, suggesting that the incorporation of improvisation into music instruction would be a valuable way for music teachers to stimulate the development of aural skills.

Creativity

Not only does improvisation provide aural benefits, but many also see this practice as vital to facilitating creative expression. Musicians are making something new when improvising, so it is a different form of creativity than what is involved in performing and interpreting the works of others. Within the context of music, the ability to create one's own music is highly regarded as a valued form of human expression (Hancock, 1994; Hickey & Webster, 2001; Overduin, 1998; Prieto, 2002). Attempting to define creativity elicits considerable variation in the definition, because it seems to encompass elements of both work and play, and discipline and freedom. The way in which these oppositional concepts interact with and influence each other in the creative process is complex and mysterious, and leads to some interesting debate in the literature. Highlighting the complexity of creativity, Craft (2015) outlines nine qualities that are

necessary for creativity to occur; among them are the characteristics of risk, play, imagination, and innovation.

While some literature focuses on the type of creative activity demonstrated by geniuses such as Mozart and Einstein, other writers prefer to see all human action as possessing creative potential. Several authors assert that there exists both ordinary everyday creativity, and great (or genius) creativity, and that each have their place (Arieti, 1976; Craft, 2015). Although this study will not be concerned primarily with genius-type creativity, it is possible that exploring the nature of great creativity has benefits, in that it may serve to illuminate more ordinary acts of creativity (Arieti, 1976). In either case, a useful definition has been proposed by Amabile (1983), who defined creativity as "a product or response that (a) is both novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand, and (b) …is heuristic rather than algorithmic" (p. 33). The key ideas are that the creative event is both novel and appropriate. In distinguishing everyday creativity from high creativity, or genius creativity, Craft (2015) asserts that those who possess extraordinary, or high creative skills actually change the domains within which they work. She contrasts this with the concept of everyday creativity, where the novel product that is generated may be useful only to the person who has made it.

One common theme that emerges in the literature is that of the role of disciplined work in creative insight (Kanack, 1996; May, 1975; Nachmanovitch, 1990; Nettl, 1998; Reimer, 2003; Stokes, 2005). Becoming intimately acquainted with one's subject matter and materials is necessary in order to have creative insights, and these insights "pertain to those areas in which the person consciously has worked laboriously and with dedication"

(May, 1975, p. 46). Craft (2015) also speaks to this idea; she argues that creative

behaviour is not "serendipitous chance…what is meant is knowing that one has been

creative with reference to previous convention" (p. 52). She goes on to state that "deep

concentration on one area through specialization is far more likely to lead to an

imaginative response than is a superficial trawl through a lot of subjects" (p. 52). This is a

strong assertion, and one that could have deep implications for the teacher of

improvisation, because it suggests the need for disciplined work in one particular area.

Yet how does one balance this need for focus in creative endeavours, with the role that

exploration and discovery play in creating?

The literature would suggest that despite this idea of dedicated effort in one's

work, there is an assumption that the creative state will not be forced. Rather, one must

enter a state of heightened awareness where play and spontaneity may flourish: "so the

work of creativity is not a matter of making the material come, but of unlocking the

obstacles to its natural flow" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 10). There appears to be an

interesting tension between freedom of play, and focused discipline, with the ability to

produce something creative resting exclusively in neither one nor the other (Kenny &

Gellrich, 2002). One study exploring laypeople's conceptions about creativity found that

people generally downplay the importance of persistence and focus in creative outcomes,

and that these opinions often do not correlate with a person's actual experiences of being

creative (Baas, Nijstad, Koch, & De Dreu, 2015). Perhaps we romanticize the idea of

dramatic Dionysian-like inspiration, and instead should come to see creativity as an

integral part of daily life, in much the same way a child lives:

> If we watch a child at play for a few minutes, "seriously" at play, we see that all
> his energies are concentrated on it. He is working very hard at it. And that is how
> the artist works, although the artist may be conscious of the discipline while the
> child simply experiences it. (L'Engle, 1980, p. 167)

This would suggest that children know how to live creatively. Bartel's (2004) hope for music classes where play occurs resonates with L'Engle's observation; Bartel is keen for music education to facilitate music-making that allows for joyful absorption where one is focused on the act of doing, rather than the outcome. The way that a child approaches life might provide a clue to creative behaviour. Writing specifically about improvisation, Nachmanovitch (1990) speaks of the false barrier that exists between life and art, and stresses that all of life calls for creativity. There is a sense in much writing about creativity of any sort, that the simplest of situations in life may be lived creatively (Arieti, 1976; Craft, 2015; May, 1975; Kanack, 1996; Wolterstorff, 1980). Parenting, cooking, working, or playing an instrument all have the potential to be enacted with creativity, and it is quite likely that this creativity may be nurtured in countless different ways (Shand, 2002).

Personal Voice

In keeping with the conception of nurturing creativity in multiple different ways is the notion of individuals contributing their personal creative voice. It is possible that by engaging in improvisation activities, students are able to develop their own voice. Burnard (2012) argues that discourse about musical creativity has a tendency to continue to privilege the "Great Masters of Western classical music" (p. 37). The classically based, notation-focused piano lesson is no exception. One possible role that improvising may fulfill is to provide a balance to this point of view. The students whose piano playing

exclusively involves the interpretation and performance of the works of others may subtly reinforce the thinking that musical works are solely created by others, either the Great Masters, or significant popular artists. Griffin (2011) observes that children have a significant gap between their informal music making and listening practices, and what they learn in formal music education settings. She recommends that giving children a voice in their own pedagogical process may help to bridge this gap. This willingness to listen to children encourages them to contribute their own voices pedagogically and creatively, and expands possible sources for creativity from the few to the many.

Such a shift in thinking about creativity in general is reflected in recent writings that prioritize a democratic definition of creativity, over an elite definition (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999). The resultant new emphasis leads to the view that everyone can be encouraged to be creative, rather than just a select exceptional few. For piano students, this means that they can enjoy playing the creative works of others, and enjoy contributing their own musical ideas; students can begin to plumb the depths of their own creativity. Hargreaves, MacDonald, and Miell (2012) concur when they argue that in music, "improvisation can be viewed as a creative exploratory process" (p. 245) that is free from notions of right or wrong practice, thereby allowing children the opportunity to explore their own creativity.

Since numerous musicians agree about the importance of being creative both within and beyond the field of music, it is curious that there is widespread neglect of the creative act of improvisation. Possibly, the Western Art tradition has focused too much on performance, and on those who are seen to possess a special talent (Bartel, 2004; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013; Wolterstorff, 1980). This focus contrasts with

ethnomusicologist Curt Sachs's (1965) observation of African tribal music, that "everyone in a tribe is part of this music; everyone sings, and many enrich the inherited stock by creations of their own" (p. 221). Perhaps the recent flurry of writing and research about improvising in music (Beegle, 2010; Biasutti, 2015; Callahan, 2012; Kleinmintz, Goldstein, Mayseless, Abecasis, & Shamay-Tsoory, 2014; Prieto, 2002; Rogers, 2013; Rowe et al., 2015) is guided by a desire to cultivate a culture where all have the capacity to organically contribute to the music of society.

If we accept this premise, that all persons possess creative abilities, then we may also consider that encouraging students to value and express their creativity has merit from a wider societal perspective as well. In a time when many are writing about the sweeping changes that technology is bringing to society (Kaplan, 2015; Robinson, 2011), it can be argued that what makes humans unique, is their creativity. In an uncertain world, the development of flexibility and adaptability, key components of creative capacities, is of vital importance (Robinson, 2011). Craft (2003, 2015) also echoes this when she equates little c creativity with concepts of self-direction and personal agency. Significantly, she argues that little c creativity "enables individuals to find routes and paths to 'travel' in many aspects of their lives" (2015, p. 40). Perhaps as music teachers we will feel inspired to encourage our students to be creative as it not only fosters musical skills and expression, but also stimulates the type of thinking necessary for living in the 21st century.

Opposing Pedagogical Viewpoints

This section will explore the discussion found within the literature, around the role of constraints and freedoms, and the question of whether improvisation is process or product.

Constraints or Freedom?

Improvisation, an elusive phenomenon to define, elicits considerable debate in the realms of philosophy and pedagogy. There appears to be a fair amount of disagreement in explorations of what it is and how one learns to do it (Biasutti, 2015; Callahan, 2012; Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Houvinen et al., 2011; Kenny & Gellrich, 2002; Kratus, 1991; Nettl, 1998). Bailey (1992), in his seminal book exploring the world's improvisational styles, makes the observation that "most musicians learn to improvise by accident; or by a series of observed accidents; by trial and error… learning improvisation is a practical matter… is achieved through the failures and successes involved in attempting to do it" (p. 8). Despite this non-theoretical emphasis, he also states that while improvisational ability cannot be forced, it is dependent on acquiring complete familiarity with the idiom within which one is improvising. Nettl (1998), who has studied may non-Western musical traditions, observes that there is a common public perception in the West, of improvisation as a free, emotional activity. He goes on to argue that, contrary to this perception, "discipline, intricacy, and control of complexities all play major roles in improvisation of all kinds" (Nettl, 1998, p. 10). What does this mean for teachers who are seeking to teach improvisation? To what extent are teachers introducing their students to yet another form of disciplined work, and to what extent are we encouraging freedom of expression?

In the absence of an existing pedagogy of improvisation within the piano-playing world, one of the chief concerns related to devising a pedagogy centres around this tension, and prompts the following question: should one teach improvisation within the context of an idiom[2] or genre (style), or not? If one is learning to play within a specific idiom, there are conventions and rules that must be followed. Some educators advocate for constraints and genre-based approaches to teaching, while others advocate for complete freedom without adhering to the rules and conventions of a specific idiom.

Several potential pitfalls are associated with teaching within one particular genre or another. The first of these centres around the question of which, or whose idiom should be taught; jazz, popular and classical traditions are available, as are any number of non-western musical styles. Educators who steer away from teaching improvisation within a genre are perhaps looking to validate this diversity or at least acknowledge the complexity of our current cultural situation. In a multicultural and pluralistic society, the choices of musical style available are seemingly limitless, and one could argue that this is a never-before-encountered scenario (Wolterstorff, 1980). Although composers such J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel in the 17th century, and W. A. Mozart in the 18th century, all incorporated French, Italian, German, and English styles into their own styles, it could still be argued that we have a greater variety of styles on hand today, especially when one considers the "pop vs classical" contrast. It is pluralism, in all its forms, which makes our time and place somewhat unique (Bartel, 2004; Wolterstorff, 1980). Therefore, how does today's teacher make a decision to adhere to elements of one particular style?

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[2] The terms idiom and genre are used interchangeably to refer to specific musical styles.

Instruction of improvisation within a particular genre involves gaining a working knowledge of the building blocks of that style. The process of acquiring the ability to manipulate these building blocks can be viewed as a mechanical, non-creative process and as such is seen as a potential threat to true creativity. In light of this, some educators advocate for a pedagogy of non-idiomatic improvisation (Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013). Their pedagogy is rooted in the ideal of student centred learning, where personal expression is highly valued, and student initiative is of primary importance. No one voice is more important or more correct than another, and the early imposition of rules is seen as an impediment to creative expression, which could give rise to non-creative reproduction of the ideas of another, thereby eliminating the creative element. Hickey (2009) suggests that children initially be given complete freedom to explore, and then have rules or structure, as dictated by a teacher, supplied later in their creative development. This approach is in accord with the findings of Campbell (2010), who observed that young children up to about the age of ten are naturally musically expressive. Encouraging this natural expressivity is desirable in the early years, and the educator must be thoughtful about the introduction of idiomatic structure.

Musicians often refer to the building blocks of an idiomatic style as constraints, and some educators favour a pedagogy that implements these constraints as a means of nurturing the creative process. Existing conventions provide a "common ground on which individual musicians are free to play with conventional expectations...creating a sense of comfort…or surprise" (Csikszentmihalyi & Custodero, 2002). Educators who prefer this approach see the development of one's own musical voice as a second step, after one has gained a familiarity with an already existing musical language (Overduin, 1998;

Schouten, 1972; Stokes, 2005; Thibeault, 2012). Although constraints may take many

forms, they often involve learning the stylistic elements of various idioms, as well as the

skills to manipulate such techniques. Educators who espouse this approach believe that

creativity is unlikely to happen without some such structure, or constraints in place; rules,

knowledge, and skills all serve to enhance creativity, or even fill in the gap when a

creative block occurs (Nachmanovitch, 1990; Overduin, 1998; Reid, 2002; Sawyer,

2012). Speaking in favour of some form of constraints, Stravinsky (1947) famously said,

"my freedom consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have designed

myself…the more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains

that shackle the spirit" (p. 68). Stravinsky seems to be suggesting that the pathway to

creative freedom is found, ironically, through the imposition of constraints.

One interesting aspect of creativity research explores the influence of creative

models on outstandingly creative individuals such as Nobel laureates. It would appear

that there is a high positive correlation between the presence of creative models, and

creative productivity (Amabile, 1983). Certainly, musicians frequently learn by

transcribing each other's works, and the most famous example of this is J. S. Bach's

transcriptions of Antonio Vivaldi's concerti. Bach was able to rework Vivaldi's music in

such a way that he not only learned the Italian style of composition (without ever going to

Italy), but also incorporated it into his own unique style. Amabile (1983) speaks to the

tension inherent in teaching within the constraints of an idiom/with a model, and asks if a

person may have "too much knowledge"; she concludes that:

> when people learn facts, techniques, and creativity heuristics (domain-relevant
>
> and creativity-relevant skills) from models, their creativity can only be enhanced.

If, however, they try to slavishly extract and follow response-generating

algorithms for the behaviour of their models, their own behaviour will be judged

as progressively less creative over time. (p. 149)

Such an observation is helpful, as it suggests that while constraints and models are vital,

they are aids, and not substitutes for individual creativity.

Process or Product?

The question of how to approach the teaching of improvisation is confounded by

the reality that (school) teachers must assign grades to a student's work. A most

interesting consideration ensues: Are creative acts essentially product or process oriented

in their goals? Begbie (2002) does not yield to the usual dichotomous thinking about

improvisation as process versus product. He sees improvisation as being either or both,

leaning toward the "process" viewpoint. Several classroom educators agree, and lament

the one-sidedness of the product-oriented school system, arguing that we diminish the

true meaning of improvisation when we treat it as one more item on a checklist of

classroom activities (Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Prieto, 2002). Teachers

have a difficult task before them if they seek to balance the tension between encouraging

students to enjoy taking the risk of expressing themselves, with the demand for

assessment.

In the private piano lesson within the classical idiom, the general disinterest

around improvisation has meant that official examining institutions disregard this aspect

of music-making, and thus no official assessment occurs. There is a certain advantage to

this approach, as it allows the independent teacher complete freedom in this area. Despite

the official freedom of the situation, there is still the sense that music ought to be

"correct." Certain rules ought to be followed, in order for music to be good. A piano teacher may not assign actual marks, but informal assessment occurs any time guidance is given in the lesson. The thoughtful teacher will be aware of the tension between desiring that the student produce a good product, and allowing the student to make music that is defined more by personal creative choice than by the following of rules.

Closely linked to issues of music as product or process is the question of the view with which the improviser should regard the audience. The mere presence of an audience would appear to emphasize the product approach to improvising. Do we wish to think of improvisation as an activity that exists entirely or partially for the joy of the performer, or the audience, or both? Again, we find a variety of opinions on the matter. Improviser Gavin Byers (as cited in Bailey, 1992) seldom enjoys listening to others improvise, finding pleasure only in being the improviser himself. In accord with this viewpoint is the observation that the (student) musician should disregard the audience, and improvise for his or her own pleasure (Hickey, 2009). Others value the constraints supplied by the audience (Begbie, 2002). Many performers in both Western and non-Western traditions will alter their performances based on the needs and moods of the audience, and Nettl (1974) defines this in itself as a form of improvisation. Bailey (1992) references both types: those who feel they will not improve at their craft unless an audience is present, as well as those for whom the temptation to please an audience destroys true creativity. There is very little agreement on this point in the literature.

It might be argued that it is the audience who give music its meaning. An interesting example of this claim is provided by a study conducted with two improvisers who also engage in teaching improvisation (Kingscott & Durrant, 2010). One of the

subjects was a jazz musician, and the other a liturgical organist. In their attempt to define

improvisation, the authors concluded that all music is made within a distinct socio-

musical context and is therefore guided by audience expectations. The audience listening

to jazz performers expects to hear a musical event based on certain set licks or stock

phrases (Kingscott & Durrant, 2010). In the case of liturgical organ, the organist has even

tighter parameters, being required to evoke an atmosphere of appropriate mood and

duration for a specific aspect of a communal worship service. In agreement with this,

Humphreys (2006) argued that creating music within a tradition is necessary in order for

humans to find pleasure or meaning in the sounds they perceive; the audience responds to

music they can understand.

The tensions created by this discussion about process versus product are related to

the conversation around constraint versus freedom, and although educators who favour

non-idiomatic improvisation have a strong argument, one must ask if it is possible for a

performer to create music that is truly free of cultural influence. The literature abounds

with examples of musicians who reflect upon their art as it occurs within a specific

context. Steiner (1989) notes that all inspiration happens:

> via reflection of and on preceding art, where "reflection" signifies both a
>
> "mirroring," however drastic the perceptual dislocation, and a "re-thinking." It is
>
> through this internalized "re-production" of and amendment to previous
>
> representations that an artist will articulate what might appear to have been even
>
> the most spontaneous,… of his sightings. (p. 218)

This suggests that all new art is based in some type of response to already-existing

material (Rowsell, 2013; Stokes, 2005; Wolterstorff, 1980). The new work may be a

reaction to, or reinforcement of an existing form of art, and this may occur at either the conscious or unconscious level. It is common to refer to the "absorption, recall and adaptation" of previously heard material (Kingscott & Durrant, 2010, p. 130). Musicians from different cultures affirm this thinking, with Raga musician Viram Jasani speaking of each musician adding his or her own voice to an already existing yet evolving form. Flamenco guitarist Paco Pena describes learning from his elders, and contributing to the growth of a living, breathing art form (Bailey, 1992). Viewed from the standpoint that culture gives meaning to music, one could argue that improvisation should be taught with some degree of respect for idiomatic constraints.

Skill Development or Discovery Learning?

A huge number of tasks must be negotiated in the course of a fleeting moment during musical improvisation (Rogers, 2013). The execution of complex motor actions, decision-making about incoming and outgoing material, and feedback monitoring must all seemingly occur simultaneously. Writing about the cognitive processes in improvisation, Pressing (1984) referred to the resource allocation model of attention, which seeks to explain how more than one task can simultaneously be conducted. When a musician practices certain tasks, the result is "to convert processing routines requiring conscious attention into automatic routines requiring only unconscious attention" (p. 357). Musical materials that can be moved into the realm of the automatic include the ability to work with elements of harmony, rhythm, and melody, the ability to combine and manipulate these components, knowledge of style traits, and technical skills. These routines could be called basic skills, and improvising musicians confirm the importance

of these prerequisites for improvising (Biasutti, 2015; Callahan, 2012; Rogers, 2013; Wopereis et al., 2013).

The acquisition of this complex set of skills seems to stand in contrast to the aforementioned idea that improvising requires acts of freedom, risk, exploration and play. Jerome Bruner's (1965) "discovery method" provides an apt context in which to expound the free, playful, exploratory aspect of improvising. Bruner favours leading the "child to discover for himself" (p. 123), and this dovetails nicely with many musicians' descriptions of how they actually learned to improvise (Bailey, 1992). We might conclude that these two contrasting learning theories stand in tension with each other, and this tension forms a central feature of this research project.

Walking the Tightrope: Attaining a Balanced Instructional Approach

Perhaps the way forward involves an approach to improvisational music-making that seeks to balance the tensions between focusing on process versus product, and constraints versus freedom. In a study on group improvisation with grade 5 children, Beegle (2010) utilized three different prompts, and found that each was useful for stimulating different outcomes. Each improvisational group was asked, in turn, to improvise in response to a poem, a painting, and a piece of music. Beegle found that the artwork prompt allowed the children the feeling of the greatest amount of creative freedom in improvised responses. The poem and music prompts each had an aural component, and this constraint produced in the children the feeling of greater restriction in creative expression. Beegle suggested that there may be times when educators wish to plan an improvisation activity that helps to develop a particular musical skill, and that this requires thoughtful planning on the part of the teacher. In such a case, providing an

increased number of constraints may be desirable. In general, it would appear that a solid pedagogical approach would be guided by a desire to strike a balance between allowing students creative freedom, and supplying useful constraints. This tension is perhaps central to the very nature of improvisation.

Continuing the discussion of free/process-oriented versus genre-based/product-oriented improvisation, Kratus (1991) proposed that these concepts do not need to be in tension with one another, and that students of different developmental phases should engage in different types of improvisation. Based on his previous research, Kratus proposed seven specific different levels of improvisation. He argued for the validity of different types of improvisation at different stages in musical (improvising) growth, suggesting that it is valid for a young child to use improvising as a private expression. As students mature through Kratus's improvisational stages, they become more skilled at organizing musical materials, and are increasingly able to audiate (pre-hear) what they are playing. These two skills, organization and audiation, hold the key to making music that is meaningful to others, and is hence product-oriented in its intention (Kratus, 1991). If a teacher wishes to guide a student from stage one exploratory improvising, to stage six or seven skilled stylistic improvisation, it would appear that the role of the teacher must change as the student develops, and this concept is supported by Hickey (2009).

The difference between the two approaches appears to be one of emphasis. Hickey (2009) seems to focus on fostering an improvisational disposition in the student, fearing the potentially restricting influence of the teacher, on the child's creativity. Kratus (1991) also stresses free exploration in the young student, but seems less fearful of the influence of the teacher, whom he encourages to employ gradually, constraints involving

rhythm, melody, and harmony. In either approach, the key is to employ these constraints at the appropriate time, so that instruction is well-sequenced. Where Hickey (2009) fears that the teacher may inadvertently squelch creativity when adding constraints too early, Kratus (1991) appears to argue that constraints add valuable instructive knowledge to the exploratory creative process. With either approach, one senses that the teacher must exhibit wisdom in discerning his or her role in guiding this mysterious developmental process. Several authors argue that the development of improvising skills occurs through a careful balance of both risk-taking activities, and skill-developing activities (Biasutti, 2015; Kenny & Gellrich, 2002). It is possible that this balance will vary from student to student, as jazz musician Ronnie Scott suggested when he observed that there are as many ways of thinking about and approaching improvisation, as there are people (Bailey, 1992).

The act of improvising is a poorly understood phenomenon because teachers and researchers are not really sure how musicians learn to do it. Consequently, the literature contains much discussion about its role, and the means by which it may best be nurtured. Researchers, practitioners, and theorists all have a slightly different perspective to contribute to the ongoing conversation. Perhaps the continuing debate concerning the roles of freedom and constraints, and process versus product orientation, and skill development versus discovery, will continue to shift and change, depending on the time and place of engagement with this creative act. The literature reviewed agrees about the importance of seeking to achieve a balanced approach when nurturing improvisation, and teachers have much to consider if they wish to learn to walk this pedagogical tightrope.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This action research study explores the learning experiences of musicians who primarily read music, as they experiment with the process of improvising. The learners included myself as a learner-teacher, and two 12-year-old student learners; I acted as both learner-teacher and researcher-teacher. Chapter 3 seeks to provide depth of understanding into the research methods chosen to explore this phenomenon, and includes a discussion of background and conceptual assumptions. It will begin with a justification of the selection of qualitative inquiry based upon action research methods, and will move on to a discussion of the details of participants, setting, data collection and analysis.

This study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do both constraints and freedom allow improvisational piano learning to occur, in ways that simultaneously encourage creativity and skill development in pianists?

2. What are the benefits and challenges for piano students who improvise, as they take ownership of creating a piece of music?

Research Design

As is characteristic of qualitative research designs, this study was conducted in a natural setting (Hatch, 2002), in this case, my own teaching studio. Data pertaining to both my own learning experiences as a student of improvisation, and my students' learning experiences was gathered.

Action Research

Action research is often defined as a type of conscious inquiry and reflection enacted by teachers who are seeking to improve their own teaching practice (Creswell,

2012; Mills, 2007; Sagor, 2005). In some respects, action research is simply a structured extension of a daily thoughtful teaching practice, done by teachers who regularly reflect upon the successes and failures they observe in response to their teaching. The concept of the reflective practitioner aligns with contemporary teaching ideals (Mills, 2007), and as such, is an excellent model of learning for this study focusing on improvisation.

One early theory of action research was outlined by Kurt Lewin in 1946, when he proposed what later came to be known as the action-reflection cycle (McNiff, 2002). Lewin found that recording and evaluating the events and content of educational workshops yielded unexpected pedagogical benefits for the teaching faculty (Lewin, 1946). He proposed combining action, research, and training. Several possible contemporary models of this cycle exist, and the current research employed a continuous four-step model that follows the steps of *plan act observe reflect* (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002; McNiff, 2002). This cycle is enacted either to explore the possible effects of changing a particular teaching strategy, or to illuminate a particular situation or problem (Sagor, 2005). In either instance, the central concept is that of the researcher-teacher improving his or her own practice, through the practice of reflection. This was accomplished through reflecting on my own learning, and through investigating student learning experiences as they interacted with my approaches to teaching. This produced two overlapping action-reflection cycles: (a) the cycle with myself as teacher-learner, and (b) the cycle with myself as teacher-researcher. The goal of this study was to better understand student improvisational processes, in order to improve pedagogical approaches to nurturing improvisation.
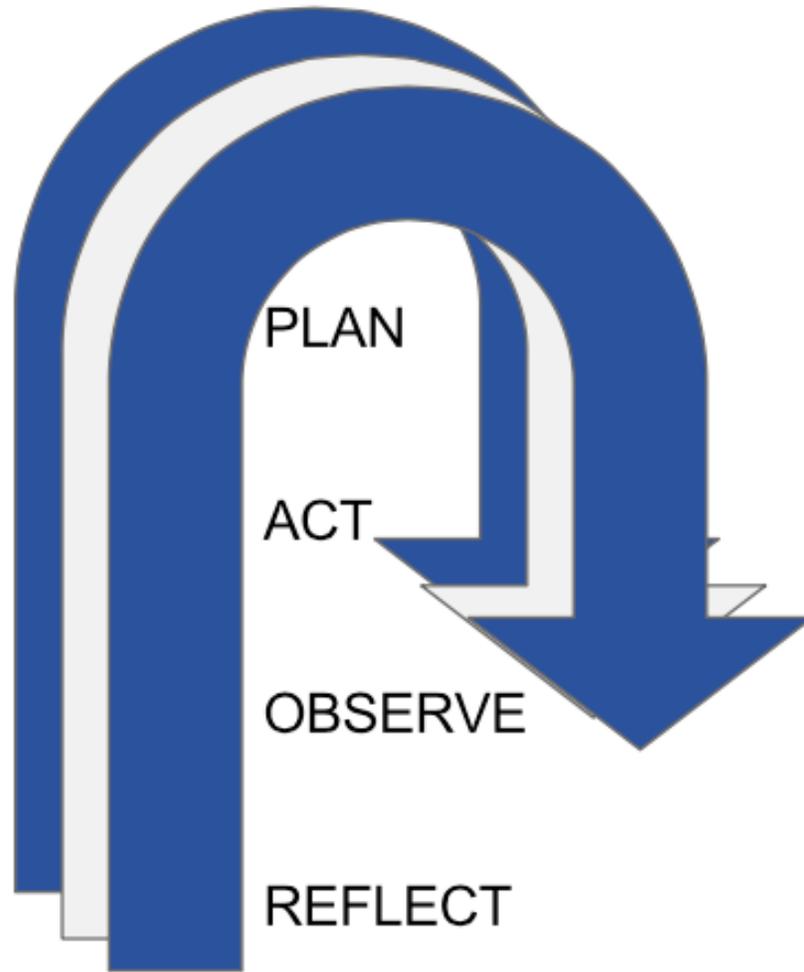
Figure 1. The Action Research cycles.

For the *plan* component of the study, I described and reflected upon the current nature of my teaching practice and playing abilities, focusing on challenges that I wanted to address, and outlining ways in which I wished to improve the situation. Through the process of being a student myself, I searched for increased understanding about the ways in which learning in this field occurs, and I brought this increased understanding to my interactions with my students.

The repeating four-step cycle pertaining to the two student participants was centered on the student silent movie improvisation project. For this study, the two student participants were asked to improvise on the piano, an accompaniment for a 3-minute 26-second excerpt from Charlie Chaplin's (1928) movie *The Circus*, entitled *The Lion Cage*. A movie accompaniment was chosen as the basis for this aspect of the project because it would be a new and hopefully enjoyable experience for my 12 year-old students, and because silent movie improvisation on either the piano or the organ occurred regularly during the silent film era; I liked the authentic connection this type of improvisation provided. The cycle worked as follows: I planned a 6-week improvising activity for two students, then implemented the activity, monitored my own practice and student responses through weekly reflections on the lessons, and watched the video recordings to make notes. I analyzed my reflections and the student responses, and guided the next lesson accordingly. According to McNiff (2002), this repeating cycle is a flexible, rather than a rigid cycle, with multiple circles spinning off at different points, and allowing for a dynamic research process.

In this study, my component of the flexible repeating four-step cycle was focused on 10 months of lessons and practice, with experimentation in different ways of

practicing brought about as a result of successively taking lessons with three different

teachers. The cycles were of longer duration, and corresponded with the length of time I

spent with a particular mentor. For each cycle I planned to practice in the way outlined by

a given teacher, engaged in that style of practice, reflected on the process. Reflection

included an assessment of how I felt about both the lessons, my practicing, and how I felt

my improvisation was developing. The move to different teachers was not planned; the

process of analyzing the results of my learning process led to the decision to change in

teachers. This switch of mentors allowed for an expanded spiral in the action research

cycle, and is in accord with the flexible multi-layered structure devised by McNiff

(2002). The two cycles were overlapping because my experiences as a learner influenced

my experiences as a teacher, and the student participant experiences also influenced my

learning.

Qualitative research is focused on text-rich data that deals with the thoughts,

feelings, opinions, experiences, and knowledge of the participants (Hatch, 2002).

Choosing qualitative research for this study allowed for the examination of students'

experiences, and my experiences, with the process of learning to improvise, while

exploring pedagogical approaches and influences. As is typical of qualitative research,

this data was gathered in the form of participant observation field notes, reflective

memos, video recordings, and interview transcripts (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden &

Major Howell, 2013). All of these sources were used for the student portion; for my

portion, I gathered participant observation field notes and maintained a reflective journal.

Merriam (2009) recommends that some degree of ongoing data analysis occur

throughout the study, in order to keep the researcher focused. Patton (1990) indicates that

the data analysis portion of a study is guided not only by the research questions, but also by analytical insights made during data collection. In this study, ongoing interaction with the data was central, as each repetition of the action reflection cycle was informed by data observation, reflection, and analysis.

Participants and Site

The study was carried out at my teaching studio, during private lessons that the students attend weekly with me through the school year. These weekly lessons are part of each student's ongoing musical development, and are guided by my philosophy that seeks to encourage students to experience a love of music, and to become independent musicians.

This study employed participants from two different categories. I was the first participant, as I became a teacher-learner student of improvisation. For me it is important to engage in studying my own practice, in order to continue to develop and improve as a teacher. As well, I am conscious of the possibility that "teachers who engage in self-study practices … act as role models of lifelong learning for their peers and their students" (Squire, 1998, p. 19). My reflections on my learning process informed the way that I approached teaching my students, the second participant category for this study.

Purposive case sampling was utilized to select the student participants. When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is interested in gaining a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon, and purposive sampling best enables this type of exploration to occur (Creswell, 2012). Purposive sampling is helpful when the researcher is looking "to describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the program" (Patton, 1990, p. 173). Two participants were recruited from my current

roster of piano students, in order to provide an example of the processes of typical students learning to improvise. The choice of two students was in keeping with qualitative research, as it seeks to obtain the views of a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2012). As well, it was desirable to select students who had acquired an intermediate level of skill playing the piano and were over the age of 10. It was determined that students of this age (rather than primary students) may be better able to answer questions and express their thoughts and feelings about improvising.

Being in regular weekly contact with both students and parents, I verbally approached the parents of two students in order to invite their children to participate in the study. Both students expressed interest, and consequently, letters of invitation were given to the parents of these students. Since both students were under the age of 18, the letter of invitation encouraged students and parents to discuss the study before further responding. Both students, and their respective parents, indicated that they would like to know more about the study, and upon receiving parental consent forms agreed to participate. An important part of this process involved gaining the children's oral assent, as it was considered vital that this research involving children considered their feelings, interests, and rights (Christensen & Prout, 2002). The two student participants for the study included Sam, a 12-year-old boy, and Meg, a 12-year-old girl. It is important to note that both participant identities are protected by the use of pseudonyms.

Data Collection

This action research study had two components for which data was collected: the first step involved me as an active learner, engaging in taking improvisation lessons. During this 10-month phase I began the keeping of a reflexive journal, in which I

chronicled my daily thoughts and experiences with practicing, and my experiences with the three mentors with whom I studied. The three mentors were not participants in the study. The next phase of the research focused on my teaching, and the learning experiences of two student participants. These two students were given the assignment of creating an improvised accompaniment to a 3-minute 26-second segment of Charlie Chaplin's (1928) film silent *The Circus*. The scene was entitled *The Lion Cage*. In each of six lessons, students were assigned a section of the movie for which to create music. Each lesson outlined possible ways that the piano may be used to create sounds that would serve to underpin the action in the movie. Some of these concepts were based loosely on ideas taken from the book *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures* (Lang & West, 1920). These techniques were worked with during the lessons, and additionally, four other tangentially related duo improvisation activities were used during the lessons. These included the playing of a free duo improvisation with the movie, a four chord structured duo improvisation, question and answer phrases, and duo improvisations based upon altered scales. An outline of the lessons is included in Table 1. The intent with these activities was to engage students in the act of improvising in a way that was more unconscious than the homework movie assignment, and thereby to build confidence in playing freely at the piano.

This study used four data collection instruments: a reflective researcher's journal (maintained throughout the entire process), video recordings of student lessons, field observation notes, and transcripts from semi-structured student interviews. Additionally, transcriptions of students' final improvisation performances were made.

Reflective Journal

Throughout the entire study I kept a journal to record my daily experiences with my own practicing and teaching, and also as a place to reflect on any observations, questions, and realizations that developed as I reflected about the study over a period of 10 months. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the keeping of a reflexive journal assists in revealing investigator bias, thereby helping to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

When outsiders are made aware of the researcher's introspective biases, they are aided in conducting an evaluation of the work (Watt, 2007). As well, the keeping of a journal allowed me as the researcher to become more aware, and potentially more critical of my own assumptions. The layout of the journal was similar to the stenographer's pad, as outlined by DePoy and Gitlin (1994), with my descriptions on the left side, and impressions, questions and interpretations on the right side. While engaging in daily practice, I recorded observations about my experiences as a learner, and immediately following each lesson that I taught or received, I recorded my impressions as a teacher or learner. Periodically throughout the study, I reread entries in order to confirm my impressions, or to track my own practicing.

Table 1

Outline of Lessons

Lesson no. (duration)	Moods to evoke	Lesson activities
1 [movie segment] (0:00-0:50)	Hurrying; suspense; thinking	− Scale game (duo & solo versions, major & minor keys) − Exploration of playing a simple melody over chords − Teacher demonstration of accompanying the movie − Student experimentation
2 (0:50-1:40)	Comic struggle	− First session asking the interview questions − Student performance & discussion of previous week's assignment − Experimentation playing 4 bar phrases in 4/4 time − Experimentation with ragtime bass for comic feel
3 (1:40-2:17)	Fear; impending doom	− Student performance & discussion of previous week's assignment − Discussion & experimentation with the use of a unifying melodic theme with variation techniques − Duo Q & A exercise in different moods e.g. surprised
4 (2:17-3:01)	Cocky, calm relief; panic	− Second session asking the interview questions − Student performance & discussion of previous week's assignment − Duo Q & A with different length phrases − Phrases & scale game over a progression of 4 chords solo & duo
5 (3:01-3:25)	Courtship scene	− Second session asking the interview questions − Student performance & discussion of previous week's assignment − Explanation & experimentation with Waltz LH pattern − Use of minor melodies − Discussion/experimentation with problematic static scenes
6 (3:01-3:25)	Performance of full excerpt	− Student performance & discussion of previous week's assignment − Third session asking the interview questions − Discussion of "faking it" in improvisation − Experimentation with musical piano playing technique

Video Recordings

Video recordings were made for the first three lessons using a Drift Ghost-S camera. Working with the resulting video footage proved to be difficult; for ease of data manipulation, a Flip Pocket camcorder was used for the nine remaining lessons. The camera was placed beside the piano, and captured the student, the piano keyboard, and myself at times. Video recordings captured the events and interactions of the lessons when I was fully occupied in my role as teacher (Mills, 2011). The video records were used primarlily to allow me to revisit the lesson afterwards, but also to review all aspects of the lesson from a holistic standpoint. A record of subtleties such as student's body language and facial expression contributed to an overall impression of the events, but the video was used primarily to analyze what the students said, and played. Having a detailed recording of the happenings of the lessons aided in carrying out a fulsome analysis (Christensen & Prout, 2002), and permitted the transcription of all dialogue pertaining to improvisation. As well, the recordings were viewed to help write a complete summary of each lesson. I sought to observe familiar routines in new ways, and look for the unexpected and paradoxical (Mills, 2007). The recordings were also used to manually transcribe the students' final musical performances, to allow for more thorough analysis of his aspect of the data.

Both myself and the students required one or two lessons to become accustomed to the presence of the video camera. Once this occurred we were better able to proceed unselfconsciously. On one occasion the battery on the camera died, and some detail was missed at the conclusion of a lesson, but this was recorded immediately through post-lesson field observation notes.

Field Observation Notes

Field observation notes are important because they provide descriptive information that allows the researcher to return to the observation at a later time (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw 1995). This includes recording detail about the researcher's feelings, reactions and reflections to the events the events being described, and also insights and beginning analyses (Patton, 1990). For this study, field observation notes were made directly following each lesson with a student. Because I was fully occupied with the task of teaching, it was not possible to make notes during the lesson (Mills, 2007). As well, I felt that this action would have been disruptive to the flow of the lesson. The post-lesson field notes included my observational thoughts about my teaching, student responses to improvisational activities, my reflections on student performances, and a record of any relevant student remarks and behaviours.

Interviews

The students were engaged in three open-ended, individual semi-structured interviews, with interviews during the second, fourth, and sixth lessons, and a follow-up interview once the study was completed. This timing was chosen because it allowed students several opportunities to express their thoughts during their exposure to the project. A semi-structured approach was chosen because it allowed for flexibility with the questioning; an outline of questions was established ahead of time, but flexibility was desired in order to respond to the situation as it developed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The interview questions sought to uncover the perspectives of students who are learning to improvise (Spradley, 1979; Stringer, 1996), and also to learn about some non-observable aspects of the students' improvisation, such as their feelings. For example,

students were asked to comment on what aspects of piano playing they most or least enjoyed, and more specifically, how they felt about the project at hand. Patton (1990) outlines six types of questions that are appropriate for qualitative research, and these include questions relating to experience and behaviour, opinions, and values, feelings, knowledge, the senses, and background questions. Both students were able to comment on their feelings about improvising, and about the things that they found challenging, or liked. Questions relating to the pedagogy of improvisation were more difficult to answer, and there was variation in the students' ability to verbalize their thoughts about the process involved in completing the assignment. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

This section focuses on an explanation of the analysis conducted on all textual sources of data. Because this was a music study, musical transcriptions of students' final performances were also completed, but this data was considered as an adjunct to the textual and aural sources of data. A brief explanation of the analysis of students' notated performances is included in this section.

Axial Coding and Comparative Analysis

To analyze the transcriptions, lesson summaries, field notes, and reflective journal, I used a constant comparative approach, in which I travelled back and forth between the data, and emerging theoretical themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Beginning with my reflective journal, I read it through multiple times, and sought to be open to observing remarks and reflections that were either unique, recurring, unexpected, or possibly even expected. Using a large number of sticky notes, I marked each interesting remark or reflection with a sticky note, upon which I wrote the salient words of the

various entries. Gradually, I noticed that certain key points recurred. For example, *trying to come up with ideas*, *I feel uncreative*, and *this is hard* were recurring key points, or codes. Merriam (2009) indicates that this constant comparative analytical method is used widely throughout different types of qualitative research. This was an open coding of data, in which will major thematic categories were identified through an inductive process that "moves from the specific to the general" in order to "find connections among them" (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). This step of analysis was essentially a descriptive one, and "several readings of the data are necessary before they can be completely indexed" (Patton, 1990, p. 382). The development of categories was guided by the suggestion of Creswell (2013), that categories are valuable if they demonstrate one of the following traits: the information is valuable or interesting to a particular audience, it is information that I expected to find, or it is information that I did not expect to find. I coded the field observation notes in a similar fashion.

All relevant dialogue in the video recordings was transcribed, viewed multiple times, and analyzed similarly, in order to seek for any illustrative common themes. Relevant dialogue included any conversation that pertained to music, and excluded talk about the week's other happenings, such as soccer games and birthday parties. Axial coding followed next, where open codes were grouped together into categories that represented major themes or patterns (Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Here, the analysis involved interpreting how to cluster similar thematic ideas together. First, using coloured sticky notes, I labelled various recurring codes as possible big ideas. I wrote all of these big idea codes on a large sheet of paper, and using my

research questions, I joined these salient points, or codes to form larger categories such as *feeling comes as a result of thinking*.

In order to assist in developing an understanding of the students' musical choices, it was elected to transcribe into musical notation, the final performances of both student participants. This proved to be a significantly challenging task, and many listening sessions were required to do this step. It was helpful to load the audio into the Audacity program, in order to slow down the playing and thereby facilitate transcription. Two versions of both students' final performances, both recorded on the same day, were transcribed. This allowed for a comparison of how much variation or preset material students had in their improvised performances. The observations made as a result completing these transcriptions were useful in confirming, disaffirming, or deepening existing aural observations. As well, they allowed for an interesting interplay with data obtained through all of the other sources.

Through all of this analysis, my own preconceived ideas about what defines good music, or what a lesson should look like, informed my analysis. For example, as I was working on the musical transcription, I sometimes thought about music as a cognitive skill. In such instances, I was, for example, aware that transcription was revealing how much difficulty students were having difficulty laying a RH melody over a different LH part. At other times, I was thinking of the play aspect of music, and an example of this could be found in one student's unconventional use of piano sonorities and harmonies. At times the tension I felt between these two ideas influenced the way that I thought about the data. For example, in the case of using unconventional harmonies, which are currently theorized as an example of play, I pondered whether

there would be a time in the future, when I would think it appropriate to speak to my student about conventional key centres and harmonic structure, as they occur within Western music. This would turn the current play component of the music into a potential source for more cognitive work.

The final step of analysis involved theoretical thinking that sought to "link the conceptual elements—the categories—together in some meaningful way" (Merriam, 2009, p. 189). Three broad overarching themes emerged, and these three themes formed the basis of the presentation of the findings in chapter 4, and the discussion in chapter 5.

Efforts to Establish Trustworthiness

Qualitative research studies, often rooted in epistemologies that support the existence of multiple realities, face an interesting dilemma; the dilemma centers around the question of how to establish trustworthiness; the traditional methods available to positivist researchers are inapplicable. Patton (1990) suggests that the credibility of qualitative research rests on three core points: research methods must be rigorous in order to ensure establish validity, reliability, and integrity of the findings, the researcher must be credible, and the philosophical assumptions underlying the study must be true to the qualitative research paradigm itself. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a study must "demonstrate the credibility of the findings", and that "the naturalist's substitute for the conventionalist's internal validity" (p. 296) is found in a demonstration of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Miles et al. (2014) also argue that these criteria are useful for ascertaining "how good is this research report?" (p. 311).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline three activities that will increase the credibility of the findings. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The purpose of prolonged engagement is to immerse oneself in the cultural situation in which the study will be conducted. For this study, I have been engaged with both the participants and the subject matter for a period of many years, so I was fully immersed in both the subject matter and the cultural situation.

Persistent engagement is desired in order to "identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursed" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). It is hoped that my own expertise and 30 years working as a music teacher will aid in the identification and exploration of the salient factors influencing the issue under investigation.

Triangulation, as outlined by Patton (1990), does not seek to point to a single unified explanation of the data; rather, "consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources and reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources contribute significantly to the overall credibility of the findings" (p. 468). As well, Patton stresses the importance of seeking for alternate or competing themes, and comparing these, as a means of increasing the integrity of the findings of a study. This study sought to provide a window into the world of learning to improvise at the piano, and multiple sources of data were used, in order to increase the richness of the findings. Through observing and analyzing student playing, asking students about their opinions and thoughts, noticing their non-musical reactions, reflecting on my own teaching and learning, it was possible to draw a multi-faceted picture of experiences with learning to improvise.

Transferability

The transferability of a qualitative research study can only be assessed by a reader who may seek to apply the results to another situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The role of the researcher is to provide sufficient description, so as to assist the reader in this assessment. The findings of this study are described in detail, in the hope that the reader may "'see' the setting for themselves" (Mills, 2007, p. 104), and thereby make a judgement about its transferability to another setting.

Dependability

The dependability of a study refers to issues concerning the quality of the study. Dependability can be strengthened through the development of a strong design. A study is more likely to be dependable if the research questions are clear and fully aligned with the design of the study, the researcher's role clearly defined, and a broad range of data collection is employed (Miles et al., 2014). This study was designed as an action research study, and Stringer (1996) envisions action research as an empowering form of research that takes into account the specific details of participant's culture, histories, practices, and lives. In this case the research questions were guided by the specific cultural context of the classically trained musician who is learning to improvise. What could be learned about their unique experiences, successes, difficulties, likes, and dislikes? As well, students were empowered to find their own solutions to the problem of generating new music. The exploration of these experiences was achieved through the use of multiple different sources of data. Guba (1981) also suggests that another way to strengthen dependability is by using overlap methods of data collection, whereby the weakness of one method may be "compensated by the strengths of another" (p. 86). This study utilized multiple sources

of data collection. Similar to triangulation, the use multiple data sources aided in providing a rich view of the situation, and may increase the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

In order to aid in establishing credibility, a reflexive research journal was kept for the duration of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend using this tool because it reveals important details about the researcher's philosophical assumptions and decision-making processes. Since the findings of qualitative research represent the perspective of the researcher (Patton, 1990), it is important to have a window on the researcher's bias, and helpful if the thought processes of the investigator are brought out into the open. My reflexive journal was an open reflection of my thoughts and actions throughout the study, and these journal entries provide revelatory information about my personal biases and assumptions. A sample entry from this journal is included in Appendix B.

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Ethics Clearance

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This study followed established guidelines that ensure ethical conduct of research involving human participants, and was cleared by Brock University's Research Ethics Board (REB) (file #15-221- COLLIER). Because the student participants were minors, and also drawn from my teaching roster, specific precautions were taken to identify and manage potential risks associated with the study.

First of all, free and informed consent was sought for the study. Owing to the close relationship between myself and the participants, there was concern that either the children or their parents may have felt pressure to participate. Parents of potential participants were furnished with a Letter of Invitation that provided information regarding the purpose of the study, and contact information. Once parents had been given

the consent form, I had a conversation with both parent and student present, in which it was stressed that the children should not feel obligated to participate, and that there were other students who could act as potential participants. Following the signing of parental consent forms, the students were read the assent script for minors, and asked to provide oral consent. Withdrawal options were clearly presented, and it was stressed that students could participate in the activities of the study without being enrolled in the research project. Although no participants withdrew from the project, participants were informed that, in the event they chose to withdraw, any written data collected would be shredded, and video recordings deleted. Because it was proposed that lessons would be videotaped, parents were given the option to agree to this component of the project, or not, in which case the lessons would have been audiotaped. Both participants agreed to the use of video recording.

All of the above details outline the formal considerations that were given to seek to ensure ethical procedures were followed for this research study. One suggestion for seeking to increase ethical practices when conducting research with children is to complement the observance of ethical procedures, with a researcher attitude of "ethical symmetry" (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 16). In this case the researcher seeks to be flexible, acknowledge implicit power relations, while at the same time taking children's rights, thoughts, and feelings into account, acknowledging that they are both similar to, and yet different from adult ways (Christensen & Prout, 2002). For this study, I was aware of the inherent power relationship between student and teacher. With this acknowledgement, I sought to conduct the research with an ongoing ethical approach that

was grounded in a fundamental attitude of respect and love for the children (Miller, 2008; Palmer, 1987).

As well, it was acknowledged that there were some potential psychological risks associated with the study. These included the possibility that students may have experienced feelings of embarrassment when creating music in front of their instructor, or may have been concerned about being judged by the teacher, or that they may have been concerned about being unable to complete a task. In order to manage these scenarios, every effort was made to ensure that the improvisation lessons occurred in the same natural and non-stressful manner as they normally would, during the student's regular weekly lesson. This potential had already been mitigated to some extent because some instruction in improvisation was begun with them from an early age, so the activity was not entirely new. As well, the planned activities were well within the students' current level of ability. It was further acknowledged that it is important for students to experience feelings of success when learning to improvise, and as such my responses to their work continued to be encouraging and non-judgmental; the goal of this research was to encourage students to freely explore at the piano, rather than to produce a predetermined product.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be recognized. First, the topics of improvisation and creativity are complex matters and any attempts to seek to explain or define them are prone to tend to either oversimplification in the one extreme, or imprecision in the other.

Additionally, it needs to be acknowledged that participants were drawn from my existing roster of piano students, and may not be representative of larger or different

populations. Their experiences of learning to improvise occurred within the paradigm of a piano lesson that focuses on the development of music notation-reading skills, and participants had already been influenced by my pedagogical perspective and experiences. A student learning to improvise from within a different paradigm, such as jazz or pop, would have a different learning experience. This study, however, is an action research study, and as such the findings are intended to be specific to a particular time and place; I was seeking to improve my own teaching practice, and to share the results with other similar teachers. I brought to the study 30 years of engaging in a reflective teaching practice.

Because this was an action research study, there are some limitations specific to a methodology where one acts as both researcher and teacher. When interviews are used as a data source, Spradley (1979) indicates that role confusion can be "by far the greatest barrier to a productive informant relationship" (p. 28). In this study, the participants were accustomed to relating to me in the role of a student to teacher, rather than student to researcher. This was somewhat mitigated by the fact that semi-structured interview questions were interspersed throughout the lessons in an informal approach, and by the fact that dialogue with the students was sought throughout the study (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

There is also some concern that students may have felt that they ought to answer interview questions, or perform their improvisations in a way that would please me, their teacher. Both of these concerns would have been influenced by the degree of trust between myself and the students. Because both students have a multi-year relationship with me, they may have felt a reasonable degree of trust. This potentially may have led to

the creation a safe environment in which to express both words and music, and therefore have may actually been a strength for this study. As well, despite these potential difficulties, the combination of observation and interviewing is widely accepted as a valuable way to gather complementary data in action research studies (Mills, 2007).

Another potential limitation stems from the reality that the two student participants may not have known how to fully articulate their thoughts when answering the interview questions. Either they may not have thought about a particular question before, or they not have been able to think of an answer on the spot. Several of the questions were asked in more than one interview session, in order to give the participants the opportunity to express a different viewpoint, or a different aspect of a previously expressed viewpoint.

One further limitation may stem from students potentially feeling uncomfortable with being videotaped. As the teacher-researcher, I sought to create an environment that was warm and welcoming, but the unfamiliar presence of the video camera in the lessons may have been disruptive to spontaneity when either playing or speaking. Videotaping may have affected not only the children, but me as the teacher-researcher as well. Initially, I felt the desire to turn off the camera and speak without the sense of an outside observer. This however, did abate, and my impression is that the benefits of recording outweighed the costs, especially for the value it added in being able to review the actual playing that occurred during the lessons.

This study had a feature that will increase the potential for generalizability in some settings, and decrease it in others. All of the participants here were essentially reading musicians, seeking to make music without reading; for another teacher with a

similar pedagogical approach, the results of this research will have greater potential for transferability than it will in other settings. But despite the stated limitations, I will make informed use of the findings of this research project, and use the knowledge generated to positively impact my future teaching.

Additionally, it is possible that this study may be applicable to other different settings within the arts, where students are seeking to learn a new skill. These could be either within the private lesson domain, or within the classroom setting. As well, the current study provides an instance of teacher learning, and risk-taking, both of which may have applicability in a variety of different settings where continuing teacher education is desired.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

This study set out to explore the improvisation experiences of piano students who have otherwise been learning to make music in the context of a traditional notation-based piano lesson. The study was grounded in the conception that anyone can learn to improvise at the piano, and therefore countered the unspoken view that only a few possess creative abilities of this nature. Two different categories of participants were employed: two students from my studio, who were recruited using purposeful typical case sampling, and myself.

This chapter begins with an explanation of the educational context, and a profile of all three participants, and moves on to a discussion of the three thematic categories that emerged from the coding and data analysis process. The three emergent categories are summarized as follows: (a) the quest for ideas, (b) the paradox of thinking and unthinking, and (c) the student voice. All of these themes respond to the topics considered by the two questions that guided this research:

1. How do both constraints and freedom allow improvisational piano learning to occur, in ways that simultaneously encourage creativity and skill development in pianists?

2. What are the benefits and challenges for piano students who improvise, as they take ownership of creating a piece of music?

To help answer these questions, theories of art as a type of everyday action and as a creative activity supplied the conceptual and theoretical framework. These theories provided guidance in lesson planning, in the data analysis process, and provided a

framework for my discussion of the findings as revealed through the three main thematic categories.

Learning Context of the Participants

Both of the student participants, Sam and Meg, learned the fundamentals of playing the piano in the context of a traditional notation-based lesson structure, that is often focused on playing music commonly defined as "classical." As a professional musician and the teacher of Sam and Meg and other students, this is the context in which I learned as a young person, and in which I currently work and teach. The domain of notation reading and classical music is often seen as a disciplined environment, where students seek to combine both technical and musical abilities in performance. Significant resources and effort are required for a student to develop these abilities, and also notation-reading skills in the piano's two clefs, treble and bass. Ear skills are desired, but often neglected, and the development of facility in improvisation is often seen as belonging to a different specialty.

At the time of the research, Sam and Meg were able to read intermediate level music with rhythmic accuracy, and were gaining proficiency with the many technical components of music, including scales, triads, and arpeggios. With guidance, both students gave increasing attention to the details of musical creativity including the handling of phrasing, dynamics, balance of hands, beginning tonal control, and appreciation of harmonic subtlety. These latter points align with Reimer's (2003) definition of musical creativity as "the skilled, sensitive, imaginative, and genuine making of decisions about expressive possibilities of sounds…aimed toward helping individuals think, do, and feel music more meaningfully" (p. 128).

In addition to learning to read music, Sam and Meg both possessed developing keyboard skills that lent themselves well to the improvising medium: both were comfortable with playing I IV V I and I V vi IV progressions in a small number of keys, improvising melodies based on a scale with a 32 beat phrase, in a simple key, and executing melodic and rhythmic question and answer phrases of varying lengths. Both students had some limited experience with composing their own music, while encounters with the improvising medium had been largely limited to free duo improvisation in the lesson with me. As a classically trained musician, I am primarily a music-reader. Despite this, I have dabbled in improvisation, without any formal lessons for most of my working life. I engage in some free improvisation with my students in their lessons, and provide basic liturgical improvisation on the organ during a church service, but have never done the latter with a sense of satisfaction or proficiency. One of the goals of this study was to find a way to stimulate growth in this area for myself and my students.

Participant Profiles

Sam[3] was 12 years old, in grade 7, and played the piano at about a grade 4 Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) level. In addition to his music, Sam, was a great lover of animals and had many pets. As well, he had a passion for swimming, and participated in this activity several times each week on a competitive team. Sam played around at the keys anytime he got the opportunity to do so during his lessons. When he was at home he naturally experimented at the piano by creating improvisations out of technical exercises, or by merging together works from his current repertoire of pieces. When he was excited by the work he was doing, he was a very strong independent learner, and his playing

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[3] Pseudonyms are used for both student participants.

provided him a great deal of pleasure. During the year or two before the study, he made significant technical gains, and flourished in his ability to perform memorized music confidently in public. This surge in learning appeared to stem from learning opportunities where he had taken ownership of his music-making.

Sam appeared to be unselfconscious in his improvising, willingly trying anything requested of him. He had a strong ability to work with melodic phrases of up to 32 beats in length using question and answer format. Although he loved to experiment at the piano, he did not naturally gravitate to playing by ear. During this study Sam consistently demonstrated confidence in his ability to handle the weekly assignments. Each week he regarded the homework assignment as his own, and had a subtle way of letting me know that he was handling it independently. For example, in the third week of the study, when given a suggestion to help overcome a frustration he was experiencing, he replied "I'll have it just in case, but there's a very good chance I won't use it"!

Meg was 12 years old, in grade 7, and playing the piano at about a grade 5 RCM level. In addition to piano lessons, Meg enjoyed playing the clarinet in the school band, and planned to be very involved in the school music program when she reached high school. She always participated in school talent shows, often in creative ways that she devised on her own. Meg loved to play by ear, and at home was frequently found experimenting at the piano, trying to figure out songs she heard on the radio. She stated that she preferred this to making up her own new music. She possessed strong ear-playing skills, enjoyed sharing her singing voice, performed music thoughtfully, and had composed one or two songs for the piano. The presence of these abilities suggested a strong and sensitive musical personality. When this study began, Meg was initially self-

conscious of her improvising, but as the weeks passed, she showed an increase in assurance about her playing. Meg's mom described her as a very creative person in many aspects of her life, musical and otherwise.

I came to this role as a researcher of improvisation through nearly 30 years of working as a classically-trained musician. As a young person studying the piano and pipe organ, learning to read music was the focus of my studies. Throughout my life, being able to read music has enabled me to engage in the enriching and amazing act of music-making both on my own, and with other instrumentalists, choirs, and singers. I am grateful for the teachers who helped me to develop this ability, and for work as a church musician, which has allowed me to make music with others, in the context of some of life's most profoundly moving moments.

Throughout my working career as a church organist and choir director, many occasions have demanded improvised music. I have always wanted to be more proficient at it. One of the most amazing, powerfully moving musical acts an organist can engage in, is to improvise while accompanying a group of singers. It is a phenomenal way to lift people beyond themselves; the variation in musical accompaniment that an organist provides, when combined with the words of the hymn, and a sort of spontaneous interaction between player and singers, can facilitate a moving experience that is deeper than simply reading from the score, and more profound than that which either medium alone may provide. The notion that music may nuance and deepen the meaning of words and images has resulted in music being used extensively in this way in contemporary media (Cook, 2000). My own stance is that when music accompanies singing, there is the additional potential for increased communion, and this may be something akin to what

Stravinsky (1947) refers to when he says "music comes to reveal itself as a form of communion with our fellow man—and with the supreme being" (p. 187).

In recent years I have progressively taught more piano students, and my experiences as an organist have influenced my teaching. The field of classical piano is often seen as a performance-oriented medium. Although this is a good and valid way to experience music, it does not fit everyone. My goal has been to seek to broaden this view of the role music, in order to help my students to experience their music in a way that is more organic to their daily lives. As Wolterstorff (1980) says, "art plays and is meant to play an enormous diversity of roles in human life" (p. 4). It is this goal that is at the root of my desire to expand my teaching to include improvisation. Whatever my approach with a particular student, I am passionate about teaching, and endeavour to guide my students to experience a love of music, and to become independent and accomplished musicians. My hope is that my students will be able to express themselves creatively, develop an enthusiasm for learning, and acquire a skill that gives both them and others joy throughout life.

The Quest for Ideas: Having Something to Say

This section of the findings addresses the first of the three categories that were derived in the data analysis, and is concerned with what participants identify as the main distinction between playing the music of others, and making up music of one's own. The idea of having to generate one's own ideas arose in interviews with student participants, and in an exploration of my own reflective notes as a teacher-learner. Both student participants, when questioned about the difference between making up their own music, and playing other people's music, referred to the contrast between playing something that

is already in existence, and having to produce something yourself. My reflective journal, as it outlined my own learning process, revealed the daily struggle to endeavour to create something from nothing; to generate a new melody, a new chord progression. This section will deal with different facets of idea generation, beginning first with exploring the participant's experience of what it is like to create musical ideas. Next will follow a discussion of some of the means by which idea generation was supported by the participants. These include the concept of working with mood, then that of being nourished by outside material, and finally, the strategy of working with one set idea.

Generating Musical Ideas

Each participant experience highlighted a slightly different perspective on the basic problem of coming up with musical ideas. When questioned about this process, Sam felt that he generally had no trouble conceiving of new ideas, but that he had difficulty translating into musical sound, the music he was hearing in his head. Once he was able to produce his musical ideas in notes on the piano, he would become frustrated if he could not recall them again, which he explained happened frequently when he was early in the idea generation process.

Meg spoke of how much she enjoyed and was frustrated by the creative aspect of coming up with music for the movie. She described the process of seeking to accompany the movie as fun, but mentioned on several occasions, that not being able to come with an idea was a frustrating experience, one that could even bring her "close to tears." She identified "when I can't figure something out" as the one thing that she did not like about the project. Conceiving of ideas for static scenes gave her particular frustration throughout the 6 weeks, as evidenced by observations such as, "where she's just kind of

sitting there…I don't know what to do there" and "there's like 3 seconds of silence and I don't know what to do."

My own experience bore similarities with both students' responses. I found over the course of 6 months of improvising, that sometimes I was in possession of a lack of ideas, and felt that I had nothing specific to say; in such instances I would tend to let my fingers flow unguided. At other times, like Sam, I would be able to pre-hear an idea in my mind, but was unable to translate it through the piano keys. More frequently though, I felt that I did not have something specific that I wanted to say! Naturally, I began to ask myself if this was a result of years of playing without being asked to contribute my own voice. I wondered if, every time I played from a score, I had actually subtly been giving myself the message that only others possess ideas worth expressing in music. Certainly for my students, never once during the course of the study did they overtly question their ability or right to invent musical ideas.

Working With Mood

The student experiences with improvising bore both differences and similarities to my learning experiences for this study. One of the differences was the context in which the learning occurred; the student participants improvised music to accompany a movie scene. By contrast, my learning was focused on acquiring specific musical skills, and developing familiarity with the jazz idiom. I found this to be abstract and difficult at times, and my notes are replete with examples of how difficult I often found it to reproduce elements of style. In contrast, I designed for the students, a learning opportunity that would position improvising in the context of a tangible mood-based (rather than stylistically based) project, in the hopes that it would afford a fun learning

opportunity. The data appears to support the premise that the movie, with all of its visual moods, provided a useful support to aid in idea generation.

Both students expressed pleasure about the idea of working with the silent film, as a context for being creative. Meg described the project as "fun" and "cool" because of the fact that she was making music for a movie, and Sam described the project as "awesome." It seemed that they liked the project, and worked with each different scene of the movie seeking a unique idea that would underpin the mood in that scene. Each week, their lessons contained playing experiments, either duo (teacher and student) or solo (student), exploring different ways to utilize the piano to create certain sounds.

The data suggest that students were able to achieve success in coming up with ideas, and that the scenes of the movie seemed to facilitate this idea generation. In the first week, both students came up with thematic musical material that helped to reinforce visual scenes depicting running, slamming, sneaking and roaring. In subsequent weeks, "falling," "barking," "angry waking lion," "peaceful awake lion," and "romancing" themes appeared. Each student used these scenes as a springboard for developing his or her own unique ideas, and a comparison of the final results reveals significant individuality.

For Meg, moments of frustration with being unable to figure something out tended to occur when there was no action to accompany, and this would suggest that tangible action scenes provided helpful support for idea generation. For example, she twice utilized a dotted rhythmic figure to evoke the idea of stealthy sneaking. Other ideas included a quick descending scale for the fainting scene, and strongly discordant chord progression for the waking of the lion.

Unlike Meg, Sam did not express any frustration with the task of creating musical ideas to accompany the less dramatic scenes in the video. Additionally, he appeared to develop in his ability to interpret subtlety as the project progressed. For example, he asked whether he was making music that accompanied the film from the viewer's perspective, or the character's perspective. When asked what he thought was good about his improvising after the first week of working with the movie, he said he felt the way his music matched the faster actions was good. By the fifth lesson, he showed great insight in interpretation: when accompanying the final courtship scene of the movie, he said, with a big smile, "that's why I was trying to sound, like, valiant" referring to his music for the previous scene, when Chaplin was interacting with the lion. He explained that he knew that Chaplin was trying to impress the girl, and was therefore being brave with his music as well.

The need for mood expression appeared to be one useful constraint to assist students in idea generation when being creative. It might be said that music, because of its tremendous expressive potential, interprets the images in a movie, and generates meaning through its interaction with images (Cook, 2000). Here, interesting visual scenes provided a fun challenge for students, as they sought to express these visual events in terms of sounds. My learning experience with improvisation was centered on learning elements of stylistic development, and as a result, idea generation occurred in a largely abstract context unaided by visual cues; my lessons almost never focused on my trying to convey a particular mood or emotion. For the students, it appeared that improvising focused on evoking emotions or moods, was not only fun, but helped to support idea generation when improvising.

Outside Sources for Ideas

  For the purposes of this study, I took improvisation lessons with three different teachers over the course of 10 months. On several occasions I was encouraged to glean musical ideas from other musicians, either through listening to recordings, playing written music, or reading about ideas for ornamenting and altering existing material. In my learning experiences I was encouraged to seek outside inspiration to assist with idea generation. In time, I came to see this as a type of food. I engaged in two types of improvisation practice: I would alternately focus on learning specific techniques and free playing. The former became the food, and the latter, the enjoyable expression that was able to come after the hard work.

  As I engaged in the movie project with the students, each week I provided them with a few ideas (outside sources) that they might employ in the creation of the mood for the scene they were working with that week. We generally spent a few moments in each lesson working on practical ways to develop these ideas. Some of this material made its way into their improvisations. I did this because, as I practiced, I came to see my acts of creativity and even play as sometimes benefitting from outside nourishment, either to motivate or support. When asked whether any of this was helpful, Sam indicated that "there are things that I probably wouldn't have done, if we hadn't talked about them in the lesson." He went on to explain that some of these ideas helped him to get a basis at the beginning, and also introduced him to the concept of having a recurring theme. He was also clear that there were times when he elected either not to use these suggestions, or to modify them for his own needs. Comments such as "I didn't really do it much for this song" (question and answer phrases), and "I kind of did it, not really though" reveal

that he felt free to employ his own ideas. On one occasion his own idea appeared to borrow certain elements discussed in the lesson, though he did not appear to be aware of this. As well, he made decisions that he felt kept the task feasible, saying "if I could actually do it I would, but it's too complicated for me."

Meg had more difficulty answering questions about what aspects of the lessons she found helpful, or confining, but she was able to identify some outside sources that helped her: using and changing themes, and "what we did there, like, just coming up with it" (we had just done an unrelated extended duo improvisation together). In the fifth lesson she seemed to be saying that practicing hand-coordination in the lesson was helpful, but she really was not sure. We talked about having a lion theme (her idea initially), but then she decided not to follow through with it when she found it was not working for her in small spots. One of the suggestions for handling the dog barking scene, was to employ a stride bass in the LH[4], with RH melody, which she did use every time she performed it for me, freely changing the melody above the bass. When asked about any things she had learned or found helpful in completing the assignment, she never made mention of this technique, though it was new for her with this project.

This apparent unconscious incorporation of musical ideas exhibited by both students may be consistent with the view that all musical material is but a reworking of existing ideas (Rowsell, 2013; Steiner, 1989), and suggests that basing one's own material on the ideas of others is, in fact, important when generating new music. I was encouraged to follow this approach, and I found that it required great discipline to do it consciously. It was difficult for me to know when I was unconsciously incorporating

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[4] LH refers to left hand playing, and RH refers to right hand playing.

existing musical ideas, but consciously I worked at times to use the ideas of Mozart, Quantz, or a particular jazz performer. I derived these ideas either through study of their practices, or through their direct suggestions.

Practicing One Set Idea

One unforeseen facet of this study that presented itself early on, was that both students began practicing one foundational musical idea over and over (a motive), for each scene of the movie improvisation. This meant that the students would develop a musical motive[5], and re-work that motive each time they played. The motive changed each time they played it, but a completely new motive was never introduced once this first idea was decided upon. The definition of improvisation was never explicitly discussed with the students in connection with this project. At the outset of the project I simply explained to them the historical role of the pianist or organist, in improvising accompaniments for silent films. Both students had previously experienced improvisation with me in the lesson, but never in context with a movie. I had not anticipated this particular emphasis, on finding "one solo idea," as Sam referred to his work.

When questioned about his approach, Sam was able to explain his approach in considerable detail:

> like it's more fun I think when you actually have a solo idea then when it's all over the place…like, if you were to, for example, this improvisation I did the video about 10 times, around that, and so every time it would be a little bit different, because I didn't have one solo idea. Like it changed, so it's kind of harder to do and that's an aspect I don't really like about it.

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[5] A motive is a short musical theme typically used as a unifying device in a piece of music.

Although he expressed this dislike, he also resisted writing anything down, saying on another occasion, "I probably won't write actual notes down, because …it's better if I just have a basic idea of what I did rather than having the exact same thing over and over again unless I actually want to write a song." So in Sam's mind, he was still distinguishing composition and improvisation, but he found it hard to have too much change occurring. When his final two performances of the movie are reviewed, both recorded during the same lesson, it is clear that he had details in common between his performances, but they were not identical. In the first bar for instance, there are directional changes in the melody and different rhythm patterns. Differences such as these throughout, and the reality that he never falters or hesitates no matter what he actually plays, suggest that he is improvising. When questioned about whether Sam thought he was improvising at any point, he was able to answer with some specific details about places in the movie where he had to modify his playing to stay with the movie. It would appear that Sam was doing his improvising somewhere on the improvisation-composition continuum. Improvising and composition perhaps, are not ideas that can be fully distinguished from one another.

Meg did not express the same frustration that Sam did, about having her ideas changing. She was more concerned about her lack of ideas for certain scenes. For Meg, the concept of pre-working improvisation ideas manifested itself differently. The first time she performed for me with the movie (lesson 3), she did very well, but was unable to keep her playing going, interrupting herself with frequent grimaces and exclamations about forgetting what she had planned. Based on my experience with improvising in front of a teacher, this was not at all a surprising outcome. Over the next weeks, we discussed

techniques such as *faking it* in order to keep going, and *tricking your listener* in order to have them think that you planned exactly what you played. In the third lesson, Meg suggested she might strive for this, when she echoed my suggestion, saying, "Yeah, I totally meant to do all of that, yep, that was in my brain." I emphasized this idea of faking it with the participants, because I wanted them to see how improvising is different from the rest of the music-making that they do. Piano players are always trying to get everything perfect, and improvising provides a brilliant contrast to this. It almost cannot be overstated, the degree to which pianists respect the written score. Improvising provides a totally different scenario, because the player dictates what is happening. If things are not going according to plan, the player definitely wants to cover this up, and try to trick the audience (or teacher). Ideas may be pre-worked, but plans do not always work out.

By the final lesson of the study, an examination of Meg's final improvisation reveals that she was for the most part, able to play without these hesitations. As well, when questioned about whether or not she was improvising on the spot, or playing from memory, she indicated "most of the time it was what I planned, but then there were some parts when I was like, I don't know what I'm doing here." As well, an analysis of her two final performances, both during the final lesson, indeed reveals differences between them. In particular, she was forced to improvise the ending to the movie, because she had not prepared her ideas at all during the week at home.

I have always been taught that improvisers plan and think about their ideas ahead of time. I experienced an interesting lesson, where I decided to write down this preparation (short 1 bar motives or rhythmic ideas), upon which I planned to base each of

my improvisations for that particular lesson. This proved to be a great learning point for me, because the unique observation for that lesson was that my work sounded organized and unified by a single idea, which contrasted with my typical melodic rambling. I journaled that I hoped that in time, I could retain the concept of working on an improvisation that was based on a unified musical motive, without having to write it down. Either way, I found that I was accountable to an idea, and that this was helpful. Like my students, I was unaware of precisely how I came up with this concept. Did I learn it from my students, or somewhere else, or did I simply land on it through experimentation? Certainly, upon reflection, I would conclude that it is difficult to untangle exactly where your ideas come from, and this includes conceptual thoughts as well as musical material.

Five Finger Position

One unforeseen occurrence that was revealed during data analysis was the extent to which both student participants' musical ideas were dictated by the notes that fall within what is known as *five finger position*. Both students' weekly and final improvisations were executed almost entirely under the position of the five fingers. Meg ventured slightly out of the five finger position and employed two key changes in two related keys. For chords, she heavily relied upon the I IV and V chords, apart from her excursions into more melodic passages, and three instances of a chromatic diminished 7th chord. Sam stayed completely in five finger position, and tended to rely on the I and V chords, but executed a modulation to a distant key, and back to the home key, and made extensive use of chromatic chord tones that fell under this five finger position.

As a teacher, I had hoped that more of the piano's 88 keys would be used: the

movie excerpt chosen was selected for its dramatic scenes, and there is much expressive potential in the piano's diverse tessitura. Was it for comfort, or a technical necessity, that students chose to stay in the closed hand position? For myself, I must have exhibited a similar tendency to stay in a local area, because I was encouraged to make full use of the piano's different registers, to avoid sameness in the sounds I was making. As well, I would employ specific licks that encouraged the opening of the hand, and specified exercises that generated RH melodies that spanned two octaves. It would have been interesting to include in the action reflection cycle, an exploration of practical ways to encourage the two student participants to move beyond the five finger position. It is possible that the use of chords as a basis for improvising, suggested this five finger hand position, thereby limiting a student's creativity. Alternatively, it is equally possible that extending out of this five finger position was technically too challenging for the level of playing and improvising that students had achieved at the time of this study.

I asked myself if a younger student, or someone un-schooled in the pedagogical context of the current study, may have naturally had more freedom. Would these hypothetical students have explored the piano's large and expressive keyboard in a more playful way? Thinking back to idea generation, is it work, or is it play? If it was frustrating for two of us to express ideas, had we been conditioned not to be creative in this way? Did we need to be taught in a way that encourages play, as Craft (2003, 2015) would suggest, or was it our individual personalities that required a bit of support, some more outside sources (Burnard & Younker, 2002)? I feel that the data can be theorized in both ways, and the next section will address both of these viewpoints.

The Paradox of Thinking and Un-Thinking

One recurring theme uncovered in the data analysis is the paradoxical idea that improvising involves elements of both thinking and at the same time, un-thinking. For our purposes here, thinking refers to focusing on what you are playing, and un-thinking refers to playing at a more automatic, or unconscious level. This next section will speak to the experiences of participants as they relate to the mysterious interplay between these two seemingly oppositional concepts. First, I will discuss the thinking aspect of improvising through the subsections entitled: hand coordination, rhythm and phrasing, constraints as indicators allow a measure of success, you need to practice things you are not good at doing, and thinking will lead to feeling. In these areas, my teaching and analysis of the data were influenced by Pressing's (1984) emphasis on the cognitive aspects of improvising. Secondly, I will discuss the unthinking aspects of improvisation, as seen through Craft's (2015) theory of creativity, and possibly also through Pressing's model, where unthinking play may follow the automation of certain motor sequences. The subsections in this second category are titled: craving freedom, and dance with yourself, let go of perfectionism.

Hand Coordination

One of the most striking and unexpected findings of this study, was that all participants experienced an unforeseen level of difficulty with hand coordination. With piano playing, the hands often function independently to one another: typically, the RH will have a melody, which is supported by an accompaniment pattern in the LH. Although pianists sometimes practice these parts separately before putting them together, all

participants were surprised to discover how difficult it was to coordinate these two parts in the absence of a visual score.

On two separate occasions, when Meg and I were discussing how well her passages with independent RH and LH parts had gone, she commented on how much she had worked on these passages at home, saying "I tried to do that so many times, and I could not do it." One of her concluding remarks at the end of the study was to observe that "it's just so much easier to coordinate your hands when you're looking off a piece of paper." Interestingly, she also remarked that one of the learning elements for her in the project, was that she improved at coordinating her hands.

Overall, Sam expressed somewhat less frustration with coordinating his hands. This may be because his final improvisation reveals fewer passages that attempt to use the piano in this way, or it may be that he was simply less bothered about it. When engaging in free four chord improvisation with me in the lesson, he remarked that "when I try to do it by myself, one hand with chords and one hand with the melody, sometimes the LH will get confused and then switch into something other than chords." As well, examination of a transcript of his final improvisation performances reveals some difficulty in this area. For example, he does not worry about keeping a consistent LH stride bass pattern, and as well, one has the sense that his RH is playing in ¾ time, while the LH is playing a shifting 4/4 meter.

My own experience with coordinating the hands bore some similarities to the experiences of the students. Generally, though, I experienced difficulty when I was playing in an unfamiliar idiom such as rock or jazz, where the piano player is seeking to emulate a drummer with the LH. Suddenly, music that I would have been able to read

without any difficulty, required practice to put together. From this, I concluded that my usual modus operandi is very much visually oriented. Apparently I normally see the beat placement, and then add to this the feel of beat placement. Now, with no music, the tables were turned, and all of us were forced to feel beat placement, with no visual assistance.

Rhythm and Phrasing

The dual issues of playing within a particular meter, and with an awareness of phrase also presented themselves as challenges for all participants. For myself, I eventually found a teacher who was aware that this problem manifests itself in musicians who are trained to read, and he consequently asked me to practice with a backing track. This track kept me accountable to playing bars with a constant number of beats (4), and also provided a background against which to construct an aural concept of a phrase. I practiced to be able to play a short composition that was of a specified number of measures, for example, 32, with phrases that had good melodic and harmonic direction, and motivic unity. None of this was easy, but my journal indicates that felt I developed in my ability to pre-hear a phrase both melodically and harmonically. I journaled, it is "going better today—I feel more creative and have a bit better control of the chords. Trying to think 1 or 2 to the bar and do his 1+1+2 (phrasing) idea." As well, this creative exercise moved from being initially frustrating, to a satisfying endeavour. A day later I journaled, "I am trying not to look at the chords—just feel/think it (aurally)—strangely, I like this."

The musical notation transcription of both Sam and Meg's performances suggests that they were developing in their ability to work with consistent beats and unified phrases. Transcription of their performances, which was done by hand, was made

difficult at times due to the shifting number of beats in measures, and an absence of consistent phrasing. This reality prevented me from attempting to utilize a software program to transcribe the student performances; the Sibelius Program, for instance, states that it is unable to accommodate measures of irregular length. Both student works had bars of 2, 3, 4, and 5 beats at times, and also beats which were fractionally shortened, which would have been problematic for a software program to interpret.

Constraints Allow Measurement of Success

Through 10 months of practicing I observed that the presence of constraints allowed me to measure success over time. If I had a specific goal to work towards, I would know whether or not I was close to meeting the goal. I found that this ability to feel success was accompanied by feelings of pleasure in playing, as shown by journal entries such as "this is a bit more fun today, which I am pretty sure is due to the fact that I'm getting better at it." Additionally, practicing a specific exercise allowed me to focus on one particular technical component, such as the development of phrase awareness, or manipulation of a rhythmic ostinato.

At times, however, I resented the constraint placed before me, either because it was difficult, or I did not understand the purpose of it, or I did not like the style in which the constraint was cast. On such days journal entries would reflect this with comments such as "the more into swing I get, the less I like it." Additionally, this sort of practice felt mechanical and rote at times. With this tension in mind, I approached the six pedagogical sessions with my students with trepidation. How would I construct lessons that would give them enough structure to experience success, but not so much structure that they were engaging in mere technical drill? In particular, I was aware that learning to read

music already requires a great deal of practice of this sort; I was not keen on giving students more of the same. I sought for a way to balance the conflicting components of improvising. I value play and creativity, but also growth in ability.

Perhaps making music for the movie excerpt provided a reasonable balance in this regard. Students were given the opportunity to be creative, and the given constraint, a movie, cast any possible learning in the context of a fun project. Both students referred to the assignment as "cool." Meg liked being able to make music to set a mood and Sam indicated that there was nothing he disliked about the project. There was simply something fun about creating music to enhance a viewer's experience of actions such as sneaking, roaring, jumping, slamming, running, and fainting.

The specific learning in this case is somewhat difficult to measure, but the project provided a context in which several notable musical elements could be explored and developed. These included manipulation of the elements of harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, and dynamics, in the quest to create a particular mood. Additionally, elements of phrasing were introduced as appropriate. Students were given freedom in utilizing these elements, though we would frequently discuss and experiment with ways in which they might be employed in the service of mood creation (as opposed to their place in contributing to the elements of a particular style), in the context of discussing each week's homework assignment (another segment of the movie). We would discuss issues such as major and minor modalities, diminished seventh chords, related key families, and non-chord tones. I found that it may be impossible to totally avoid teaching without reference to a particular style, but I refrained from making comments of a corrective nature, once the students had developed a segment of music. This aspect of my teaching

was guided by theories of creativity that regard every individual as possessing creative potential (Burnard, 2012); I did not wish to let any of my own creative boundaries impose limitations on my students.

The one exception I made, occurred in the second week, when I decided to encourage students to think about the constraint of meter, and this is one instance of a repetition of the action reflection cycle. Sam was expressing frustration with his music being "all over the place." I had also been working at playing with the video, and was finding that I felt I was a slave to the images on the screen, which resulted in feelings of disorganization. At this point, I decided that establishing the constraint of a pulse and meter, and playing with a sense of phrase would help to diminish this feeling of "being all over the place," and perhaps encourage flexibility with other musical elements.

In keeping with this, at the second lesson, I encouraged Sam to play in a meter, and to keep that as the one consistent thing, while allowing the elements of rhythm and melody to change. We did this in the lesson, establishing an internal pulse for him before the movie even began. I counted while he played (and he was to change his playing as much as he liked, just stay with the count), then he counted for himself. At the third lesson, Sam reported that playing with a pulse did not always work, but in fact his playing does have a strong sense of pulse, with bars of fairly consistent duration. Phrases tend to be short; about 2 bars in length. We tried an approach to unified phrase construction that I had been learning with one of my teachers, and a review of the video reveals that he was able to do this in the lesson, but that it did not translate fully into his improvising.

Meg was very uncertain at the start of the second lesson, and though she said she did well, seemed unwilling or unable to play for me. When we began experimenting with

meter in the lesson, she quickly progressed to naturally playing two 8 bar phrases, and

later transferred this into her playing. This can be observed in several scenes of the movie,

including the dog barking scene, and the final romance scene, both of which contain

several 4 bar phrases. For Meg's third lesson, we discussed the problem she was having

with stopping due to forgotten or absent ideas, and I used this idea of phrasing to

encourage her to complete the phrase, by playing anything. This provides an example of

the action reflection cycle, where I found myself reflecting on a particular problem, and

seeking a way forward. My own reading about the perils of boxing students in creatively

(Hickey, 2009) made me cautious about employing regular phrasing, but I ultimately

decided that the adoption of this constraint would facilitate the improvisational activity in

this case. A review of Meg's two final performances reveals that she did in fact utilize

phrasing to facilitate playing without stopping. She had some basic chordal and motivic

ideas that she used repeatedly, such as arpeggiated I IV and V chords, and these appear to

demonstrate her attempt to keep going no matter what. When analyzing this component

of the data, I concluded that the use of phrasing here seemed to facilitate creative

expression, rather than thwart it, but I maintained an awareness about this point of tension.

You Need to Practice Things You Are Not Good at Doing

All three of us noted that we got better at playing things that were initially

difficult, by practicing them. For me, I know I improved at handling rhythmic and

melodic coordination, and both students made mention of their improvements in this area

by the end of the study. Pressing's (1984) cognitive process model was helpful when

theorizing about the various thinking aspects of improvising. Pressing suggests that

improvisers must practice executing specific motor activities (thinking), in order that they

may become automatic and therefore able to be of service during improvisation. During

the course of my lessons I learned the importance of practicing rhythmic coordination.

Drummers must practice something called *sticking*, which is how they figure out and

coordinate which hand or foot plays when. Being an organist, this was interesting to me

(like the drummer, I play with both hands and both feet), but because I have always read

music, I have experienced this coordination differently. Now I know that having to

practice this coordination is normal for drummers who do not read from a score. The

participants of this study may find they can learn from drummers.

     At the beginning of the study, Sam rated this improvisation project as a seven out

of 10. By the end, it was a nine out of 10 for him, and when asked why, he remarked that

"it's easier to do, I think." Catherine: "because?" Sam: "you practice it" (smiles).

Additionally, he noted that the project was quite a lot of work. Meg rated it an 8.5 at the

outset, and by the end indicated that she would like to do it again. She concluded with the

observation that "at the beginning it's so frustrating, but then it's so much fun." These

comments support the idea that practicing can increase the pleasure one experiences

while improvising. Speaking about what is difficult about playing the piano in general,

Sam observed "it changes, it can be different at some points. The hardest thing can

become the easiest thing."

     My experience with practicing improvising has been similar. Practicing things

that I have difficulty with is frustrating, but one of my teachers mentioned to me that if

you are practicing what you can already do, you are wasting time. All three of the

teachers I worked with indicated in their own way, that learning to improvise was,

significantly, a matter of practice. One of the teachers purported that improvising cannot

be taught: he observed it was all on the learner, to actually learn. Basically, I needed to get doing it. I was told me to expect to sound badly for one entire year. The final teacher I encountered had a well-thought-out pedagogy, and gave me specific exercises or techniques to practice. The provision of many more constraints provided a more satisfactory learning experience on the whole, because the constraints identified specific skills I could develop.

Thinking Will Lead to Feeling

Perhaps the idea is to practice things that you cannot do, or copy ideas from others, in the same way that you eat nourishing food. Just as you take in vitamins, minerals, and proteins for your body when you eat, so when you practice improvisational techniques that can feed your playing, providing new sources of inspiration and opportunities to learn mastery.

At the conclusion of the study Sam remarked once again that he found that the most difficult thing for him was trying to translate via the piano, the sounds and ideas he was hearing in his head. He noted that this became easier during the six weeks, because he was forced to continually work at it throughout the study. In his words, "it got easier every time I did it…because, like, every part where I had to come up with a new, um, sort of idea for the song, I had to do the same thing over again." During the fourth lesson a smiling and laughing Meg said of the project "it's fun, it's just tricky with some parts." At the end of the study, Meg commented that she learned how different chords could evoke different emotions. She also felt she got better at coordinating her hands, and other things she "cannot explain."

For myself, I felt the paradoxical conundrum of both liking and disliking my

practicing. I greatly appreciate the increased control that I have acquired, though it has not been easy. I journaled about practicing one particular exercise improvising on a Beatles' song using a pentatonic scale, remarking that, "with a lot of struggle it gets better." Later, on one occasion practicing improvising with the movie, I noted, "this gets a bit better as you keep working on it." Journal notes about my experience playing in the jazz idiom indicate that while I neither liked nor understood the particular style my teacher was asking me to work within, I did appreciate that without such exercises, I have a tendency to otherwise "keep on doing the same things."

The business of thinking while practicing improvising is frustrating, and interestingly, it has parallels with regular reading practice as well. Meg, when asked about her favourite part of playing the piano, replied "I don't know, it's fun. I can kind of like, lose myself in it, like other things you have to concentrate and then piano is just kind of like, you're relaxed and you're playing." Catherine: "Okay, and when I get on your case to concentrate when you're practicing, how does that fit into that?" Meg: "Great! [she laughs out loud]. Um, I don't know." One of my teachers made the claim that "thinking will lead to feeling." Here, the data seems to suggest that one can practice things to automate them. Practicing improvising is a bit like taking in food: you incorporate into your body, the nourishing elements of food, and you may incorporate into your playing, the nourishment of new musical ideas and new technical mastery.

Craving Freedom

This leads into the idea that perhaps playing around with improvising, or doodling, should be distinguished from practicing improvising. In one of my lessons this concept was given a term: cleansing. I was encouraged to engage in this type of playing at times,

because it afforded an opportunity to explore, and listen, and learn. My own notes to myself are replete with references to having fun when I was freely experimenting with sounds at the piano. I would note something like, "It's fun! You can create melodies in both hands" or "I love free-playing around." I think this was creative play. Tempering this, however, are notes in my journal that indicate that I was bothered by the fact that my creative play had a sameness to it: "I feel like I had fun but everything I do is the same." I later noted "I prefer free-play, but I think working with…will expand my free-play repertoire in the background." It seemed that if I fed myself with ideas, that I would experience pleasure in playing when I gained control over these new techniques and ideas.

Because of the evolving nature of the data collection, sometimes certain participants are emphasized more than others in the findings. This topic of craving freedom is an area where there is more data for myself, than for the two student participants, so conclusions are based more on findings associated with my data. Meg referenced losing herself when improvising, and Sam mentioned that there are things he just doesn't worry about when he improvises, and these comments suggest that the student participants may have experienced this theme in a way similar to mine. My data strongly suggested that if freedom is desirable, perhaps that freedom might be enlarged by doing things that initially feel restricting: rehearsing different motor sequences, and incorporating various nourishing ideas. I was aware that these skills and ideas were not goals in themselves, but rather the means to an end. That end is the acquisition of the freedom I so crave at the piano, and the ability to creatively play.

Dance With Yourself, Let Go of Perfectionism

While it is easy to see how working at something can help you to become better, it

is more difficult for the classically trained musician to understand concepts such as dreaming about sounds or dancing with yourself. The classical musician reads music from a score is often complex, and treated with extreme respect: every detail is observed and considered in the process of constructing an interpretation. Consequently, there arises a strong sense that a musician will play either the right thing or the wrong thing. These ideas of dancing and dreaming in sounds were suggested by one of my teachers, as an antidote to the perfectionism that he felt is strongly ingrained in the classical musician. Among the three participants in the study, data for each person reveals some perspectives that led to the development of this category.

For me, as the learning teacher, there is perhaps the most data. This may be because I am the one with the longest history with being a reading musician, or because I was engaging in a different and more lengthy process, or because I had teachers who had rather specific expectations. My reflective journal contains many expressions of frustration with the quality of my improvisations. As the lessons progressed, I found that if I was going to succeed, I first needed an encouraging teacher. Next, I needed to cease judging myself. I have noticed that there is something very personal about making up one's own music. The act of sharing it requires courage, because you are sharing something of yourself. Perhaps I could learn from Sam, who seemed free of self-judgement.

Sam was always willing to experiment on the spot with any improvisation exercise in the lesson. This appears to mesh with Craft's (2015) ideas of play, where the creative person enjoys toying with new possibilities. In fact, a review of the video data reveals that Sam would take any opportunity in the lesson to doodle with sounds of his

own design or with ideas just presented. He never expressed any displeasure with his playing, except once, during a rather terrifying constraint-free duet improvisation in which he and I engaged. As well, he remarked more than once that he felt he was doing well with the assignment. From the first day, he played with the video without faltering hesitation or uncertainty. He seemed to simply take pleasure in playing with different sound possibilities.

An examination of the videos of Meg's lessons reveals a different learner. In the first set-up lesson, my impression was that Meg was hesitant when asked to experiment with ideas, and expressed displeasure with her impromptu ideas as we experimented during the lesson. This finding, however, should be qualified by an awareness that this was also the first lesson at which she was recorded, and I found the presence of the video camera was intrusive for about 2 weeks.

At the second lesson, Meg was reluctant to play her ideas for me, even though, when asked how the homework went, she twice replied, "um, good I think" and rated it an 8.5/10. Something was holding her back, and moments later she remarked "it's not very good. I didn't get much done…I was trying to think of things and I didn't really get that good of an idea." When she did begin to play, she remarked that her fingers do not move quickly, and apologized for playing in the "wrong" octave of the piano. Once playing along with the video, hesitations, comments and facial grimaces and head shakes dominated her playing. She commented several times "I had nothing planned for that." In reality, Meg's playing contained many good things, such as an expressive idea for Chaplin's sneaking scene, and playing that was marked by a strong awareness of phrase.

Two possible conclusions, both opposite sides of the same coin, could be derived

in analyzing this data. First, one might say that the assignment was a bit too open to allow Meg to be comfortable. Alternatively, it could be said, that what was needed was for her to be able to experiment with improvisation in a less conscious and therefore less threatening way. Either explanation might be remedied by the provision of a prop, to help her engage in play. For Meg, the addition of some unconscious constraints facilitated this, revealing her more confident side, and allowing her to improvise without hesitation, frown, or apology, particularly in the early lessons.

An analysis of Meg's second lesson, when she began working within the constraint of casting her musical ideas in a phrase structure, reveals none of the hesitations and comments about a shortage of musical ideas, as was found in the initial more open improvisation component of the lesson; when she was focused on the phrase, she appeared to be free to play, and was unconcerned with her lack of ideas. At the third lesson, Meg performed a free duet improvisation with me, that was based upon the constraint of the four chords of a pop progression. She did this twice with a great awareness of rhythm, melody, and phrase, exhibiting a sense of ease, with neither hesitation nor expressions of displeasure. My observation was that her playing was excellent. Possibly, musicians who are a bit self-conscious or prone to self-criticism, may benefit from improvisation opportunities that remove the thinking component; in Meg's case the addition of unconscious constraints provided a vehicle by which her ability in improvising could shine, without her even knowing it. This use of free duet improvisation in the lesson was a further example of an iteration of the action reflection cycle. I hoped that this type of playing would serve as an inspiration to Meg, and give her confidence in her own abilities.

My own experience bears more similarity to Meg's that it does to that of Sam. In fact, I moved from being hesitant and faltering, to a place of some fluency, with some simple constraints provided by the teacher with whom I was studying. The provision of a chord progression, existing song, or backing track to work with, seemed to give me a footing to work from, a place within which to dance, or to play. Perhaps Meg and I share perfectionistic tendencies which lead to unhelpful judging of our playing. During the course of my lessons I learned that when improvising, one needs to "leave the judge in the other room."

The Student Voice: Letting It Be Heard

This section addresses the findings that relate to the student voice, and the possible role of that voice in music education, particularly within the context of a private piano lesson. The first section will deal with improvisation as a vehicle by which to rethink the learned perfectionism of a classically trained musician. Next is a discussion of way in which this project gave students a voice in music-making, and the section concludes with an assessment of the how the students view this type of music-making themselves.

Freedom for the Perfectionist

In this study, the theme of perfectionism manifested itself differently with the three participants. Where Sam exhibited few or no traits characteristic of the perfectionistic classical musician, Meg had some behaviour suggestive of this trait, and I had this trait brought to my attention by one of my teachers.

The previous section dealt with an analysis of Meg's responses to the improvising process as seen through the concepts of applying constraints that facilitate unconscious

improvising. There is a second possible interpretation of Meg's improvisation results, and that revolves around a pedagogy that encourages the student voice. An examination of Meg's performances show that she was able to cease her faltering and self-critical playing with the silent film, by the sixth week of the study. This success could be attributed to her growing comfort with the material, but it could also be attributed at least in part, to the conscious effort that she made to fake it. This alternative interpretation aligns with Niknaf's (2013) observation that there are no mistakes in free improvisation. One could argue that in general, there are no mistakes in any type of improvisation, and that Meg simply needed to realize that although she may not have played exactly what she intended, there was still a sense in which there are no mistakes. The world of classical piano might be said to encourage the trait of perfectionism, but with improvising, musicians are given a different goal in music; they are given a place for their own creative ideas and voices.

The classically trained pianist is usually trained to follow the score with precision, and a great deal of time is spent either avoiding or correcting mistakes; there is no room for either faking it or making it up. Perhaps giving Meg the goal of keeping playing no matter what, with the view to essentially fooling the listener, gave her permission to approach the piano in a way that is seldom granted in the traditional reading-oriented piano lesson. It is possible to interpret her eventual ability to refrain from self-judgement, as a reflection of a shift in focus away from perfect performance, to keeping going no matter what. Niknafs (2013) ascribes power to free improvisation, asserting that it is "self-affirmation, a recouping of our musical identities, whether as students or as teachers" (p. 32). Encouraging Meg to improvise may have indirectly informed her that

her own musical ideas could govern her piano playing, not just the ideas of a published composer. It may also have been an act that affirmed her as a creative, musical person.

An interesting occurrence transpired in the sixth week of the study, when Meg was faced with conflicting demands on her practice time, and was unable to meet all of these demands. Given the choice between working on her improvisation and preparing rehearsed pieces for an upcoming performance, Meg opted to focus on the later. Meg described the decision that she made about her practicing, when she said:

> This week I didn't really get to practice my improv because I was really
>
> practicing like my other things for the recital, to try and get them nailed and done,
>
> cause, yeah, I was worried that they wouldn't be done in time.

Meg felt that the upcoming performance ought to be the central focus of her work that week; in the face of pressure, she assigned a subsidiary role to the non-performance elements of the lesson. The pressure to attain the perfect performance was keenly felt.

For Meg, improvising might have been seen as a way to free her from the perfectionistic tendencies that can be observed in classically trained musicians. I myself, having many years working as a musician within this field, can assert that my perfectionistic tendencies revealed themselves at every lesson I had during the study. For a time, I journaled about my complete inability to relax during the lessons. I felt unable to let go, and take the risk of speaking with my own voice when asked to improvise in a variety of moods. As well, I worried about what the teacher thought about my improvisation in a particular style. Later on, it helped to work with a mentor who provided not only encouragement about the worth of my playing, but also enough structure for me to express my voice and experience success in doing so. For example,

when asked to create a composition for a lesson, this particular teacher laid out a 32 bar structure of specified phrases, keys, and chord goals for me to follow. I was free to use melodic, harmonic, and textural elements to create a song of my own devising, and this allowed me to generate an original work in the moment.

Even though this structure gave me a scaffold upon which to improvise, I was not always happy with the result. Reflecting upon this, I can observe that I was unconsciously comparing my improvisation to the more complex written works I was accustomed to playing. At times my teacher counselled me to refrain from expectations of perfection, which are possible only in the world of finely tuned composition.

Unlike my experience, Sam's data has a lack of reference to anything that would suggest a strong perfectionist personality. On multiple occasions he engaged in unsolicited doodling during his lesson. He freely described his own experimentation at home, playing around with his technical exercises and existing repertoire. Once, when questioned by me about how he manages the awkward key change merging a piece in E flat Major to one in A minor (very distantly related), he said "I don't really worry about it." It may be that his willingness to experiment and ignore conventions, are indicators of a less perfectionist personality to begin with. Improvising for the movie gave him permission to bring into his piano lesson, the personal voice that he was already experimenting with informally.

Students Identify a Place for Their Musical Voice

Both students expressed an interest in the idea that improvising allows students an opportunity to express their own voice. When questioned about what made this type of music-making different to reading music as they normally would, there was similarity in

the responses of the two students. Sam expressed pleasure at being given the opportunity to have a voice, remarking that "there's a cool thing to improvising where you can come up with your own thing. You don't need to follow anything." His words suggest that he appreciates the dual aspects of doing your own thing, and not being required to follow anything. An analysis of his final results points to a creation that is unique, and something of which he is proud.

As a teacher, I would say that when reading from a score, pianists are always trying to establish a mood. Yet here, Meg defined this as one of the ways in which she saw improvising as being different to reading music. More than once, Meg referred to the idea that improvisation is something "you have to do … yourself." In her words, "well, the one you just have to play the notes and make it good. This one you actually have to create the mood and stuff, like, by actually writing it." At the summary of the study, she again reflected "you have to do it yourself." The comments of both Meg and Sam suggest that personal responsibility figures highly for each of them when improvising.

My own experience was different to that of the students, possibly because I approached improvising from a totally different place. Never, as a young student, was I given the opportunity to make my own music. My field notes documenting my own practicing suggest a twofold problem: the first revolved around my efforts to develop the technical competency to improvise, and once that began to develop, a second issue appeared, that of looking for something to say. Complicating all of this was the matter of determining which style I would use to express myself. Observations such as "I'm bored" and "I feel uncreative" were common in my reflective journal, as I wrote about playing in the jazz style. Generally, the word "fun" dominated my journaling about my experiences

with free-playing improvisations. Even these fun sessions, however, were at times tempered by the observation that I feel still felt uncreative and repetitive.

The notion of feeling uncreative may be a function of never making my own music for years and years. At one point, I noted that I would much rather just sit and read music, than try to come up with my own. One of my teachers reassured me that he has students who would rather make music up from a lead sheet than have to actually read from a score. Maybe he is right, that most people do one or the other, not both. One question that remains, is whether or not I will be able to awaken a fuller expression of my creative voice. If I had been encouraged to creatively play as a child, would this aspect of my musicianship be stronger today? Does my data suggest that children need to be given space to develop small c creativity (Craft, 2003, 2015), or do some individuals simply need some structure to assist them with creative expression?

Nourishing the Personal Voice

My own observational field notes and reflective journal entries, as well as the lesson videos, are well-stocked with themes pertaining to feeding the student voice. Each week in the lessons with the student participants, I discussed and played with the students, exploring different possible ways to employ the piano keys in the service of setting the mood for a particular scene. These suggestions formed the core of the act portion of the action reflection cycle. Several of these ideas found their way into the students' final improvisational product, though not necessarily in the way that I had suggested: review of the video reveals that fast notes, dotted rhythms, diminished 7th chords, minor scales, stride bass, LH accompaniment of a RH melody, non-chord tones, limited thematic development, and use of the I IV and V chords all appeared in some form or other. I

wonder what would have happened if I had done none of this. Would their experiences have been like mine when I attended a lesson that lacked the structure that helped to fuel my practicing for the week? When asked about what was helpful in her lessons, Meg replied "just doing it, making it up." It is difficult to assess the results from non-instructional improvisation with the students, apart from this observation by Meg, that she found it to be useful in helping with the weekly assignment in some way.

When I began this study, I was hoping to find a new way to teach students to improvise, that did not rely upon reverting to the established world of jazz improvisation. This proved to be difficult. Even my teachers saw it as problematic; one said what will you do, the style of Mozart? The other said, why not jazz, what choice do you have? The rock style is suited to the guitar, not the peculiarities of the piano. The third teacher indicated that I probably should improvise in the style of Chopin. So, I tried with jazz, but I definitely did not feel that was my voice. What I hoped I was doing, was opening myself up to learning about techniques that I could someday make my own; without this outside input, I seemed to just keep playing in a similar style over and over.

I reflected that this may be something similar to what J. S. Bach was doing when he copied the scores of composers such as Vivaldi and deGrigny. He was opening himself up to learning elements of their particular styles, which in that day, by virtue of their styles being Italian and French, were different to his German style. This process, essentially again like the taking in of nourishment, allowed him to enrich his own compositional and improvisational output. One of my journal entries reads "I think I needed to do this to assimilate style. Bach did it, after all."

This chapter presented the findings pertaining to the improvisational learning

experiences of three piano-playing participants, who usually make music through the medium of notation reading. Two student participants, and myself, a teacher-learner, engaged with the art of improvisation: the students made music for a silent film excerpt, and through taking lessons with three expert mentors, I experienced three different pedagogical styles to the teaching of improvisation. Each participant encountered challenges and successes in their own way, but certain common themes emerged. Of note were the themes: (a) the quest for ideas, (b) the paradox of thinking and unthinking, and (c) the student voice. Through an exploration of these themes, this chapter brought to light some of the unique issues that may encountered by piano teachers who wish to venture into this relatively uncharted territory.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of classically trained piano students as they learned to make improvised music. One teacher-learner and two students were engaged in an action research study that sought to uncover some of the experiences encountered by reading musicians as they learned improvisation. This chapter begins with a review of the findings and moves on to a discussion of the major themes that emerged from the data, connecting them to research questions, and to current debates in the literature. Implications for pedagogical practice and future research, and a final reflection will conclude the chapter.

Summary

This research examined experiences in learning to improvise when approached from the vantage point of the classically trained music-reader. The learners included myself as a teacher-learner, and two student learners: I acted as both teacher-learner and teacher-researcher, and the two students were drawn from my teaching studio using purposeful sampling. My experiences with learning to improvise involved my becoming a student, and taking lessons with three different experts over the course of 10 months. The two student participants were engaged in a 6-week project that involved the creation of music to accompany a silent film excerpt. This study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do both constraints and freedom allow improvisational piano learning to occur, in ways that simultaneously encourage creativity and skill development in pianists?

2. What are the benefits and challenges for piano students who improvise, as they take ownership of creating a piece of music?

Data for this qualitative action research study were collected through the use of a reflective field journal, field observation notes, video recordings, and interview questions. Data were analyzed using axial and constant comparative methods. Three major themes were uncovered, and these were encapsulated in the categories of:

- The quest for ideas: having something to say

- The paradox of thinking and unthinking

- The student voice: letting it be heard

Discussion of the Findings

Learning to play the piano often occurs in a structured setting focused on reading notation and performing the works of the classical repertoire. Creativity is emphasized through interpretation in performance, rather than through the generation of one's own compositional works. This study, conducted with musicians who work primarily in the classical music idiom, sought to explore an alternative source for creativity, that of improvising.

The placement of myself as a researcher and the findings for this study are situated within a theoretical framework that emphasizes the everydayness of art (Begbie, 2003; Wolterstorff, 1980). This everydayness contrasts with a commonly held view of art that envisions aesthetic contemplation as one of the primary purposes of art. Here, rather than seeing an art form as a way of escaping from the world, or as existing solely for the purposes of aesthetic contemplation, art is viewed as capable of fulfilling a wide diversity of roles within the spectrum of human actions: "the purposes of art are the purposes of

life" and this art "is meant to play an enormous diversity of roles in human life" (Wolterstorff, 1980, p. 4). This is not to say that art must necessarily be useful, or fulfill a function, rather, that it may satisfy many roles, and these roles will be guided by a fittingness between the character of the work of art and human actions. Depending on the context, there may be a fittingness between the work of art itself and the artist's state of mind, an outside image, a particular action, or between a work of art and the age in which it is conceived. Art may fulfill any of these roles, and it is in this context that this study was conducted; this broadened view of art allowed me to envision a role for improvisation within the traditional piano lesson.

Inspiration for this theory of art in action, can be drawn from the folk art of non-Western cultures, where music, painting, and dance are inseparable from the acts of daily living. Musicologist Curt Sachs (1965) refers to this different approach of non-Western cultures when he writes that in such cultures "music is not compelled to fight the indifferent and the unmusical with 'appreciation' or to appease critics, board members, and managers with tame and carefully balanced music programs" (p. 222). Rather, this "folk music is an integral part of all important occasions in village life" (Bartók, 1976, p. 10). These words, written by Béla Bartók, the prominent Hungarian composer associated with the collection of more than 16,000 Hungarian folk songs, open us to a view of music that is somewhat foreign to the Western mind, and serve to reinforce the concept of art as a type of action. It is possible to grant ourselves the freedom to allow for many different purposes for art, not the least of which may be its role in our daily life.

The following discussion will interpret the findings of this study in the light of these arguments, namely that art can be seen as a type of creative action, situated in a

particular time and place. The three major themes derived in the data analysis will provide the structure for this argument, and these three themes will be used to address the study's two research questions. The three themes are encapsulated in the following phrases: (a) style and the generation of ideas, (b) paradoxes are inevitable: constraints and play work together, and (c) developing the personal voice. It should be noted that there is some crossover between these three categories. The first and third categories involving the generation of ideas and nourishment of the personal voice are both imbued with elements of the second category, that of the roles of constraints and play. In order to discuss these topics from different vantage points, the categories will be maintained, but it is acknowledged that this separation is somewhat artificial. As mentioned in chapter one, dichotomies such as the contrast between work and play can be over-simplifications of some complex matters, but are maintained here for their usefulness in discussing contrasting ideas that are part of the human experience.

Style and the Generation of Ideas

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the different benefits and challenges that pianists experience when taking ownership for creating a piece of music. Several issues came to light, with the whole notion of being creative, in the sense of making something, surfacing first. The act of being creative is seen as one of the benefits of being able to improvise (Biasutti, 2015; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Rowe et al., 2015; Wopereis et al., 2013). In order to be creative, one must make something new or innovative, that is also useful in some sense (Craft, 2015). In the case of improvising, the player must combine pitches, rhythms, timbres and harmonies in new and different ways, but how should these elements be combined when there is no clear path?

This difficulty with finding this path, proved to be one of the challenges of taking ownership for creating a piece of music. For two of the participants in this study, finding the path, or the musical ideas with which to construct the path, was difficult. Perhaps the direction for the path was difficult to see. For the third participant, there was less frustration with actually coming up with the ideas, but he wrestled nonetheless, in working with these ideas. Craft (2015) writes of little c creativity, a type of everyday creativity demonstrated by individuals who can envision an end, and through play, questioning, risk-taking, imagination, and awareness of convention, somehow manage to get to this envisioned end. This study was concerned with exploring ways to help students be creative in this way. In essence, they were trying to find the path to making their own creative pieces of music.

In chapter 4, I discussed the idea that participants seemed to need to nurture their voices in order to generate new creative works, and I likened this to the concept of taking in nourishment. In much the same way that one eats food for sustenance, a musician may wish to feed their expressive voice. This seemed to be necessary either because the ideas would not come, or could not be voiced, or bore similarity to already voiced material. It was discovered that the nourishment a musician may consume may take many forms, and range from gaining mastery over new techniques, to an in depth exploration of the music of others. Traditional pianists often prioritize one canon over another, but a view through the lens of 21st century postmodernist culture would suggest that any style could be a valuable potential source of nourishment. The piano player who wants to get better at improvising has much material to draw upon and combine in unique ways, and this consistent with the postmodern idea of valuing particularity.

If we maintain the view that art is an integral part of daily life, this will greatly expand the range of expressive possibilities for the classically trained musician. The music of many cultures and styles may provide creative stimuli, without the fear of having to adhere to one particular style or another. It has been argued that in order to be unique in one's expression, a musician must first be able to grasp and work with the particulars of certain specific styles. Craft (2015) indicates that "deep concentration on one area is far more likely to lead to an imaginative response than is a superficial trawl through a lot of different subjects" (p. 52). This would suggest that gaining mastery of a particular style continues to be relevant, but in bestowing art with a diversity of roles, pianists may find many different ways to feed their personal voice.

Current discussions in the literature often refer to the difficulties of choosing which style to employ when teaching creative activities (Hickey, 2009; Higgins & Mantie, 2013). Our diverse multicultural society celebrates many different types of music, and teachers can be unwilling to impose a particular style of playing on their students. Private piano teachers are likely to experience this differently than school teachers, simply because piano students often seek out particular teachers in order to learn specifically from that teacher. It may be possible that piano teachers will not wrestle with the issue of style choice, because they do not need to. I was searching for a way to teach improvising, that did not necessarily depend upon the jazz tradition, but I did not find a workable solution. For now, I am dependent on the jazz style until I develop some alternative approach.

My own experiences during this study appear to confirm the idea that one should seek to become conversant in one particular style, then apply those skills to any number

of other genres (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002). I do not know what style I will ultimately employ, and it is possible that this does not matter. What appears to be important, is the skill set that can be gained by working with dedication in a particular area. The student participants in this study worked with a movie segment, with the focus of their work being on mood creation. For the duration of the study it was possible to avoid direct reference to stylistic constraints. However, for me as a teacher-learner, it seemed that the structure of the jazz improvisation lesson was helpful when learning outside of the mood-based structure. The value of taking ideas from other sources in order to grow as an improviser has been underscored by several recent studies about improvisation (Beegle, 2010; Houvinen et al., 2011; Kleinmintz et al., 2014). I ultimately was able to find a jazz teacher with a well-developed pedagogy of improvisation, who could facilitate my learning process by supplying many ideas for emulation. Although it is possible that not all students require the structure that I benefitted from, it is defensible to argue that there are students who will need structure to aid in attaining growth in this area (Burnard & Younker, 2002). The student participants in this study received some ideas for working with moods, that were not genre-specific. Both students indicated that these suggestions were helpful in their quest to create the silent movie music, and this appears to confirm findings that indicate that growth in improvisational abilities is aided by any type of instruction (Houvinen et al., 2011).

The ability to improvise is often associated with enhanced aural skills (Rogers, 2013; Wopereis et al., 2013). Although this study was not of sufficient duration to comment on the long term value of musicians developing an aural conception of phrase, or of their growth in the ability to listen to an improvising partner, it was possible to see

that playing tunes by ear filled an important role when improvising. Since I was learning

in the jazz idiom, some of my creative work involved learning an existing tune by ear,

and then altering and embellishing this existing tune. This type of improvising proved to

be satisfying for me, and the reworking of other people's tunes provided another variation

on the theme of nourishment as an aid to creativity.

Paradoxes Are Inevitable: Constraints and Play Work Together

This section will seek to answer the first research question by focusing on

exploring the interplay between constraints and play, as they relate to the theory of art as

an everyday activity, an activity, with many possible purposes. The current study found

that these intensely oppositional concepts, work and play, both had a role to play in the

context of improvising. As well, the second research question will be addressed when

considering the benefits of play as it manifests itself in improvisation.

Constraints. Multiple categories encompassing the paradoxical ideas of thinking

and unthinking were explored in the discussion of the findings of this study in chapter 4.

In engaging in the act of musical improvisation, the participants seemed to require both

intense thinking, and an element of unconsciousness, or play. Intense thinking was

needed to overcome both physical limitations (one form of constraint) and to be able to

engage in stylistic playing (another form of constraint). The findings of the study indicate

that participants found that dealing with these constraints provoked feelings of frustration

and restriction on the one hand, and success and empowerment on the other. By placing

the findings within the notion that art may serve a tremendous variety of social roles, it

was possible to provide a helpful way in which to view constraints.

This discussion assumes that a desire to improvise is accompanied by a desire to gain an increasing ability to expressively control or manage both the materials of music (Reimer, 2003), and various physical realities encountered, including the instrument and the body. We all wanted to figure out how to sound good. We wanted to feel successful. In order to do that, we had to grapple with the various physical limitations and contextual constraints: slowness of fingers, unclear moods to interpret, forgotten ideas, ideas that were difficult to express, lack of ideas, unstylistic ideas, and lack of rhythmic and hand coordination were among the obstacles that all participants encountered. In answer to the second research questions, these various constraints were some of the challenges participants encountered as they took ownership in improvising their own music. We all needed to be able to control these, to make our music effective.

For this study, two of the participants were seeking to create expressive music that served to highlight the images in a film. As teacher-learner, my goals were less clearly defined, but one of my goals was to gain more freedom at the keyboard for activities such as accompanying. In either case, the art had a different action to accompany, and required a different sort of fittingness (Wolterstorff, 1980); all of the participant's musical outcomes simultaneously bore signs of great promise, and showed evidence of limitation. If fitting expression was the goal, then gaining more mastery of these physical realities could only be enabling. Ironically, it appears that increased freedom of musical expression is found by addressing at least some of these different forms of constraints. Craft's (2015) idea of working with depth and devotion in a particular field, in order to be creative, seems to underpin this finding. In seeking to begin to answer the first research question, about the ways in which constraints and freedom work together to foster

creativity, we might conclude that acknowledging and working with various constraints ironically opens up creative possibilities.

Play. Despite the importance of acknowledging and working through constraints, the findings of this study suggest that there is more to being creative than focus and work. There appears to be a role for freedom that comes through play, and in partial answer to the second research question, this may be one of the benefits of improvising. If we hold to the theoretical framework that sees art as an everyday sort of action with all sorts of roles, perhaps one of its roles may be defined as providing an opportunity for creative play. It was found that improvising requires thinking, and unthinking, with the later referring to the something that could be defined as play. My own data was especially concerned with how much fun I experienced at the piano when I did not have to think, and I freely roamed. Student participants indicated that they enjoyed free improvisation exercises in the lesson. In both of these instances, thinking was minimized, as the role of music at that moment in time was something more like fun, or play, or dancing with oneself. Constraints were still present, but only enough to facilitate the pleasure of the moment. Collier and Kendrick (2016) indicate that open-ended exploratory creative processes such as this, that are free of structure, may facilitate increased creativity.

Chapter 4 explored the notion of play, and the idea that one of the roles that learning to improvise may fulfill, is simple fun and exploration at the keys: improvising is one way of encouraging a stressed 12 year old, or a busy teacher an opportunity to do something non-productive, just for the pure fun of it. This is something that cannot be assessed or placed on a resume, and with highly regimented pedagogies, it is easy to neglect this aspect of ourselves. Perhaps a paradoxical aspect of being human involves

allowing for actions that encompass both work and play: improvisation can fill a role in both of these scenarios. Improvising gets better when you work at it, and reckon with constraints, but it is so much fun to do, when you can simply freely play.

The notion of fittingness (Wolterstorff, 1980) provides a framework for teachers to make decisions about whether their goal in teaching improvisation is to emphasize play, or focused work. At times, it is fitting to allow play at the piano. At other times, work may be the goal. The difficulty for the teacher, is to figure out how to balance these two oppositional ideas both in the short term and in the long term, in a way that nurtures, rather than curbs creativity. Supportive pedagogies that provide opportunities for becoming familiar with "genres, topics, processes and modes of expression" (Collier & Kendrick, 2016, p. 186), and allow space for play, may encourage the personal expression that is ultimately desired. The next section will consider the way in which improvising may be seen as a means for engaging in this type of personal expression, another of the possible benefits of taking ownership for this type of music-making.

Developing the Personal Voice

This category connects closely to the second research question, which seeks to identify some of the benefits of improvising. If we embrace the postmodern affirmation of the amazing beauty and diversity of human voices, we may find a context in which to discuss the idea of personal expression. As previously discussed, it is possible to embrace a view that sees art as accompanying many different human actions: constraints again will play a role, albeit a changing one. For the movie accompaniment in this study, students expressed that they felt coming up with their own music was different than playing something already in existence. They hinted at the difficulty and pleasure of this.

Encouraging classically-trained musicians to improvise provides an opportunity for them to contribute their own musical voices, and has the potential to fundamentally change how these musicians view the role of music. Western art music, the world of the classical piano lesson, prioritizes discipline and predictability, and in learning to improvise, musicians can experience different priorities in music (Nettl, 1998). For example, Nettl suggests that freedom and unpredictability are valued in the improvisatory music of the Middle East. This valuing of different musical priorities harmonizes with Burnard's (2012) idea of assigning worth to the full range of different musical creativities. Wolterstorff (1980) might call this seeing different purposes for art. By acknowledging a variety of purposes, and a range of different creativities, we can expand our assumptions and enrich our experiences with making music.

Students will have multiple different constraints that may guide their voices, some being physical realities, and others issues of style. It is possible to take the viewpoint that when making decisions about style constraints, teachers and students will have some personal decisions to make. This seems to be consistent with the "pick'n'mix bricolage" (Begbie, 2003) aspect of postmodern culture, which values particularity, rather than totalizing narratives (Begbie, 1997; Connor, 1989; Eisner, 1985; Greene, 1995). The ultimate goal of honouring particularity is the quest to become more fully ourselves, free to be responsive to our distinctive individual gifts, and free to seek unity in this diversity. Borgo (2005) suggests that "the ability to incorporate and negotiate disparate perspecives and worldviews" (p. 19) is one of the unique strengths of current improvisation practices. Regardless of the path chosen, the data from this study suggests that constraints are meant to serve the making of music, and not the other way around. Although working

with constraints can be difficult, frustrating work, it can be seen as a vehicle through which our students may express their personal voices. For all his talk about the value of constraints, Stravinsky, of all composers, seems to embody freedom and originality in his compositions. The diversity of his compositional style stands as a testament to this. The constraints must have been a vehicle to serve his creativity. Can we help our students to see constraints as gift, rather than obligation? The gift is the transmission of cultural elements, that enable students to benefit from the "contributions of those who have gone before" (Eisner, 1985, p. 53). But as Eisner says, we want students to interpret these cultural elements, in a way that enables them to contribute their own voices.

One interesting contemporary example of a composer and improviser who works his craft mingling a variety of genres is the Norwegian choral composer Ola Gjeilo. Trained in jazz improvisation and classical piano, Gjeilo claims he does not seek to write and perform music that is multi-stylistic; his music is simply a product of who he is, as an artist who has absorbed many different stylistic influences. He states that he wants his music to be a "unique expression of my own musical identity" (as cited in Parsons & Gjeilo, 2010, para. 44). It might be said that his personal voice is flourishing, because he has worked to familiarize himself with performing and writing in different styles. His ability to playfully improvise along with his written choral works is at least somewhat enabled by his familiarity with the constraints of different styles. If the paradoxical ideas of work and play can be held in balance, this approach may prove to be fruitful in helping students to nurture their personal voices.

Implications for Practice

This section discusses the implications that these findings have for pedagogical practice. Specifically, the topics considered will be directed to piano teachers who teach students to read music notation. Often, but not exclusively, this type of learning is associated with playing music from the classical repertoire, and carries with it certain assumptions and associations. Some conceptual implications will be addressed specifically in this context. Other matters of a more practical nature may have broader application. Conceptual matters are encompassed in broad educational goals. A discussion of practical matters highlighted by the data analysis will include the handling of rhythm, phrasing, idea generation, styles, hand coordination, and keyboard geography.

Broad Pedagogical Goals: Benefits

One of the implications of this research, is that there are certain benefits to possessing the ability to improvise. This section will outline the possible conceptual benefits afforded to those who work with this medium, as these are suggested by the literature, and by the findings of this study. These include the possibility of a de-emphasis on the performance aspect of playing (and a de-emphasis of the constant quest for perfection that is often associated with performance goals), and the resultant creation of a role for creative music-making in daily life, the provision of an opportunity for a unique form of personal creative expression, and the development of aural skills.

Creativity and the student voice. With a de-emphasis on performance goals, one of the benefits of improvising may be found in the expansion of the view of the role that piano playing can fill in a young person's life. In accord with Craft's (2015) theory of little c creativity, and Wolterstorff's (1980) idea of the everydayness of art, the

implications of this study are that musical activities may be part of a creative everyday life. The literature indicates that with self-direction and engagement in activities such as improvising, students see an applicability of their studies to their own lives, and experience increased pleasure in music-making (Rowe et al., 2015). Opening the world of improvisation gives students permission to play imperfectly, to doodle at the piano, play by ear, experiment with sounds, change music. All of this requires having the time and space to be creative, in a self-directed sort of way. Although it may seem self-evident that this should already be occurring when playing a musical instrument, as discussed in the review of the literature, pianists who strictly read music often subtly acquire a different message: the score is sacred, and the exclusive source of all musical inspiration. With improvisation, students are given the message that they can search for musically creative ideas. In a changing world, it is our capacity as creative beings that is seen as the unique characteristic that sets us apart from the world of computers and artificial intelligence. One could argue that nurturing creativity is of utmost importance. Encouraging music readers to be creative in this way, may encourage creative development and the unique personal voice.

With improvising, the source of inspiration has the possibility to come from the student, who is now given permission to be creative, to play. The piano may even become a friend where daily acts of play and exploration may occur, as the student develops and expresses his or her unique voice. The literature similarly agrees about the value of giving students the opportunity to have a participatory and personal voice in their music-making (Griffin, 2011; Hickey & Webster, 2001). One of the participants in the study referenced the role that playing the piano has in her ability to "lose herself." As teachers, we usually

encourage our students to concentrate, and work hard, but allowing space for experimentation may be one way to encourage students to embrace a lifelong love of music, and to potentially become more creative individuals, who have a voice in directing the course of their learning. In so doing, it may be possible to moderate the performance emphasis that is often central to playing the piano, and encourage the integration of piano playing into the rhythm of a creative daily life.

Aural skills. The development of aural skills was also mentioned throughout the literature (Rogers, 2013; Wopereis et al., 2013), as affording one of the benefits of improvising. Although the duration of this study was too short to demonstrate strong evidence for the development of aural skills, there was some indication that this may occur. My own improvisational learning experiences involved playing by ear, and my abilities in this area improved as I worked at it, as evidenced by my impression that it got easier as time passed. When it comes to managing the elements of music aurally, the literature suggests that classically trained students lack an aural conception of phrase length (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002; Monk, 2010), and all three participants in this study did experience varying amounts of difficulty managing and manipulating phrases during their improvisations. I was required to play with a backing track, in order to address this challenge, so it appears that pedagogues are aware of the issue. Again, my own data reveals that I sensed an improvement in this area, but the student's portion of the study was too short to speak to this matter. Informal duo improvisations conducted during the lessons allowed some opportunity to develop listening and perceptual abilities, but the current study did not attempt to measure the quality of listening, or any improvements in this area.

Practical Pedagogical Considerations for Pianists

In my own improvising, I have observed that it might be possible to boil improvisation down to two basic elements: being able to keep going without hesitation, and having something to say. Learning to feel the phrase, and keep playing through it, is a reasonable first step for the new improviser, and the approach that I decided to take with this study. The movie provided a helpful constraint, and the measurement of success was left largely up to the student: they were left to determine if they liked the mood they established or not. I simply asked them to play with a sense of rhythm, and to keep going. I did not focus on trying to assess the quality or style of a student's musical ideas, but did comment on elements that seemed interesting or creative.

When considering practical issues, there are five that come to mind: managing rhythm and phrasing, ideas, styles, hand coordination, and keyboard geography. A good starting point for teachers who wish to help their students to improvise, is to begin by dealing with the rhythm and phrasing problems inherent to many music readers (Monk, 2010). As mentioned by McPherson and Gabrielsson (2002), reading musicians tend to gain eye skills and appear to do so at the expense of the ears. If piano teachers have an interest in making aural development a priority, there are measures that can be taken during the lesson, in order to work with our reading students to seek to develop an aural sense of phrase awareness and an ability to control meter. Playing in a group is another way to approach this issue, and should be encouraged, but this paper will discuss approaches for the private lesson.

Elements of rhythm and phrasing. The findings of this study agree with Monk's (2010) observation that reading musicians often lack an aural conception of phrase. In

order to begin to develop this ability, there are several techniques teachers may employ: backing tracks, question and answer rhythms, question and answer melodic phrases, and the use of rhythmic scales are but a few. By beginning with rhythmic copying exercises between teacher and student, and progressing to ever longer question and answer rhythms, while simultaneously extending this to melodies, this skill can be developed without the student even being cognizant of it. Even better, such things can be couched as games. Both student participants in this study indicated that they found these activities to be enjoyable and helpful.

The use of rhythmic scales is a fun and effective way to get a self-conscious child to improvise without even knowing what they are doing. This can be done in at least two different ways. One enjoyable option is a game referenced in chapter 2, by Thibault (2012). As student and teacher play together, and success is achieved, the rules change to grant increasing freedom to the student. There is something about the rhythmic propulsion of this exercise that makes it a lot of fun, and students always know when they have succeeded. A second way to work on phrasing, and get the self-conscious student improvising, is to have him/her play in the LH a short chord progression such as I IV I V I IV I V I with a backing track. The RH then plays melodies constructed out of the notes of the scale. Bradley Sowash (2007) is credited with creating this idea, and he suggests that it can be used to further develop rhythmic control and phrase contour. In the case of rhythmic control, students can be encouraged to choose to limit themselves to different rhythms (RH or LH), each time they play. In this way, one can develop the ability to control different LH accompaniments and different melodic rhythms. This study found

that one participant noticed a sameness from one improvisation session to the next, and that conscious working with rhythm is useful for combatting this issue.

This exercise can also be used to develop the ability to work with melodic motivic material, and general phrase shape. One melodic motive can be chosen as the basis for the improvisation, and be used either for unity or motivic development. Again, all of these things will be informed by the exact style that one is attempting to improvise within, and teachers will be able to discuss the specific techniques of different styles. This intent of these recommendations is not to propose a correct style, but rather to propose a platform from which to begin free exploration, and to allow for the building of skills. As outlined in the findings, this is similar to the idea of taking in nourishment: it is a way of feeding one's playing, and a way of breaking free from the printed page. Because all of these ideas occur without reading, it could be said that they are cast within the general idea of musicianship, as it was envisioned by educators such as Zoltan Kodály. Kodály's goal in music education was music literacy; "literate in the fullest sense of being able to look at a musical score and 'think' sound" (Choksy, 2000, p. 9). More recently, Kodály's approach, as well as that of Orff and Dalcroze, have been identified as 'sound before symbol' (Hanley & Montgomery, 2002; McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002). An adoption of the sound before symbol ideal, would suggest that improvisational playing could begin at the very earliest piano lessons. This stands in contrast to traditional piano lessons, which have a tendency to focus on symbol from the very early phases, and at times this approach can be more like symbol before sound. In this case, the student learns to read the conceptual musical symbol before they experience the sensory feeling of the symbol;

this is an example of the prioritization of the eyes over ears approach that often

characterizes piano instruction.

One of the realities of playing the piano is that players are most often alone. It can

be helpful to address the solitary nature of the pianist's music making; the use of a

rhythmic backing track when improvising is a practical way to do this. The provision of a

steady beat, with or without harmonic content propels the player forward in a meaningful

way, and prevents the all-to-common tendency to create bars of irregular lengths. This is

not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with bars of irregular lengths, but I will

suggest that one would optimally like to be able to control this element, not be controlled

by it. As well, music is generally constructed with some sort of sense of phrase, and the

best analogy for this would be to compare a phrase to a sentence. A lot of words gain

meaning when they are combined together into a sentence, and similarly, many notes can

gain meaning when they are assembled in a sort of musical sentence. Admittedly,

phrasing may vary from style to style, so this is one area where the teacher will want to

exercise judgement. A reasonable goal might be found in asking our students to be able to

control phrase shape, rather than simply being controlled by whatever the hands produce.

In so doing, students will acquire increased freedom, and develop the ability to play in a

group setting, since matters of phrase and rhythm are central to making music with others.

Ideas and styles. This study found that coming up with ideas, or expressing

internal ideas can be challenging. It has already been suggested that it is possible to

nourish the creative self through various outside influences either through mastering

certain styles, or through studying the music of others. One must consider that though

there are general skills to master, these often seem to occur within a certain style. It

would be interesting to develop a pedagogical approach that is not completely cast within the jazz tradition. This could include developing fluency in certain elements of the jazz tradition, in combination with other styles and a non-stylistic approach to issues of musical tension, variation, and balance. Perhaps techniques from Mozart and Chopin, as well as pop music could be developed. As well, students could be encouraged to explore the music they listen to, and bring these influences into their improvising. It should be noted that there is much crossover between the notion of feeding the personal voice with outside influences, and the concept of constraint. The two are almost inseparable, so teachers will be able to consider the different sources for ideas for their students if they are open to it.

Hand coordination. Hand coordination appeared to be an issue for all three participants, although the data got at this information differently. All three participants self-reported some degree of frustration with the matter, although one of the participants was less bothered by it. Findings for both student participants were strengthened by my observational data.

The student who said "it's just so much easier to coordinate your hands when you're looking off a piece of paper" made a perceptive observation that could be helpful to teachers of improvisation. It is interesting to note that this particular matter was not specifically revealed in the review of the literature. Teachers will need to plan for this to be an issue when teaching improvisation. One practical way to work on it, would be to assign students a theme and variations project. This is especially fun to do at Christmastime, when there is a readily available supply of well-known tunes to work with. Choose a left-hand pattern, to apply to right-hand melodies, and begin by practicing

blocked or broken chords in simple rhythms. Students may advance to more complex rhythms as appropriate.

This study found that with more complex rhythmic accompaniments, it may be helpful to provide students with a written version of the melody, which enables them to keep their focus on the issues of coordinating accompaniment, and not tune recall as well. Generally, it is best not to introduce techniques of great complexity, or too many new concepts at one time. By being fairly specific with instructions about accompaniments, and targeting activities to meet a students' current skill level, teachers will be able to help students experience success with an activity such as this.

Keyboard geography. One matter for consideration that was discovered during this study, was the degree to which the student participants confined their playing to "five finger position." As described in chapter 4, there seemed to be a comfort zone that students played within; the piano has 88 keys, but a much smaller number than that were used here for the movie improvisation project. Given the dramatic nature of the movie, it was a little surprising that both students chose to stay in the middle of the keyboard. There are many possible reasons for this, and these could range from the desire to play it safe by limiting the number of difficulties, to not having thought of it, to not knowing how to do it. Another possibility is that the lessons that the students have had thus far may themselves have confined the students' imaginations. Did previous work with closed position chords lead to this way of playing for the project? Was this an example of a constraint applying an unintended limitation on creativity? Were students so focused on what they were doing, that they lacked the freedom to vary their playing? (Houvinen et al., 2011)?

Teachers may wish to discover ways overcome this seeming natural tendency, and encourage their students to move around on the keys. For my part of the lessons, one of the teachers gave specific instructions to remind me to make use of the entire keyboard, thereby increasing variety in my music. Something as simple as an instruction to use the full piano may be enough, or students may need help with how to physically move their hands up or down, when no written page is telling them to do it. In this case, it would seem reasonable to use the finger positions of scales, and overtly tell students how to finger a move. This was the approach taken by one of the mentors with whom I studied, and it was helpful.

The role of free play. At this point, most piano teachers will recognize that these suggestions are starting to sound a lot like the rest of music education: we are always trying to encourage our students to be able to control their hands. The difference, is that the above exercises are meant to additionally elicit in the player, a sense of freedom when playing without notes. Regardless, it is more work. The good news is that the findings of this study suggest that there may be times in the lesson, or at home, that free play is desired. It appears that both play and work are needed, and that the work, although frustrating, serves to feed the play.

The findings of this study also indicate that musicians who are first and foremost music readers, may also experience difficulty with the idea of keeping playing no matter what. It is reasonable to attribute this in part to the reality that piano players spend most of their time making music alone, rather than in groups. They become accustomed to stopping at any time, and this is something that is automatically protected against when playing in a group. In addition to this idea, the current study found that players struggle to

keep going when the ideas are not flowing or are not working out as intended. This would suggest that learning to improvise has two elements to it: practicing techniques (the nourishment element) and practicing developing flow.

Holding these two paradoxical concepts in tandem may be difficult, but teachers may want to consider seeking to balance them. It may be advisable to assign different types of playing practice, in particular, the type that encourages the development of fluidity. If the focus is always on technique, this may be underemphasized. Two participants in this study were more likely to punctuate their playing with stopping, and needed to be encouraged to keep the playing going no matter how unhappy they may have felt about the quality at that moment. There are many possible reasons that a piano player may feel the need to stop; this study did not investigate the reasons. It is possible that the perfectionist tendencies encouraged by reading music, and performing with complete accuracy, carry over into improvising. As mentioned in chapter 4, this study referred to tricking the listener, or making the listener think that the player fully intended everything that just happened. It would be difficult to demonstrate, but one may consider whether gaining this skill in tricking the listener may bring freedom into other areas of the perfectionistic player's world.

Two piano improvisation. Playing along with students either on a second piano, or on the same instrument may provide an additional way to practice the idea of keeping going no matter what. For this study, I used some free improvisation activities during the lessons, in order to stimulate improvisational playing at home. For example, one player is assigned to play a set chord progression in any rhythm of their choosing. The four chord pop progression is familiar to most students, and can form an effective basis for this

activity. The other player focuses on playing a melody, with an awareness of the chord progression being used. There are many potential learning opportunities associated with this interesting activity. One player can help to keep the other going, so there is the opportunity to practice playing without stopping. As well, students may work on their rhythmic and listening skills, awareness of phrasing, and motivic development, especially if there is a predetermined motive to work with. Switching roles allows both individuals the chance to provide either the rhythmic chordal foundation, or the melodic material. With this exercise, the teacher is able to decide whether to grant that the playing will be free, or a teaching opportunity. In the case of the latter, suggestions about rhythmic accompaniments, and melodic devices may be utilized. Whatever the purpose, it is beneficial to enjoy making music with our students in this way. Students who normally read music will be thrilled to learn they can make up their own music and sound good, so it is good to record it, even the first time.

Student voice. In terms of developing the student voice, piano teachers can choose to ask students to share with them, the music the student has experimented with at home. I have often been surprised to learn of some of the experimentation my students have been doing, and this can serve many purposes. First of all, it allows the student to tell you about themselves, and your willingness to listen provides an affirmation that it is good for them to engage in experimentation. As teachers, we can take this as a sign that our students are taking ownership of their music-making, even if it is not what we want them to do. We know that music will be more likely to be an organic part of their lives long after they leave our studio, if they are taking ownership. Additionally, when students play for us, we have the opportunity to pick up some new ideas that we can then employ

with other students. For example, I learned that one of the participants in this study, followed up after the study, and began to make her own music. She utilized a chord progression of her choosing, and began to sing along with it, making up her own songs. When surveyed at the start of the project, she had indicated that she preferred figuring out songs by ear over making up her own music. What she played for me was nothing like her result with the movie project, but something seemed to have been sparked with her. I hope that she was inspired by the idea that anyone can be creative and come up with their own music.

Part of the reality of being a reading musician, is that there is a sense that you may play 1,000 right notes, and only one wrong note, but it is that one note that everyone notices. It can be hoped that learning to improvise may have the potential to release students from the domination of the page when reproducing music. Although the written score will always be held in high regard, perhaps experiencing music-making outside of this paradigm will grant the reading musician a small sense of freedom from perfectionistic tendencies.

One final thought implication for teaching revolves around the uniqueness of each student. The very nature of private piano teaching carries with it the idea that it is possible to meet each student's needs on an individual basis. Given that there were variations as well as similarities between the learning experiences of the three participants in this study, it seems reasonable to adopt a pedagogical view that embraces general principles while still honoring particularity. The idea of respecting particularity in musical styles was mentioned previously, and here I will suggest that there is also particularity in learning styles. Students may exhibit traits that show them to be bold,

cautious, creative, trusting, expressive, playful, natural improvisers or readers, or ear

players, or any other number of possibilities. Our students are all as unique as musicians,

as they are as people, and the benefit of a private lesson lies in the ability to

accommodate these differences in preferences and strengths. When it comes to fostering

creativity, Burnard and Younker (2002) noticed tremendous variation in student responses

to creative compositional activities. Collier and Kendrick (2016) likewise suggest that a

flexible approach is of importance when teaching creative activities. The findings from

this current study affirm that both creative paths and learning preferences and styles seem

to vary from individual to individual, and teachers will want to be aware of this when

teaching improvisation. Some students will crave more freedom, other will need more

support, thus it is important to be sensitive to the needs of the student.

Implications for Future Research

Action research is a valuable type of inquiry and reflection through which

teachers seek to improve their own teaching practice (Creswell, 2012; Mills, 2007; Sagor,

2005). Essentially, it is a structured extension of a daily thoughtful teaching practice,

which allows teachers to reflect upon the successes and failures they observe in response

to their teaching. This action research project was initiated with the intention of opening

up dialogue about the subject of teaching improvisation to classical piano students. Many

issues were brought to light, and as a result there are several implications for future

research, potentially also within the action research field.

One noteworthy question remaining at the conclusion of this study, is whether a

coherent non-jazz pedagogical approach to piano improvisation could be generated.

Classical piano instruction long ago divorced itself from improvisation, but could it be

reunited in any way? It would be useful to explore the development of a pedagogy of improvisation for beginning classical piano students that is modelled on a jazz approach, yet stylistically distinct. A second suggestion for research pertains to pursuing an evaluation of duet or group improvisation as a means for the solo piano player to learn to improvise, and the third question would relate to studying whether improvisation would be a good instructional approach for students who are having difficulty with reading music. In any of these instances, it might also be interesting to further explore whether differences in improvisational aptitude are related to differences in gender.

The first question, that of developing a pedagogy for piano students from the very beginning phases, is a project that would require some time to explore. One first step would be to become familiar with the way that jazz teachers instruct beginners, and adapt a parallel approach that would be workable within the classical style. This might again require the teacher to become a teacher-learner, observing a jazz beginner's lessons for a period of many months. It would be useful to understand how the jazz pedagogue integrates teaching the development of hand position and technical facility at the piano, alongside the development of musical elements such as rhythmic control, ear playing, phrasing, and harmonic and motivic manipulation. An observational period would allow the teacher who is generally focused on developing notation reading, to explore the strengths of another wholly different method. Additional sources of information could be found in familiarizing oneself with the principles of Suzuki, Kodály, Dalcroze, and Robert Pace methods, all of which have varying degrees of emphasis on the aural aspect of music-making. A significant amount of effort would be required to essentially create a new approach to beginning piano, but the end result could possibly produce a student

who is strong in reading notation, and able to improvise as well. This would be an interesting way to build on the current research. In this instance, longitudinal study would be interesting, as it would afford the opportunity to explore student responses to different types of instruction either over a period of time, or to compare the responses of two different groups.

The second suggestion for possible future research would involve exploring the development of improvisation within a duet or group lesson. The duet approach would easily be adaptable to the private piano lesson, whereas the group would necessitate a separate lesson, but would allow for a completely different teaching experience for the purposes of a research project. In the case of group improvisation, teachers Higgins and Campbell (2010) suggest group improvisation activities based on the book *Free to be Musical: Group Improvisation in Music*, and it would be interesting to explore some of these activities in the context of playing the piano. In the case of duet improvisation, ideas could be adapted from the *Ontario Arts Curriculum*, which for grades 1 through 10 has a strong emphasis on using both call and response, and rhythmic ostinato improvisation. Augusto Monk (2013) proposes eight strategies for group improvisation that would work in a duo setting as well. He suggests experimenting with copying, adapting, contrasting, punctuating, highlighting, supporting, signposting and allowing, all of which are an expansion of the call and response idea. Group improvisation is focused on the development of what Monk terms, "collaborative improvisation" (p. 76), and seeks to develop communication skills, and the ability to work with others. These qualities are both prioritized in Ontario' Arts curriculum (OME, 2009; OME, 2010). Monk mentions that group improvisation can facilitate the development of active listening as it is guided

by conscious decision making. This current study touched on elements of conscious thinking in improvisation, but further work in this area would allow for more exploration of the think–unthink paradox explored in chapter 4. The setting of a group or duo lessons would provide a unique context in which to explore the paradoxical ideas inherent in learning to improvise. A research project that seeks to outline and explore a unified progressive sequence of duo or group lessons, perhaps combining materials from multiple resources, could provide an interesting addition to research on improvisation for the piano.

The third potential research topic is that of improvisation for struggling music readers. Some students appear to have a great deal of difficulty coordinating their hands and reading notation. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine which of these is the greater problem. Both improvisation and reading notation are challenging activities, but it would be interesting to know if one is more suited to certain types of learners than others. Much is made in the literature of the different learning styles, and future research could explore whether these differences can be acknowledged and aided by taking varied approaches with specific learners. For students who appear to have great difficulty reading music, one possible research project would involve working with such students in a strictly ear-based approach. There are many questions that could be addressed, ranging from exploring innate student preference, to possible differences in affinity to one approach or the other.

An action research study could build on the current project, working with one or two students who are experiencing reading and coordination challenges. The student's regular lessons could, for a time, focus solely on improvisational activities and exercises

that have them interact with the elements of music that they would normally encounter when reading music, but in a strictly aural context. It would be interesting to see whether or not these students would find it any easier to coordinate two handed activities when the reading aspect is removed. If this were a study of significant duration, one could then return to music reading after a time, and explore any possible changes. For example, whether the participants found that after increasing hand coordination abilities without reading, they were then able to add back the reading element. Any discoveries could have a far-reaching impact on the way that teachers approach working with children who struggle in this area.

Conclusion

This action research study on improvisation was concerned with exploring the learning experiences of two student participants and myself, a teacher-learner, as we engaged with the art of improvisation. All three participants were accustomed to making music by reading notation, an approach to music that is typical for those learning within the classical music idiom. Improvisation is typically omitted from the music-reader's experience with music-making, so this project was unique in this respect. Though unique, the inspiration for this research is part of a general trend reflecting an increased interest in creative music-making within the field of music education. Both composition and improvisation are of interest to researchers and pedagogues, though the classical piano field is perhaps one of the later fields in which an interest has been exhibited. The historical precedent for improvising at the piano is reasonably strong, despite its general abandonment since the 18th century. This research explored the role of constraints and

freedom in encouraging the development of improvisational abilities, and also some of the challenges and benefits to pianists as they interacted with the genre of improvisation.

All of this was cast within a theoretical framework that values the development of everyday creativity. An acknowledgement of the value of each individual voice, and a theory of the everydayness of art provided additional contexts in which to view the findings. The benefits of improvising were found to include not only increased facility with musical skills, but also increased opportunity for creative expression, the opportunity to develop the personal creative voice, and there was some suggestion that improvisation helps to develop a player's aural abilities. At a time when the cultivation of creativity is widely regarded as a vital prerequisite for 21st century living, musicians are positioned in a unique situation: piano teachers have before them, the opportunity to encourage the development of creative abilities in all of their students. Each creative voice can be encouraged to find expression, as part of our quest to become persons who live thoughtfully and creatively, in response to the unique gifts that each of us have been given.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1) How do you think your improvisation went today? Is there anything you would do differently?

2) How do you feel about improvising with your teacher in the lesson?

3) Do you ever do it at home (when I don't make it part of your homework), just make up your own music? How do you decide what to do then?

4) Most of the time we play songs by other people, what do you think about being able to make up your own songs? Does it feel similar, or different to playing music made up by other people?

5) On a scale of one to ten, how much do you like improvising? Being close to ten means you like it a lot, and being close to one means you don't like it at all. Is there anything that helps you to like it more? Is there anything that makes it easier to do?

6) What do you like most about lessons? What do you like least? What do you find to be the hardest?

7) Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your improvising?

8) Was there any time in today's lesson when you completely improvised it? Like when you forgot what you were planning?

9) How are you finding this assignment?

10) Is there anything that we've done in the lesson that has been helpful?

11) How would you teach improvising?

Appendix B

Reflective Journal—Sample Statement

Date: Tuesday, June 7th 2016
Reflection on lesson with Mentor Fred
Entry:

The big learning point for me with this lesson was preparing something specific for each component of the lesson. For chord scaling, I came up with a motive and wrote it down (the day before). I did the same thing with the free binary improvisation, and also, the secondary motive, (I didn't tell him I wrote it down). He observed that what I did was organized and unified by a single idea, instead of random noodling. I think from now on I will force myself to commit to one idea for each day and exercise. Maybe writing it down will be necessary for me initially, because it makes me accountable to something. Ultimately I would like to get better at being able to aurally recall/retain a motive/idea.

We talked a little about the idea that reading is easier for me, and reading lead sheets (making up accompaniments) is easier for someone else. It all depends on your perspective. Many times in the past two weeks, I wanted to practice from written music, not improvise, which I am finding so difficult. It's funny, because sometimes I might resist, or find difficult, practicing from written notes. Seen from this perspective, being handed the notes seems easy! Mentor Fred says "it all depends on which door you come through", and this reminds me of a conversation that I had in the Apple Store with a young man, about reading music versus ear playing. He said "you have one, and you have to train the other". One seems to be your first skill, and somehow that makes the other harder to acquire. Maybe instead of beating ourselves up about being "weak" in the other area, we should just accept that this is the case, and relax about it.

Mentor Fred is very thoughtful about his teaching (and well-prepared). He never says "just improvise". He always gives me a structure to go from, which, ironically, is freeing. He is much more of a pedagogue that the previous two mentors I tried, who were less good at giving guidance. Also, Fred is positive and never makes me feel bad.

His thought for the day: "This is a very demanding art form. Dance with yourself. You'll never get classical level perfection."

Appendix C

Ethics Clearance Letter

Brock University
Research Ethics Office
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 4/6/2016

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: COLLIER, Diane - Teacher Education

FILE: 15-221 - COLLIER

TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project   STUDENT: Catherine Willard
                                                              SUPERVISOR: Diane Collier

TITLE: Improvisation in Music

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW   Expiry Date: 4/28/2017

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 4/6/2016 to 4/28/2017.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 4/28/2017. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:
   a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
   b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
   c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
   d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Kimberly Maich, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.