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PRAXES FOR CONFIDENT MUSIC IMPROVISING

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ABSTRACT

Scholars in many fields of study have examined confidence. Within music education, confidence is often studied through the lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory, and for music improvisation, much confidence work has been accomplished through survey design and examined confidence to teach improvisation or gender differences. Though Bandura's self-efficacy model provides a useful framework to study confidence as part of music (especially in understanding why people's behavior may differ markedly in improvising), confidence may be important to improvising distinct from self-efficacy theory, and deserves inductive and explorative treatment; I completed three qualitative research studies on confident music improvising (CMI). These three studies are shared in this dissertation, a phenomenological study of CMI from the perspective of improvising performers (Chapter 2), a case study of teachers at the jazz portion of a summer music camp (Chapter 3), and most recently (Chapter 4), I explored CMI within the parameters of improvisation teachers helping students build a personal, subjective sense of confidence, which is needed to improvise musically.

In the first study, interviews and observations were conducted with three self-described confident music improvisers: a bluegrass fiddler, a jazz bassist, and a baroque violinist. Participants described their learning experiences with CMI. The following essential themes emerged from that analysis – *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, *sequential experiences*, *passion for a style*, and *openness to*

learning. The first three of these themes were considered pedagogical and the final two themes dispositional.

In the second study, case study design was employed to test the essential pedagogical themes—*listening*, *criticism-free environment*, and *sequential experiences*—against situational reality of the jazz portion of a one-week summer music camp. The focus of this second study was on teaching CMI. Interviews, observations, and documents were used to triangulate data. *Teaching through questions* emerged as a theme of teaching CMI.

In the third study, an emergent, responsive interviewing research design was used to explore the experiences of expert improvisation teachers' teaching praxes for improving student confidence to improvise music. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand praxes of teaching CMI, that is, how expert improvisation teachers conceive the techniques they use to increase student confidence to improvise music. There were two research questions. What teaching praxes do participants use to help unconfident students become confident music improvisers? How does student gender affect teaching praxes?

Keywords: improvisation, confidence, praxis, teaching, music

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Praxes for Confident Music Improvising

Americans seem to value creativity as a central aspect of education, and yet our educational system educates students out of their creativity too often (Robinson, 2001/11). As Robinson stated, "Everyone has huge creative capacities. The challenge is to develop them" (p. 2).   I taught music for twelve years, eleven in a large, urban school district. Over time, I developed a strong belief in the importance of music improvisation as spontaneous musical composition[1] in my elementary bands and orchestras. I felt music improvisation might play a vital role in fostering student creativity in schools.

My understanding of music improvisation brings together two theories, praxial music education and free play. Praxial music education theorists Elliott and Silverman (1995/2015) wrote, "What distinguishes an improvisation from a performance is the human effort to *compose in real time,* though the weight of this distinction depends on cultural appropriations" (p. 254, emphasis in original). The emphasis on context to music improvising is also found in Nachmanovitch's (1990) description of improvisation as spiritual, spontaneous and liberating *free play*. That author suggested, "The heart of improvisation is the free play of consciousness as it draws, writes, paints, and plays the raw material emerging from the unconscious. Such play entails a certain degree of risk" (p. 9).

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[1] This was my working definition of improvisation as a teacher. It was developed as an improvising musician, is shared with many jazz musicians, and is informed by, confirmed, and complicated within the literature cited later in this dissertation.

Nachmanovitch also explains, "Play is always a matter of context. It is not what we do but how we do it" (p. 43). Improvisation in drawing, writing, painting, and playing music are each contextually different. Further, there are *cultural appropriations* connected to improvisation in jazz, rock-n-roll, hip-hop, bluegrass, and other musical styles and genres that affect essentially what improvisations are in context.

As I look back at my music education, music improvisation was underemphasized and music reproduction skills, such as technical perfection and facsimile of music as the composer's intent, were emphasized. Improvisation was not taught in undergraduate instrumental methods courses where I learned to teach band and orchestra. Instead, those courses focused on teaching music literacy through method books, tone production, ensemble conducting, and band and orchestra literature. I came to believe these are important to music education but not enough. Moving from my training (in *music as reproduction*) to the belief in teaching *music as spontaneous action*, and the implication of this belief to my teaching praxis, was a reflective process that continues.

After my undergraduate university studies, in addition to teaching in public elementary schools, I began playing New Orleans style jazz music semi-professionally. Music improvisation was an important part of this music. Knowing there was some disconnection between my belief about music (that music ought to be *for* creativity) and my elementary band and orchestra teaching, I gradually began to incorporate improvisation in elementary band and orchestra classes.

Through a process of trial and error, drawing on student teaching experiences I had with an elementary jazz band, and the three years I taught general music (employing the Orff approach to improvisation), I developed an approach to teaching improvisation, through early jazz music, to elementary instrumentalists. This approach focused on these five concepts; listening to recordings, learning standards by rote, playing along with piano accompaniment (context), echoing musical phrases (developing vocabulary[2]), and building interest by encouraging students to take individual solos (agency).

I still taught music reading skills through methods books and band literature, but now many lessons began with the students listening to recordings of jazz standards, learning songs by rote, and improvising solos. I felt rote-learning was important because jazz is historically an aural tradition. I played piano as the students performed the songs from memory so that students would hear the underlying chord structure as they improvised. I encouraged every student to play solos so they would develop a sense of agency – students would feel empowered to create their own music. My approach seems in line with Borgo's (2007) description of a pedagogical orientation traditionally found in jazz communities, where "learning is not a matter of what one knows, but who one becomes" (p. 62). I hoped my students, through performing situated improvisatory music, would become creative people (people who create / creators).

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[2] In jazz, these phrases are often called licks. Some of these licks are codified and some are not. I extracted most of the phrases from the songs students were performing. The use of the term "vocabulary" echoes the work of Azzara (1993) who defines improvisation as a "manifestation of musical thought… an individual has internalized a music vocabulary and is able to understand and to express musical ideas spontaneously" (p. 330).

I came to believe that music improvisation could facilitate creative thought and this creativity might transfer to nonmusical spontaneity – a belief that seems to be corroborated by an fMRI study of the brains of improvisers (Limb & Braun, 2008). Interpreting their empirical data, Limb and Braun suggested, "the similar findings seen for both Scale and Jazz paradigms, despite the musical simplicity of the former, strongly suggest that our findings are *attributable to neural mechanisms that underlie spontaneity more broadly* rather than those specific to high-level musicality alone" (p. 6, emphasis added). The findings that music improvising might affect *neural mechanisms* of *spontaneity* can inform advocacy for music improvisation pedagogy. If the neural mechanisms at play during music improvisation affect other actions requiring spontaneity (such as invention and problem solving) it seems logical that learning music improvisation has implications for music and beyond music. Music improvisation pedagogy seems to have wide-ranging implications for humans as spontaneous creators.

And yet, *confidence* (or lack-thereof) is an issue for many music improvisation students and teachers (Alexander, 2012; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007; Shevock, in-press-a; Shevock, 2013 February; Shevock, 2013 November; Watson, 2010; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). Without confidence to improvise, it is impossible for music teachers and students to reap the benefits improvisation pedagogy might inspire. Because of the possible transferable nature of improvisation to spontaneity in general, music education that includes improvisation can play a distinctive role in the public school educational system, but more needs to be known about students'

confidence, the learning of music creativity, and how confident music improvising (CMI) might be taught.

Students Learning Improvisation

Improvised music is a meaningful part of many of the world's music cultures (Bailey, 1992). Allsup (1997) described learning music through improvisation as *authentic*, with the potential to facilitate *transcendence*. The opportunity to facilitate transcendent experience provides reason enough to learn how to effectively teach improvisation. Coker (1964) suggested five factors affect the success of jazz improvisations, "intuition, intellect, emotion, sense of pitch, and habit" (p. 3). Consequently, the author suggested focusing on developing student *intellect* to improvise, as "four of these elements… are largely subconscious" (p. 3). Can these *elements* be enculturated?

The concept of teaching improvisation may be limited, because *teaching* improvisation may be problematic. Hickey (2009) recommended employing "enculturation" (p. 286), focusing on students' freedom to explore music rather than teaching improvisation. Kingscott and Durrant (2010) investigated jazz keyboard and organ improvisation phenomenologically and concluded, "… by a process of assimilation and formal learning, one reaches a point where meaningful improvisation may take place" (p. 141). These conclusions are consistent with Berliner's (1994) descriptions of jazz musicians. Perhaps formal teaching needs to evolve into less-formal learning activities so students can be enculturated to improvise. This seems consistent with Gordon's (2003) audiated music

improvisation sequences, which move a student from discrimination learning to inference learning, and Lucy Green's (2008) informal learning pedagogy.

Many authors have connected learning to improvise with acquiring a vocabulary and have placed an emphasis on the development of aural skills (e.g. Azzara, 1993; Coker, 1964; Martin, 2005; Shevock, in-press-a). "The most common form of improvisation is ordinary speech" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 17). While many people are confident speakers and can fluently hold conversations, it may be that musicians do not have the necessary musical vocabulary or grammar to improvise confidently. According to Nachmanovitch, the *vocabulary* of music improvisation is the "building blocks," and the *grammar* is the "rules for combining them" (p. 17). Martin (2005) adds, "the apparent spontaneity of improvisers and improvising is actually the result of extensive work and experience in acquiring the musical vocabulary of an improvising style community and, gradually and painstakingly, developing ways to extend that vocabulary in personal ways" (p. 169). For Martin (who is expanding upon Elliott's praxial music education) *personal* expression is built within a social context (i.e. an improvising style or genre).

Teacher confidence to teach improvisation may be important to improvisation pedagogy. Music educators learning to improvise have been researched ethnographically by Della Pietra and Campbell (1995), who looked at social interactions during a 5-week music teacher-training segment focused on improvisation. They concluded students' sensitivity to the process of improvisation was enhanced through learning to improvise in a group setting.

Employing a survey, Madura (2007) concluded that confidence to teach improvisation was improved through a summer jazz workshop. These findings were echoed in Bernhard's (2013) survey of music education majors.

Confident Improvisation and Gender

Another aspect of CMI, especially in jazz scholarship, is gender. Research findings have been inconsistent regarding gender and how individuals experience CMI (Alexander, 2012; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). This research suggests female improvisers are less confident than male improvisers (Wehr-Flowers, 2006), and then in replication that there is no significant difference (Alexander, 2012). Wehr-Flower's research is in line with Caudwell (2010) who suggested, historically, jazz improvisation has denied women equal footing with men. Certain instruments are viewed with masculinity, while female jazz musicians are often consigned to the role of vocalist. Caudwell continued, "… it is worth noting that Black African American women singing the blues, prior to the shifts to swing and bebop, were expressing, often through vocal improvisation and visceral narrative, their gendered and sexualized daily experiences" (p. 242).

MacDonald and Wilson (2006) suggested gender identity takes a back seat to jazz musician identity. "The need to maintain identity as a jazz musician is, then, prioitised [sic] over the identity project of femininity, to the extent that the upset of discriminatory practices are positions as an individual problem" (p. 71). Individuals negotiate identity in the social context of the jazz ensemble. If gender is an issue to developing an improvising identity, then feeling confident as an improviser might also be affected by gender.

Musicking

My experiences with musicking jazz have directed my own reflective understanding of improvisation, and my understanding of improvisation was expanded through interviewing and observing improvising musicians who play jazz (Shevock, in-press-a; Shevock, 2013 February; Shevock, in-press-c), bluegrass (Shevock, in-press-a; Shevock, 2014 April), baroque (Shevock, in-press-a), and rock (Shevock, 2014 April). I also conducted a historical study of an improvisation teacher (Shevock, in-press-b). How an individual chooses to music has implications for his or her view of the world. This is because musicking expresses "ideal relationships" (Small, 2001, p. 345), how people believe they should live among one another. Small's (1998) *musicking* is important to CMI within the context of *ideal relationships*, improvising musicians represent a certain set of values. Confidence is important in music improvising because music improvising is not the primary way many musicians in school music programs regularly music.

Free Play

Music improvisation can be understood within psychological and spiritual contexts, wherein liberatory experiences can lead to the free play of consciousness (Nachmanovitch, 1990). As Nachmanovitch suggested, "Improvisation is the most natural and widespread form of music making" (p. 6), and yet improvisation has not played a substantial role in the "literate musical tradition in the West" (p. 6), or in public schools, for more than a century. Because improvising music can require overcoming fear, it may require a "breakthrough experience" (p.11),

which Nachmanovitch connects to the Zen concept of *satori* – "moments of illumination and moments of change of heart" (p. 11). Therefore, CMI, especially for students who have been taught in the *literate musical tradition of the West*, may require teaching that leads to breakthrough experiences, and to overcoming psychological and spiritual obstacles to CMI.

Praxis

My understanding of praxes of CMI includes praxis as a set of improvisation instruction examples for practice, which increase student confidence. How improvisation pedagogues conceive their practices is important. I feel my line of research (Shevock, in-press-a; Shevock, 2013 February; Shevock, 2013 November) has been particularly praxial because each research study was initiated without first distinguishing CMI within the context of a set social theory like Bandura's model of self-efficacy.

Aristotle defined praxis, "*praxis means active reflection and reflective action for the positive transformation of people's everyday lives and situations*" (in Elliott & Silverman, 1995/2015, p. 43). It seems Limb and Braun's (2008) findings about the possible transferability of music improvisation to spontaneity in general makes improvisation pedagogy praxial in the sense that it involves a transformation in *everyday lives* beyond music. My use of *praxis* is, in many ways, in line with how praxis is used in education (e.g. Freire, 1970/93) and music education (e.g. Elliott & Silverman). Echoing Aristotle, Freire defined praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). In this way, praxis can be viewed as larger than the application of improvisation,

but also includes a reflective process. I understand *confidence* as a personal transformation of the students' *world*. If teachers can foster confidence, there is a transformation that allows students to express themselves within the context of the classroom and/or public concerts. Elliott and Silverman suggested, "Praxis is guided by *an informed and ethical disposition to act rightly*—musically, socially, communally, and so forth—with continuous concern for protecting and advancing human creativity" (p. 44, emphasis in original). In its concern for confidence, teaching CMI is an *ethical* choice. Teacher praxes of CMI might help advance *human creativity,* by fostering more improvisation and more creativity.

Regelski (1998) furthered our field's understanding of praxis by contrasting it with the concept of techne. As he wrote, "In ancient Greece, then, techne referred to manual skill, craft, productively working with one's hands" (p. 25). Therefore, techne involves "technical know-how" (p. 25), and making things, where praxis is "inherently social" (p. 28). As the author continues, "praxis regularly calls into question the 'good' of many products of technology (techne) in terms of their consequences for human health, and prescribes alternative 'ideals' that ought to be" (p. 29). In the current dissertation, informed by Regelski's distinctions between praxis and techne, praxis is separated from mere teaching techniques by its reflective and social nature.

A Praxial Question

The scholarly explications of praxis by Elliott and Silverman (1995/2015), Freire (1970/93), and Regelski (1998) have helped me construct a praxial guiding question for this dissertation. How do teachers think about and enact music

improvisation praxis to improve student confidence to improvise music? Because of this praxial guiding question, understanding how expert improvisation teachers conceive of their teaching is important. My previous research into CMI has explored the concept through participant perception (Shevock, in-press-a) and observable teaching techniques (Shevock, 2013 February).

Summary of "The Experience of Confident Music Improvising"[3]

In this phenomenological study (Shevock, in-press-a), I interviewed three self-described confident music improvisers: a bluegrass fiddler, a jazz bassist, and a baroque violinist. During the two interviews with each participant, and observations of improvised performances, each participant told me stories describing experiences they felt were significant to their building confidence to improvise. I analyzed this data using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. The following essential themes emerged from that analysis – *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, *sequential experiences*, *passion for a style*, and *openness to learning*. The first three of these themes were considered pedagogical, while the final two themes dispositional.

Summary of "Teaching Confident Music Improvising at Summer Jazz Camp"[4]

I tested the essential pedagogical themes that emerged—*listening*, *criticism-free environment*, and *sequential experiences*—against the situational reality of the jazz portion of a one-week summer music camp through case study

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[3] The abstract and link to the full article, *The Experience of Confident Music Improvising,* is detailed in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[4] The full research report, *Teaching Confident Music Improvising at a Summer Jazz Camp,* is detailed in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

design (Shevock, 2013 February). I conducted interviews with the jazz camp founder and a past participant, and the primary data were observations of the classes, which I member checked via email to insure accuracy. Each of the essential pedagogical themes was directly observable at the camp. Teachers at this camp taught by posing questions, and *teaching through questions* emerged as an additional theme. Through conducting these two studies, my interest in identifying and categorizing praxes of teachers teaching CMI was beginning to emerge.

I view these sequenced research studies (*The Experience of Confident Music Improvising*, and *Teaching Confident Music Improvising at a Summer Jazz Camp*) as substantial pilots to my emerging dissertation research, *Praxes for Confident Music Improvising[5]*, the purpose of which is to understand praxes of teaching CMI, that is, how expert improvisation teachers conceive the techniques they use to increase student confidence to improvise music.

Introductory Conclusion

Considering Nachmanovitch's (1998) concept of improvisation as *free play of consciousness*, especially the challenges of obstacles blocking improvisation, praxis, the challenges to developing creative capacities (Robinson, 2001/11), and the research I have conducted in CMI, exploring CMI teaching praxes seems important. I approached the following dissertation with this guiding question – How do effective music improvisation teachers teach students – who may be unconfident – to confidently improvise music? The present research, by

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[5] The full research report, *Praxes for Confident Music Improvising*, is detailed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

discovering praxes of CMI pedagogy, may provide music teachers with music improvisation pedagogical tools and theory.

Chapter 2: The Experience of Confident Music Improvising

ABSTRACT

Improvisation is a transcendent act that can help students experience self-liberation, confidence, freedom, and inspiration. However, some musicians are not confident enough to improvise. Therefore this research explored the experience of confident music improvising (CMI). In nursing research, Evans, Bell, Sweeney, Morgan & Kelly (2010) established a working definition of *confidence,* "an acquired attribute that provides individuals with the ability to maintain a positive and realistic perception of self and abilities" (p. 335). In psychological research, Avni-Babad (2011) defined *confidence* in relation to the concepts of safety and comfort. "Safety precedes confidence, comfort, and well-being, and there is a conceptual linkage between these feelings" (p. 226). With these definitions in mind, and through incorporating my own experiences in teaching improvisation, for this study I defined *confidence* as: the ability to maintain a positive perception of self and abilities derived from a feeling of safety.

Since lack of confidence can block musicians, teachers, and students from improvising, my research questions arose: What is the essence of confidence in music improvisation? What experiences do confident improvisers describe as educative? This phenomenological research focused

on how experienced improvisers construe notions of confidence, and how confidence is built. The purpose of this research was to explore the essence of the experience of confident music improvising.

There is an extensive research tradition that utilizes interviews, effectually deepening our understanding of the culture of improvisation for jazz performers (Bailey, 1992; Berliner, 1994; Caudwell, 2010; Dahl, 1984; MacDonald & Wilson, 2006; Norgaard, 2011; Wilson & MacDonald, 2012). Phenomenological research obtains essences—prevalent and shared themes— from data such as interviews (Giorgi, 2009). This study was structured using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, which was designed to examine psychological experiences and Rubin and Rubin's (2005) responsive interview process, which extracts deep information from interviewees while allowing them the freedom to direct the conversations. Wilson and MacDonald (2012), who have investigated jazz performers extensively, suggested improvisation research move "beyond particular genres" (p. 570), and the present study attempted to realize this by investigating the lifeworld experiences of improvisers from various genres.

Three participants were interviewed, twice each, between December 2011 and January 2012 – a bluegrass and Irish fiddler, a jazz and classical bassist, and a baroque violinist. Each participant (age 23 to 29) performed as a semi-professional musician. Observations of performances were also conducted. Interviews and observations yielded 22 distinct stories depicting the phenomenon, CMI. The researcher journal was used to reflect on

experiences as a confident improviser in relation to the participants' stories about CMI. This journal was also used to develop themes. Themes were winnowed using *imaginative variation*, and *essential themes* were those pertinent to all three participants' *lifeworlds*. The final list of essential themes included: *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, *sequential experiences*, *passion for a style*, and *openness to learning*.

I divided the *listening* experiences in this study into two categories: listening to performances and responsive listening. Each participant described experiences with listening in both categories. *Criticism-free environment* included performing music away from the structures of home and school, without critique, improvising among audiences that were positive and supportive, and improvising in a free, open environment, where the performer is not the audience's focus. *Sequential experiences* were described by each of the participants, and allowed them to build confidence over time and through limited structures. *Passion for a style* also rose as a theme for these musicians, as each was passionate about their respective improvisational tradition. All of the participants demonstrated *openness to learning*, seeking out new learning experiences. Three of these themes were viewed as pedagogical: *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, and *sequential experiences*; and two of them as dispositional: *passion for a style,* and *openness to learning*.

Transition

In *The Experience of Confident Music Improvising* I asked confident improvisers to tell me about their experiences learning to become confident at improvising music. While the essential themes identified might inform teaching, they were not explicitly teaching themes. Because of my experience as a music teacher, I was interested in how applicable these themes were to teaching; my focus moved from learning CMI to teaching CMI. I wanted to identify a case of improvisation instruction where I could observe the pedagogical essential themes in action, and could see how these were taught.

Chapter 3: Teaching Confident Music Improvising at a Summer Jazz Camp

Prelude

At the time of this research Hal[6] was a university student performing with multiple jazz ensembles that I had hired for a number of engagements on tenor saxophone. I view him as a confident and talented jazz musician with a round tone and a keen sense for crafting interesting, melodic improvisations. The music camp experience was important to Hal's development, and he attended the Mid-Atlantic Summer Music Camp (MASMC) after his 9th and 10th grade years of high school. "I was in one of the combos, which were a little intimidating because I had never played in a jazz combo before" (Hal, personal communication, April 3, 2012). After his 11th grade year of high school, Hal attended a different, jazz only music camp, but MASMC served as an important channel for him in developing into a confident improviser. Hal suggested MASMC, "laid a good foundation for me to learn more things later" (Hal, personal communication, April 3, 2012). Since the camp was one component in developing his then emerging feeling of confident music improvising (CMI), I began this study with this question – How do teachers at MASMC instill students, like Hal, with this feeling of CMI?

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[6] The names Hal, Dane, Dean, Hunter, Damian, Bens, Clark, Gigi, and the Mid-Atlantic Summer Music Camp are pseudonyms.

Introduction

Music improvisation is a diverse, emergent and rich musical experience. Improvisation has been described as "informal music learning" (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010, p. 72), "a conscious effort to filter musical input and to form new and meaningful musical configurations" (Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995, p. 113), responsive to its environment (Bailey, 1992), "experimental, tolerant of change" (p. 1), free play (Nachmanovitch, 1990), and "an act of transcendence" (Allsup, 1997, p. 81). Benson (2003) explained improvisation as fused within composition and performance. In talking about performance practice as improvisation, Benson stated,

> In the musical practice of Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music, there was a significantly different way of *conceptualizing* music, in which the principal focus of music making was the *performance itself*. The idea of a musical work as an entity that was distinct and autonomous from the performance simply did not exist. Rather, pieces of music (to whatever extent they had an identity) were things that facilitated the activity of music making, not ends in themselves. As a result, performers and composers were united in a common task, which meant that there was no clear line of separation between composing and performing. (p. 22)

Since improvised music composition and performance are interconnected, improvisation pedagogy might provide unique opportunities to teach music as a holistic, integrated experience.

Because of the nature of improvisation in relation to composition, music improvisers' musical decisions seem to be on display more than performers of written music. Nachmanovitch (1990) writes, "The heart of improvisation is free play of consciousness… Such play entails a certain degree of risk" (p. 9). I think instrumental music teachers have an obligation to teach improvisation as a creative, uplifting and collaborative process, essential to learning music at all grade levels and in all musical styles.

Many music teachers may be too insecure with improvising to teach their students to improvise (Beitler & Thornton, 2010; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007). It is easy to imagine a cascading condition when self-doubting instrumental music teachers inadvertently pass their own insecurities to the next generation of students. Instrumental music teachers might avoid improvisation instruction entirely because they define creativity as "recreating existing repertoire" (Snell, 2013 April, p. 1). Beitler and Thornton suggested anxiety over mistakes factors into a lack of improvisation confidence and Della Pietra and Campbell stated, "minimal attention has been given to improvisation training" (p. 113) at the university level. The secret to fostering a disposition to teach improvisation among instrumental music teachers may lie in forming a positive creative identity (Randles, 2009), through sequential experiences and collaborative play (Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995).

Conversely, some music educators teach improvisation confidently and effectively (Beitler & Thornton, 2010; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995;

Robinson, Bell & Pogonowski, 2011), and documentation of successful programs could encourage less experienced teachers to emulate effective teaching approaches. Because jazz is characterized by its "overwhelming emphasis on improvisation and the improvising soloist" (Caudwell, 2010, p. 242), I believe that a rigorous study of improvisation in high quality jazz programs could inform a deeper understanding of how improvisation is taught and learned. Over time, such understanding might assist in improving improvisation pedagogy for all teachers. I view jazz as a well-developed improvising musical culture that music educators at all levels and styles might emulate some aspects of jazz pedagogy to teach improvisation.

The current study represents a portion of a larger goal of understanding CMI. In the aforementioned study (Shevock, in-press-a), *listening*, *sequential experiences*, and *criticism-free environment* emerged essential pedagogical themes of CMI. Additionally, *openness to learning* and *passion for a style* emerged as essential dispositional themes. In that study a jazz bassist and skilled improviser characterized jazz camps as fundamental to the development of his confidence, which in turn he felt was necessary to improvise. This participant's experience with jazz camps was later reinforced when I interviewed the saxophonist Hal, who specifically identified MASMC as important to his development as an improviser.

With a focus on teachers who are teaching confidence, the present research hopes to elucidate the essential pedagogical themes of CMI by locating them in a bounded case. Since "most qualitative research inherently

shapes or modifies existing theory" (Merriam, 1998, p. 49), and because little research has been conducted in CMI, corroborating evidence seems necessary to illuminate the role of these themes within CMI. If these themes are to be demonstrated as wide-ranging, they will hold up to the particulars of a case study, and in a research design in which observation plays a more central data-collection role. The previous investigation (Shevock, in-press-a) I asked participants to remember and discuss moments of confidence development. The current study examines CMI within a learning context (a summer music camp) through direct observation. Due to a participant's reference to the importance of jazz camps, and my interest in pursuing jazz as the medium for studying improvisation pedagogy, the case I chose was a summer music camp with a jazz portion.

The music camp I observed offered activities in concert band, orchestra, choir, piano and jazz for high school students. By observing the jazz portion of a comprehensive summer music camp, rather than a camp dedicated solely to jazz, I had the opportunity to observe less experienced, unconfident student improvisers who possess more familiarity with concert band or orchestra than jazz. Dane, who founded the jazz portion of this camp in 1987, reinforced this suspicion in an interview (Dane, personal communication, April 27, 2012). This camp structure also reinforced that I might observe unconfident improvisers, as the camp provides jazz performance and improvisational opportunities to students with "extensive experience or none at all" ([Mid-Atlantic Public University] Outreach

Marketing and Communications, 2011). In this case, I believed less experienced (with improvisation) high school musicians might be also less confident – each of my participants in my previous study (Shevock, in-press-a) described experiences where confidence was an issue connected to learning more through *sequential experiences*.

My research questions emerged from considering the essential pedagogical themes describing the phenomenon of CMI (Shevock, in-press-a), and through taking into account that many teachers are uncomfortable teaching improvisation, while many others are self-assured and successful (Beitler & Thornton, 2010; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Robinson, Bell & Pogonowski, 2011). The guiding question for this study was, what techniques do instructors at a jazz portion of a summer music camp use to increase the confidence of students to improvise music? The purpose of this qualitative case study was to document CMI techniques used to teach high school students attending the jazz portion of a summer music camp.

A Qualitative Case Study

To study a phenomenon as a case, the phenomenon must be "intrinsically bound" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). I identified the jazz portion of a summer music camp held at The Mid-Atlantic Public University as the boundary of this case study and *teaching* CMI as the phenomenon. The data sources for this case study were field notes written during observations at the camp and interviews with a past participant and the jazz camp founder who taught at the camp. I maintained a research journal throughout this study to

increase my awareness of my subjective experience, to formulate interview questions, and to make sense of my observational field notes. Field note accuracy was corroborated through member checking via email.

In April 2012, I began my inquiry with two interviews: Hal, a university engineering major and tenor saxophonist, who studied at the camp as a freshman and sophomore in high school, and Dane who founded and directs the jazz portion of the camp. Seidman (2006) indicated, "Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their actions" (p. 10). These interviews were loosely formatted to allow the participants control of the direction of the conversations. I transcribed and coded these interviews based on the previously identified essential pedagogical themes for confident improvising (Shevock, in-press-a).

My reflection on these two initial interviews helped to provide context for the observations. Additionally, I analyzed documents including a method book on improvisation written by Dane and the webpage promoting the summer music camp ([Mid-Atlantic Public University] Outreach Marketing and Communications, 2011). These documents afforded me insight into the values of the music camp. My analysis of these documents informed my thinking through the journal writing process, and during observations.

I observed and kept field notes of the jazz portion of the summer music camp between July 16, 2012 and July 21, 2012. At three points— during the observations, in the evenings during the camp, and after the camp's culmination (through email member checking)—I pinpointed teaching

moments where I felt, subjectively, student confidence was bolstered by using the aforementioned themes (Shevock, in-press-a) and personal valuation. I coded the data informed by Seidman (2006). The codes reflected the essential pedagogical themes of *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, and *sequential experiences*—interview transcriptions (Hal and Dane), field notes, and member checks (all teachers) were coded as these three themes. An additional theme, *teaching through questions*, emerged inductively from the observational data and was included as a fourth theme. Validity was maintained through triangulating data – observations, interviews, and documents – and through member checks.

Framework

The framework I employed during this research was shaped by Dewey's (1938/97) continuity of experience. Dewey suggested that education must be based on experience, and that the quality of experience is measured by its "connection with further experience" (p. 27). He labeled these educative experiences "continuity of experience" (p. 28). I chose the jazz portion of a university summer camp with an eye toward labeling continuous experiences of CMI. Continuous experiences may be meaningful to these students because they grew out of previous experiences with improvisation, and have the opportunity to lead to further experiences. In the prelude, Hal suggested his experiences at MASMC helped build his confidence.

Observations

I interviewed a past MASMC participant Hal, and the founder of the
jazz portion of MASMC Dane in April 2012. During the 5-day MASMC, I
observed three concerts and 17 hour-long class periods. The concerts
included one jazz faculty concert led by Dean, a chamber music concert that
included two student jazz combos, and a jazz concert comprised of three
student big bands. The observed jazz classes at the camp comprised three
sections of improvisation, one section of jazz history, two jazz combos, three
big bands, and two master classes – a jazz percussion and a jazz piano. I
observed a total of five improvisation class periods—three taught by Dane,
and one each by Bens and Hunter—two jazz history/listening periods taught
by Damian, five jazz combo periods taught by Bens and Caesar, three big
band rehearsals taught by Dane, Damian, and Clark, a jazz percussion master
class taught by Caesar and a jazz piano master class taught by Bens. These
observations and supporting documents collected during observations—nine
worksheets handed to students by Dane and Bens, three concert programs—
afforded me the data I used to form this analysis.

Results

In this section I will share a vignette constructed around the experiences of
a student who seemed unconfident with improvising, the instruction that seemed
to help her improve as a confident music improviser, and data from field notes
around the four themes – listening, criticism-free environment, sequential
experiences, and teaching through questions.

Gigi

One student in particular, Gigi, seemed to have difficulty with CMI, and consequently her experience seemed particularly relevant. On the first day of music camp, Dane divided the students enrolled in improvisation class into three groups based on prior experience and perceived skill at improvising. Students who had not "studied improvisation in some way" were grouped into the first improvisation class. Those who had improvised on a blues scale were grouped in the second improvisation class taught by Hunter. Those who "can make sense of a ii-V-I change" were grouped in the advanced improvisation class, taught by Bens. Dane elected to teach the beginning improvisation group, which included Gigi, and led this group of students to a large classroom with desks, a piano and a sound system. He handed out a worksheet with a pentatonic scale and the circle of 4ths and played a recording of the accompaniment to *St. Thomas*, an up-tempo Latin piece. Each student took a turn improvising.

I recognized Gigi's difficulty during this first improvisation class. Students took their turn improvising, but when it came to Gigi, her alto saxophone was silent. Gigi said, "I don't understand what we're doing exactly." Dane suggested, "you're just making things up," but he could tell that she seemed particularly nervous. Another student suggested that she could play, "the notes on the scale," and Dane replied, "try to make a good melody. We'll talk about what makes a good melody throughout the week. Knowing which scale is one step to learning to improvise."

Throughout the period, Dane kept Gigi engaged by asking her questions, and keeping her involved in class. The class was filled with improvisational music on this simple pentatonic scale. Confidence seemed to be built by doing, and Dane had students improvise over the song's head (the form of the song), and trade 4s (each improviser take turns improvising for four measures). Gigi's confidence seemed to build throughout the period by continuing to have the opportunity to improvise.

On the second day of improvisation class, I noticed that Gigi still seemed nervous and was chewing her nails. She didn't seem to want to answer questions. As with many classes, one student was answering most of the questions, though not always correctly. Dane wasn't reacting negatively to incorrect answers and eventually talked directly to Gigi about identifying the "flat 3" (the third degree of the scale, lowered a half-step). Dane taught the students a short lick (motif or pattern for improvising), using "flat 3, 3, and flat 7." Later that day, I observed Gigi playing in Clark's big band, which was the beginning big band. Though the other big bands had a heavy emphasis on improvisation, Clark spent most of the time I observed him teaching correct pitches and rhythms, and not improvisation. Because this was a beginning band, they may have required a great deal of rudimentary work. Gigi's big band experience did not seem to reinforce her improvisation instruction.

I observed Gigi again during Dane's fifth improvisation class on Friday. By this class, the conversation had become far more technical, and the

students were delving into deeper theoretical concepts around "pentatonics of choice," "blue pentatonics," the "circle of 4ths," and form. Gigi seemed far more comfortable than she did early in the week. Her solos sounded rhythmically and melodically interesting, though it seemed she still hadn't internalized the 12-bar blues form – during her first improvisation of the day, her melodic idea stopped after eight measures. Dane remarked, "You did well for eight bars, but you have to play the whole 12 bars." Dane continued to talk to the class, and his conception of CMI might be summed up in this statement from our interview, reinforced during the class:

> Having confidence in what you do has a lot to do with how much you know about what it is you're trying to do. You don't have to have something perfected, but if you have a good understanding of how things are working, you'll have a good chance to have success. (Dane, personal communication, April 27, 2012)

Listening

Listening instruction (aural instruction) was part of every class I observed. *Listening* specifically to recorded improvisations was included in Dane's improvisation class, Bens's piano master class, and Damian's jazz history class. In addition, in all of the classes, teachers directed students to listen to each other while playing. Caesar and Damian sometimes taught their ensembles by playing or singing riffs and having students repeat them. For instance, on the first day of camp, when a trumpeter in Caesar's jazz combo didn't know the G blues scale, Caesar sang it for her and had her find the

notes by ear with little expressed reinforcement, i.e. "half-step." "Listen to it

so much that it becomes natural."

Damian's jazz history class, which I observed on Monday and Friday,

provided maybe the clearest example of building vocabulary by listening to

jazz music:

> The goal of this class is to listen to some specific things in jazz—
>
> melodic interpretation, earlier decades, and performance practices—to
>
> do this we need to hear jazz. Let's begin with sound. I'd like to play
>
> something. It's fair game for you to say anything; it makes me think
>
> of the color purple, or I like the ride cymbal.

On the fifth day of camp, Dane asked his improvisation class, "What is more

important than listening?" One student answered, "practicing," and Dane

replied, "That might be the only thing, and I'd give them equal importance."

During jazz history on that same day, Damian told a story about a friend of

his, a classical violinist who was given an assignment to listen to classical

music five or six days a week, three hours a day. Damian tried that for a few

years, and stated, "Whatever success I've had, that experience helped most.

I've had to sit in on gigs without charts, but I had heard the song before."

Criticism-Free Environment

Each instructor at the jazz camp fostered a *criticism-free environment*.

Throughout Caesar's and Bens's jazz combos, and Dane's big band I observed

students given long periods of time to improvise without any instruction.

Instead, each instructor spent this time directly instructing the rhythm section.

Letting every student improvise was important to Damian, and he allowed every student in his big band to improvise at the concert.

Hunter's improvisation class, which I observed on Wednesday, provided an especially notable example of *criticism-free environment*, as he encouraged students to try "something completely new." He warned me, "we're going to do some pretty weird stuff," to which I replied, "all the better!" Hunter had selected Wednesday as an opportunity for students to explore free improvisation. Hunter asked for a volunteer and the baritone saxophonist agreed. Hunter continued, "All right. We're going to play on the spot, a duet."

Student, "Do you want to take lead first?"

Hunter, "Let's not set parameters. Let's just see what happens. We'll just start playing whatever."

Hunter and the saxophonist began playing their unstructured duet, and some time passed before the improvisation seemed to work well. At first, the melodic and rhythmic motifs seemed disjointed, but with a few minutes of work, the two musicians seemed to find some common ground. Hunter said, "That's pretty good, and very good on your part." As the free improvisation lesson continued, the saxophonist chose a new partner, and every student had many opportunities to improvise, creating and responding to each other's musical ideas. Students were given complete freedom to choose metric, rhythmic, harmonic and melodic content without direction from the teacher. Instead of judging the improvisations directly, when students chose to end

their improvisations, Hunter asked them how they felt about what they played. After the duets, students did the same exercise in trios, which required more diligent listening and leaving space for other students' musical ideas.

Sequential Experiences

During the drum set master class, Caesar taught improvisation over a musical form, and employed a sequential experience. Students seemed to become more confident at improvising as Caesar expanded the form of the music, first a 12-bar blues form, then a longer form. Caesar began by playing a blues form on the bass guitar. The first student took his solo, and implemented some of the rhythmic motifs Caesar taught earlier in the period. After he was finished soloing, Caesar asked, "Did you know where the top of the form was?" By his facial expression and lack of an answer, it seemed the student did not. As the next student improvised, Caesar had the first student signal every 12 measures to designate the top of the form. Next, Caesar had the students listen as he played through a 32 bar form on the bass in a two feel. Caesar played the form again, this time singing the melody to *Autumn Leaves*. The students seemed to build confidence at improvisation over the 32 bar form by repetition, but also because they had already learned the 12 bar blues.

Throughout the camp, I observed sequentially designed lessons. On the first day of jazz history course, Damian had students listen to standards by Ella Fitzgerald, The Original Dixieland Band, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis (all what I would call traditional jazz greats), and

attempt to identify typical rhythmic and melodic traits of jazz. When I observed the same class on day five, students were listening to Guillermo Klein, Andy Milne, and Maria João (all more contemporary jazz musicians who employ what I consider to be more intricate music) and Damian guided students through the complex ways musicians use that jazz language in the 21ˢᵗ century through referring back to the day one lesson. For instance, when listening to a track by Klein, Damian asked, "Is it rooted in jazz?" A conversation about sequentially more complex jazz music had a chance to be meaningful because students had already had experience with traditional jazz recordings earlier in the week.

Teaching Through Questions

Throughout the week I observed each of the essential pedagogical themes of CMI. Instructors also engaged students in conversations by *teaching through questions*. "Most educators readily agree that questioning is an important aspect of teaching and learning" (Hannel, 2009, p. 65), and that dialogical teaching can keep students engaged in class, and develop proficiency with language and thinking (Allsup & Baxter, 2004; Scheib, 2012). Because all of the teachers employed *teaching through questions*, it emerged as a theme of teaching CMI in this case study. As an example, during the free improvisation lesson I observed on day three, after a student guitarist and baritone saxophonist improvised, this conversation among Hunter, the performers, and two other students – here labeled Student 1 and Student 2 – seemed meaningful.

Hunter, "What was good with that?

Student 1, "I liked the guitar lick."

Hunter, "Anything else?"

Student 2, "Occasionally they were playing the same notes, and the notes lined up and harmonized a bit."

Hunter, "What things could have been better?"

Student 1, "Had they picked a key?"

Hunter, "What about things other than notes, harmony, and chords?"

Baritone saxophonist, "Copying ideas. I was trying to figure out the 'da, da, da' section." This student takes a few seconds to figure out the melodic motif the guitarist had improvised, and Hunter continues, "What other things are there?"

Student 1, while the baritone saxophonist is figuring out the guitarist's motif, says, "Rests."

Hunter, "Elaborate. What do rests do in music?"

Student 1, "They pause between the notes."

Hunter, "leaving space and letting things settle in. When you're put on the spot, [often] the first thing you want to do is play a lot of notes."

Similar conversations were ubiquitous in every class during the camp. Equal participation in verbal conversations during class may inspire confidence during musical improvisation, which can require a parallel musical conversation, shared among students and teachers during class. *Teaching through questions* may also promote divergent thinking among students.

Webster (1990) suggested, "Creative thinking, then, is a dynamic mental process that alternates between divergent (imaginative) and convergent (factual) thinking, moving in stages over time" (p. 28). By dedicating time to *teaching through questions*, these teachers may have been allowing space for *convergent (factual)* thinking.

Conclusion

In this research, I documented confidence-building experiences that occurred at the jazz portion of a weeklong summer music camp for high school musicians. The purpose of this study was to document CMI techniques used to teach high school students attending the jazz portion of a summer music camp. I observed each of the essential pedagogical themes of CMI identified in earlier research (Shevock, in-press-a). The camp instructors put import on *listening* activities, and *sequential experiences*, and modeled a *criticism-free environment*. Researchers have identified lack of confidence as a possible roadblock for teachers to teach improvisation (e.g. Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995), and consequently, confidence seems evermore vital for teachers who hope to foster confidence among improvising students.

The guiding question was, what techniques do instructors at the jazz portion of a summer music camp use to increase the confidence of students to improvise music? In addition to the essential pedagogical themes of CMI, one approach I observed throughout the camp was *teaching through questions*. Dewey (1909) stated, in some classrooms "the child knows perfectly well that the teacher and all his fellow pupils have exactly the same facts and ideas

before them that he has; he is not *giving* them anything at all" (p. 34). By *teaching through questions*, it seems the students are able to *give* something to the class, increasing student ownership of learning, because students are able to share their values and knowledge. Echoing the nature of *teaching through questions*, the same might be said for the act of improvising; musical improvising is an act of giving and sharing musical values and knowledge.

Findings echo Henley, Caulfield, Wilson, and Wilkinson (2012), who found their participants "engage in musical dialogue within improvisation and traditional pieces. This in turn acts as a model for verbal dialogue" (p. 514). By *teaching through questions*, teachers and students may seem to be on more equal footing. Schmidt (2005) suggested, "The nature of teaching and teacher education is intrinsically related to dialogue and questioning" (p. 7). Like the very act of *teaching through questions*, at its best, jazz improvisation emphasizes listening, reacting, and collaborating rather than the dominance of a single figure. Further, *teaching through questions* might promote what Webster (1990) labeled divergent thinking.

As the present investigation was qualitative in nature, it is not appropriate to generalize the findings to other jazz teaching and learning situations. However, these findings might be transferrable, and music teachers could benefit from trying some of the techniques documented here. This case study seemed to reinforce the importance of the essential pedagogical themes of CMI.

Transition

After conducting this case study that corroborated the pedagogical essential themes of CMI in this jazz camp, I conducted a survey of university-level improvisation teachers (jazz, organ, baroque ensemble, and improvisation ensemble) and then allowed the seed of CMI to germinate while I explored some other scholarly interests. These were practicing music improvisation, democratic teaching practices (arising out of *teaching through questions*, a theme in this case), critical race theory, and social philosophy. From these explorations, I became interested in praxis (described in Chapter 1). Just as the movement from *The Experience of Confident Music Improvising* to *Teaching Confident Music Improvising at a Summer Jazz Camp* represented my movement in interest from learning CMI to teaching CMI, in moving from the previous research into *Praxes for Confident Music Improvising*, I moved from identifying teaching techniques to identifying teaching praxes (as ethical practices of music educators).

Chapter 4: "A whole lot of people are a whole lot of scared":

Praxes for Confident Music Improvising

Confidence (and lack of confidence) has been examined in many fields of study. Generally, confidence can be described using terms such as *trust, belief in oneself, trustworthiness, reliability, self-reliance*, and *assurance*. In the business world, scholars are concerned about lack of confidence in the stock market or of consumer spending because of debt (Tett, 2011). In government, analysts are concerned about confidence in government programs (Wolak & Palus, 2010) such as education (Loveless, 1997), and in issues related to other nations, such as whether Iran has ended its nuclear program (Hollis, 2008). Within education, student confidence is often studied using Bandura's social cognitive theory as a lens; e.g. in the context of writing (Pajares & Johnson, 1994), art education (Jones, 1997) and music education (Alexander, 2012; Watson, 2010; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). In Bandura's theory *Confidence* is part of self-efficacy, which "is regarded by Bandura's social cognitive theory as the most influential arbiter in human agency and helps explain why people's behavior may differ markedly even when they have similar knowledge and skills" (Pajares & Johnson, 1994, p. 313). Each of these disciplines seems to consider *confidence* differently, though there is meaningful overlap.

I have argued that though Bandura's self-efficacy provides a useful framework to study *confidence* as part of music (especially in understanding

why people's behavior may differ markedly in improvising), confidence is important to improvising music unique from Bandura's theory, and deserves inductive and explorative treatment. The current study will also consider *confidence* not as part of self-efficacy, but in line with my previous research on confident music improvising (CMI). In this line of research, self-perception of *confidence* is important as it is perceived, or from the participants' lifeworlds.

Self-perception of confidence is, as I understand it, confidence. Since, "Engagement with music can enhance self-perceptions, but only if it provides positive learning experiences which are rewarding" (Hallam, 2010, p. 282), student confidence (as a *self-perception*) in improvised music might be intrinsically tied to the music being improvised in the classroom.   Hamilton (2000) suggested "stylistic or structural devices" (p. 182) enhance individuality in improvisation. Teaching CMI might necessarily be teaching musical style and structure within an improvisational tradition. As Wynton Marsalis (2008) said, "We have to encourage the students so they'll get over that shyness and learn how to speak this language [jazz]" (p. 7). While *jazz* and *improvisation* are often synonymous, jazz is one genre, style, or musical culture within which improvisation is vitally important. For the current research, improvisation is understood as, "music that is neither notated nor composed, and it is integral to a wide variety of music genres, styles, and cultures" (Hickey, 2015, p. 426). This present research continues the process

of illuminating the experience of CMI, grounded in the experiences of improvisers and improvisation teachers.

Improvising music confidently might be difficult because improvised music requires the performer to make more choices (of pitches and rhythms) than they would make in non-improvised music. For Marsalis (2008), the key to increasing student confidence to improvise jazz music lies in encouragement.

> We have to continue that tradition, which is not to say any and everything is great, but to say we recognize that each student struggles in some way. We know when one is lazy or one is working hard, and we should encourage all of our students to play and make choices, even when they are not the best choices. Do something. (p. 7)

This focus on a tradition is in line with other improvising traditions, such as Persian radif, where students learn from a collection of standards (Nettl, 2009). Marsalis seems to connect the tradition (of jazz, a group musicking activity) to individual meaning making. Marsalis continues by connecting confidence with "personal identity" and "hearing in the moment" (p. 8). Because we *hear in the moment* with others, identity is formed during group improvisation in jazz. Marsalis's insights might provide a lens to interpret empirical research and is consistent with Burnard (2002), who found "Group improvisation provides opportunities for children to confer meaning on their creativity, to connect and interact in ways that uniquely develop a social and musical sense of self" (p. 169). Such an improvising identity might be built

collaboratively, specifically through self-reflection (May, 2003) or collaborative reflection (Beitler, 2012). Beitler's research found collaborative reflection particularly effective for woodwind students.

Survey research has provided our field with much insight into confidence in musical improvisation (Alexander, 2012; Bernhard, 2013; Bernhard, 2014; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). Music teachers may not value creative music making (improvisation and composition) as highly as they do other learning activities (Strand, 2006; Stringham, Thornton & Shevock, 2013 September). Band directors in New York seem to support improvisation instruction (Schopp, 2006), but many university-level band teachers do not include improvisation instruction in instrumental methods courses (Stringham, Thornton & Shevock, 2013 September). Band directors may feel unprepared to teach improvisation. As Burnard (2002) said, "Many teachers are reluctant to explore group improvisation" (p. 168).

Using the 1994 NA*f*ME standards as a basis, Madura Ward-Steinman (2007) shared two studies. She surveyed vocal jazz workshop participants (n = 213) to describe their confidence in teaching improvisation and then undergraduates (n = 13) who participated in a six-week vocal jazz course to see if their confidence would increase from instruction. In the author's first survey, participants' confidence was less in teaching the high school standards than the elementary school standards. The participants rated their confidence to improvise as low, but were interested in learning more about how to teach

improvisation. In the second study, participants in the vocal jazz course increased their teaching confidence.

The role of music teachers in students' improvisation learning has been examined, and barriers to music teacher involvement have been identified. Using Madura Ward-Steinman's (2007) survey categories as a basis for his study, Bernhard (2013) described undergraduate music education majors' confidence in teaching improvisation. There were differences in confidence to teach improvisation based on students' year in school and primary instrument area. While these participants were not particularly confident in their ability to improvise, they were interested in learning how to teach improvisation. In seeming contrast with Madura Ward-Steinman and Bernhard's research, Koutsoupidou's (2005) survey of English primary classroom teachers found mostly positive perceptions; but teachers without personal experiences improvising had lower positive perceptions.

Gender and CMI seem to relate to each other in complex ways. Wehr-Flowers (2006) and Alexander (2012) conducted surveys exploring the relationship between gender and confidence to improvise jazz music. Wehr-Flowers (2006) found females were less confident, and have less self-efficacy in jazz improvisation. However Alexander (2012), who used Wehr-Flowers's questionnaire, found confidence levels were not significantly different between female and male participants. Considering that gender and CMI relate to each other in complex ways, I wanted to explore this issue qualitatively. I have found exploring gender differences in CMI difficult. In

my research of a jazz camp (Shevock, 2013 February; see chapter 3), I noticed

that the camper who appeared least confident was female. I observed her to

see if the teacher was able to improve her observed confidence levels with

improvisation, but I found little conclusive evidence. Still, these findings

were tentative and inconclusive. My exploration of gender in CMI continues

in the present research.

Experimental research has been employed to explore confidence

(operationalized within Bandura's social cognitive theory) in music

improvisation (Watson, 2010). That author's participants were divided into

two groups using identical instructional material; one group received notated

instruction and the other aural instruction. Those in the aural instruction

group showed significantly larger gains than those in the notation instruction

group.

Elliott and Silverman (1995/2015) suggested, "Praxis is guided by *an

informed and ethical disposition to act rightly*—musically, socially,

communally, and so forth—with continuous concern for protecting and

advancing human creativity" (p. 44, emphasis in original). I believe teachers

who are concerned with developing students' confidence to improvise are

making an ethical choice. Because of this focus on the musicing educators'

concern, and Regelski's (1998) distinction between praxis and mere teche (in

the present research, understood as teaching techniques) to understand

improvisation teachers' praxes, it is important to understand teachers'

conceptions of their teaching CMI.

Defining Confident Music Improvising

The body of research into confidence in music improvisation examines teachers' confidence in teaching improvisation (Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007; Bernhard, 2013), the level of student improvisers' confidence (Watson, 2010), and issues of gender in improvisation (Alexander, 2012; Wehr-Flower, 2006). My own research explored how confident improvisers build confidence (Shevock, in-press-a), how students might learn confidence (Shevock, 2013 February), and both how university improvisation teachers experience confidence and teach students to be confident improvisers (Shevock, 2013 November). However, when I conducted those studies, the distinction between the various ways confidence affects music improvising was unclear. How teachers build their confidence to teach improvisation, how improvisers build confidence to improvise, and how teachers teach CMI are distinct categories. I learned through conducting research, and developed an interest in CMI as a learning experience among performers (Chapter 2), and teachers teaching students to become confident music improvisers (Chapter 3). As I operationalized CMI, my research moved me toward an understanding of the importance of praxes improvisation teachers use to build students' confidence to improvise. I have looked at confidence inductively, and therefore I have come to understand it through the subjective experiences of my participants. For this study, I define CMI within those parameters – as people building a personal, subjective sense of confidence needed to improvise music.

Focus

Some of my most powerful experiences with music have been through improvising, but improvising was not a large part of my own music education. Confidence is important to performing improvised music (Shevock, 2013 November). I have come to view confidence as a building block to improvisation. If musicians are confident, their improvisations might be good, but if they lack confidence they will never make an attempt to improvise. As my teaching career progressed, my view of my role as an instrumental music teacher advanced, beginning with a view of instrumental music teaching as teaching students to read music, produce quality tone on instruments, and experience traditional band or orchestra literature. I still believe these are all important, but not enough. My view of music teaching evolved to include facilitating student creativity through jazz improvisation. When we music in school we ritualize ideal relationships about the world (Small, 1998).

In my own teaching, by facilitating student creativity through jazz improvisation, a new set of relationships, where student voice mattered, were ritualized. Through research into confident music improvisation, I realized CMI is experienced as a multifaceted and complicated matter. Since CMI is a subjective experience, identity, gender, and experiences with others all seem to be important to CMI. Some teachers are able to help students become confident music improvisers, even when these students begin unconfident in their skills. In previous research, I observed a jazz camp instructor help a

student improve her confidence during the week (Shevock, 2013 February). Guiding my thought process, as my scholarship focused on CMI, I had some general questions. What teaching praxes do successful improvisation teachers use to improve confidence? The focus of my research is teaching praxes of CMI, and is guided by the question, how do music teachers teach students to become confident music improvisers?

Locus

To build themes of praxes used by improvisation teachers to build, in students, CMI, it is vital to identify knowledgeable participants. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated, "The essence of responsive interviewing is picking people to talk to who are knowledgeable, listening to what they have to say, and asking new questions based on the answers they provide" (p. 5). Therefore it is critical that participants in the current research came highly recommended as expert improvisation teachers.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand praxes of teaching CMI, that is, how expert improvisation teachers conceive the techniques they use to increase student confidence to improvise music. For this research a deeper inquiry into teaching praxes, especially those of expert improvisation teachers, was needed. There were two research questions. What teaching praxes do participants use to help unconfident students become confident music improvisers? How does student gender affect teaching praxes?

Method

To obtain robust, qualitative data of praxes of CMI, Rubin and

Rubin's (2012) *responsive interviewing* design was used. Interviewing has

long been used to study jazz improvisation (Bailey, 1992; Berliner, 1994;

Caudwell, 2010; Dahl, 1984; MacDonald & Wilson, 2006; Norgaard, 2011;

Sawyer, 1992; Sidran, 1992; Wilson & MacDonald, 2012). Responsive

interviewing involves asking participants three types of questions – main

questions, probes, and follow-up questions. "Main questions address the

overall research problem and structure the interview; probes help manage the

conversation and elicit detail; and follow-up questions explore and test ideas

that emerge during the interviews" (pp. xv-xvi). This research design is

notable because the "stages of research" (p. xvi) are interconnected, and

because, as the authors suggest, responsive interviewing provides a model for

seeing the world, not merely a method for collecting data. One reason I chose

Rubin and Rubin's responsive interviewing was because I successfully used

an earlier edition of this design to explore CMI (Shevock, in-press-a). The

initial interview protocol began with me asking participants to tell about a

student they helped to become more confident at improvising music. I then

asked *probes* to build on that story and elicit the praxes the teacher used.

Since this research follows my previous research in CMI, scripted probes were

crafted and asked at the end of the interview around the themes of my

previous research.[7]

Theoretical Sampling

Interview participants were selected using triangulation, theoretical

sampling, and snowball sampling. Glesne (2011) suggested the researcher

employing theoretical sampling, "Selects cases, people, events, activities, etc.

through evolving theoretical constructs in one's research" (p. 45). The initial

pool of participants was selected for their expert opinion. Triangulation is a

form of "convergent validation" (Decrop, 1999, p. 158) that is, "above all a

state of mind, which requires much creativity from the researcher. The search

for convergence is the motto, in order to make propositions more sound and

valid" (p. 160). To fulfill the proposition that my core participants were

expert improvisation teachers, I used triangulation, I asked improvisation

teachers whose work I am familiar with to suggest core participants. I then

asked two other improvisation teachers familiar with the core participants'

work if they agreed that the selected participants were expert improvisation

teachers.

The two selected core participants were interviewed twice. During

interviews with the core participants, I used snowball sampling to find other

expert improvisation teachers (improvisation teachers who the core participant

respected as expert) and negative cases (improvisation teachers who teach

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[7] These include the essential themes – *listening*, *criticism-free environment*,
sequential experiences, *passion for a style*, and *openness to learning – teaching
through questions*, and the process themes – *knowledge about music*, *playing with
authority*, and *fluency*. It included questions on gender.

improvisation differently). Additional participants were chosen based on

theoretical questions, which arose during interviews, based on issues that

needed more explanation, clarification, breadth or depth – I interviewed a

guitar teacher, a piano improvisation specialist, a high school orchestra

teacher who employs improvisation pedagogy, and two university students.

New participants were selected until data was saturated. Rubin and

Rubin (2012) stress the importance of sampling with an eye toward emerging

conclusions being *balanced* and *thorough*. The authors stated, "You do not

need a vast number of interviewees to demonstrate balance and thoroughness

so long as you show that you have explored alternative points of view and

evaluated them carefully" (p. 63). In this sampling method, sampling, data

collection, and data analysis are intertwined. Because of the nature of

theoretical sampling, it was impossible to identify the number of participants

before the research began. Various *points of view* were sought by selecting

participants from various backgrounds – jazz, piano, and orchestra. Field

notes were kept on the researcher's personal computer and member checked

with the participant via email.

Data Collection

Core participants were interviewed twice; second interviews allowed

the researcher to craft follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), refine

analysis and provide prolonged engagement with participants. Interviews

were conducted in person or via telephone. Data analysis (described below)

was done after every interview. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) said, "Each time

you come up with a possible explanation, to ensure that your research is thorough you need to look for further examples, evidence, and refinements and, in doing so, test and modify your emerging theme. Sometimes, you simply ask your interviewees how they respond to your ideas" (p. 63).

Interview protocols were emergent – deigned after previous interviews were analyzed. Data was organized using mp4 video clips (of the audio) and Microsoft Word documents labeled using participant pseudonyms and interview date. These documents were stored in folders labeled as each interview date. As themes were developed, an observation of a core participant was arranged, which helped provide triangulating data. Additional triangulating data included publications by two of the participants; online teaching videos by one of the participants, and teaching materials provided in-person by one participant.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the first interview, by keeping a *reflective field log* throughout the research process to make sense of interview data, observation data, and emerging themes. The reflective field log provided further research trustworthiness by clarifying researcher bias. Describing the vital nature of reflective writing to data analysis, Glesne (2011) said,

By writing memos to yourself or keeping a reflective field log, you

develop your thoughts; by getting your thoughts down as they occur,

no matter how preliminary or in what form, you begin the analysis

process… Writing helps you think about your work, and about new

questions and connections (p. 189).

The reflective field log provided a mode for codes and themes to emerge

throughout the study and help me "remain open to new perspectives, new

thoughts" (Glesne, 2011, p. 189). With each interview, I began grouping data

into descriptive codes, which summarize "in a word or short phrase – most

often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña,

2009). The initial codes were constructed in a Microsoft Word document that

labeled when each code occurred on the audio recording and segmented the

recording for transcription (See Table 4.1: Sample Interview Segments).

Segments were then transcribed and recoded.

The descriptive codes were grouped into larger themes, which were

winnowed to find the central themes of praxes of CMI. Since Rubin and

Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing design was used, thematic coding was

appropriate. Using Rubin & Rubin's design as an example, Saldaña (2009)

suggested, "Theming the Data is perhaps more applicable to interviews and

participant-generated documents and artifacts, rather than researcher-

generated field notes" (p. 141).

The early codes and themes influenced the questions asked during

subsequent interviews. In this type of analysis structure, the researcher

interweaves data collection, with data analysis, with writing. The time frame

of the study (October 20, 2014 to December 26, 2014), and number of

interviews (twelve) emerged during the study and continued until *theoretical*

saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation "means that successive examination of sources yields redundancy and that the data you have seem complete and integrated" (Glesne, 2011, p. 193). Because previous research had identified female students as possibly less-confident than male students (Alexander, 2012; Wehr-Flowers, 2006), participants were asked about gender issues for their students, and if they had different techniques based on gender.

Participants

Sampling techniques were chosen with the focus on understanding praxes for CMI. With the aim set, triangulation of expertise, snowball, and theoretical sampling techniques were employed. There were ten participants (see Table 4.2: Participant Information Pseudonyms). Hank[8] and Damian were identified as core participants, triangulated as expert improvisation teachers, and were interviewed twice. At the time of this research, both core participants were well-known jazz performers, clinicians and composers. Hank has taught high school and university jazz bands, and Damian taught at a liberal arts university in Pennsylvania. Three participants, Julian, Margery, and Geraldo, were recommended by Hank and agreed to participate in this research (Snowball Sampling). Julian was a doctoral student in California who taught a university-level jazz band and performed professionally on the saxophone. Margery taught jazz and improvisation in Iowa, and Geraldo taught at a university in Virginia.

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[8] The names Hank, Hunter, Harper, Luc, Julian, Damian, Henri, Margery, Heath and Geraldo are pseudonyms.

Five participants – Hunter, Harper, Luc, Henri, and Heath – identified through theoretical sampling agreed to participate in this research. Hunter taught a university-level jazz band and guitar, and was sought because of a participant's description a *culture of improvisation* around guitar. Harper was sought because of her expertise as a piano improvisation specialist. She was a doctoral student. Luc was sought to provide potential negative case analysis, as he was a high school teacher in North Carolina who taught improvisation (but not jazz improvisation) to strings students. Henri and Heath were chosen because they were students in the improvisation class Hank taught – Henri seemed confident with improvisation and Heath seemed less confident (see Figure 4.1: Sampling Chart). Margery and Harper were identified as female participants. I asked the core participants to identify an expert female improvisation teacher I might interview; Hank identified Margery. I knew Harper prior to the research, and personally identified her as an expert improvisation teacher. Two participants, Damian and Hunter, were participants in my previous research (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation), helping me further assess their expertise as improvisation instructors.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through clarification of researcher bias, prolonged engagement, triangulation, negative case analysis, and rich, thick description. To member check, interview transcripts were emailed to participants, who verified their words were accurately represented, and added ideas they missed during the interview. To triangulate, this study used

interviews, documents (online information about the participants, online pedagogical documents, publications, and teaching materials), and an observation.

Results

The central theme of this research was *aural instruction*. *Cultures of improvisation*, *simplifying structures*, *compositional thinking*, and *free improvisation* were themes in relation to the central theme. Each of these themes as praxis was connected to the central theme, *aural instruction*. Smaller themes of praxes of CMI were *teaching through questions*, *time*, *visuals & technology*. Other themes explored in this research were *gender*, and *safe environment*.

Central Theme: Aural Instruction

Each participant employed *aural instruction* as a teaching practice aimed at improving student CMI. As a theme, *aural instruction* connects to the essential theme of CMI, *listening* (Shevock, in-press-a). Where *listening* activities arose as how emerging performers experienced confidence, *aural instruction* represents how expert improvisation teachers teach confidence. There were differences among the participants in how they used and thought about *aural instruction*, and also in the extent to which *aural instruction* was emphasized.

Observation Notes: Improvisation Instruction for Music Education Undergraduates.

In a large university marching band rehearsal room, with concrete floor and flags of conference sports opponents high on the wall, a recording of a woman's voice, piano accompaniment and tenderly brushed drums resonates softly below the rustle of musicians pulling instruments out of cases, adjusting chairs and stands, and talking softly to each other. Visual and aural stimuli seem at odds on this cold December morning. Senior music education undergraduates, whose focus is elementary and middle or high school band education, are opening their instrument cases as an expert improvisation teacher, Hank, is holding his saxophone preparing to teach. The three course instructors invited Hank to teach a session on improvisation for the senior capstone class. These undergraduates will be student teaching next semester. Eleven students and two graduate assistants are also in the room. The instrumentation provides an interesting and unusual assortment for jazz – flutes, saxophones, trumpets, euphoniums, French horns, bassoons, and a vibraphone. After making sure everyone is playing their primary instruments, Hank begins playing short phrases for imitation. After some time of imitation, Hank says, "Now instead of playing what I play, just play what comes next," and begins leading them in a call/response activity, using *The Twelve Days of Christmas* in multiple keys. Hank hopes to get a sense for the

students' aural skills. To me, the students seem to be having quite a

bit of difficulty with this activity. (Observation notes, December 8,

2014)

I interviewed two of the students in this class after the observation. A jazz

saxophonist, Henri was perhaps the most experienced improviser in the class,

and Heath, a tuba player, had much less experience improvising. Consistent

with Gruenhagen and Whitcomb (2014), who found teachers discussed the

importance of sequencing students' improvisation learning, Heath expressed

appreciation for Hank's sequence of instruction. Henri felt Hank's teaching

approach was useful because of Hank's emphasis on aural instruction.

Some people say you should talk about theory right away. With his

approach, I like it because it's not necessarily waiting for anything.

Essentially, it gets [students] improvising. It gets them audiating what

they've heard and putting it into music, because (.) they sing it and

then they play it. (Henri, personal communication, December 10,

2014)

For Hank, aural instruction was the primary way he taught CMI. "The

objective [of my teaching approach] is just to get them playing off of the

page" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014). In Watson's

(2010) research, aural instruction was described as instruction received

"primarily through aural imitation" (p. 245), and was positioned in contrast

with notated instruction. For this current study, then, *aural instruction* is

defined in contrast to notated instruction (having students play *off of the page* / without notated music) and consists of aural imitation teaching activities.

Themes connected to *aural instruction* include *culture of improvisation, simplifying structures, compositional thinking*, and *free improvisation*. Improvisation instruction also included listening to expert models, often by directing the student to listen to recordings of improvisation experts. Further, students who have good aural skills may be more likely to have an easier time with improvising music. For instance, at his university, Damian finds few students who enter his ensembles to be confident at improvising music, but those who are confident are so because of their ability to "hear."

> That tends to come with people who can hear and can identify, accurately and quickly, music, and can therefore hear with less coaching what's going on in music that they like and can replicate it. But that's a small minority. The majority of people are not so strong in the realm of ear training and really need some coaching and to be shown a slowed-down version early on. (Damian, personal communication, November 7, 2014)

It seems, at the very least, aural development makes improvisation instruction easier. As Hank's vignette illustrates, music education undergraduates seem to need more *aural instruction*.

Culture of Improvisation. There seems to be a *culture of improvisation* around certain instruments – in particular drums, guitar, and

saxophone. Hank was the first participant who suggested drums and guitar have a *culture of improvisation*, where students are immersed in *aural instruction* when they begin lessons, and that this *culture* helps them become more confident improvisers. Julian (personal communication, November 6, 2014) suggested there is also a *culture of improvisation* with the saxophone. The piano specialist I interviewed, Harper, had experience with many styles of music, and connected the *culture of improvisation* to *aural instruction*.

> Playing by ear is a big part of [improvisation for drummers and
> guitarists]. You will have experienced music where not every note
> was dictated to you, and that it worked, it sounded good, and you had a
> good time (Harper, personal communication, November 5, 2014)

Harper connected the *culture of improvisation*, through playing by ear to a sense of enjoyment ("a good time") and agency[9]. Since praxis is defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/93, p. 51), it is through the development of agency that *aural instruction* becomes a teaching praxis. The aim of *aural instruction* seems to provide students with "tools" (a word used by many participants) to improvise, creating their own music.

> Negatively, a *culture of improvisation* that is focused too much on

aural instruction at the cost of music literacy can hinder students. A guitarist and jazz band instructor, Hunter suggested,

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[9] In this research "agency" is defined as belief in oneself that one can change the world (*musical world* in this instance, through improvisation), i.e. as "agents" in the world, and not mere objects acted upon with no control.

Some guitar players come to the audition and they don't do very well. Here's the chart. Here's what you're supposed to do with the chords. And they can't do it. Some guitar players get into the band and they can struggle for a little bit because they're just not used to that environment of handing out music. (Hunter, personal communication, October 22, 2014)

A jazz bassist, singer, and improvisation instructor, Margery, recommended learning music theory and music literacy along with *aural instruction*, modeled on early language learning. "Theory is looking at music that is great and figuring out why it is great" (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014). It may be detrimental to CMI to introduce theoretical concepts too early, but failing to introduce them might also delay student improvisational development.

Simplifying Structures. The theme, *simplifying structures*, was constructed from the subthemes *starting with the known*, *imitation*, and *sequential experiences*. An example of *starting with the known*, Hank has beginning jazz band students improvise "in a rock beat because it speaks their language" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014), and Luc has orchestra students improvise to a well-known folk tune, "*Simple Gifts* – something every string player in the world has done" (Luc, personal communication, November 6, 2014). Many of these improvisation teachers begin with *imitation* (call and echo) activities and then move to

question/answer (call and response) activities to increase student confidence
to improvise.

> One thing I love to do with beginning improvising is to do full-on
> aural instruction, where I play then you play an imitation. And then
> after the students get really good at imitating what their instructor has
> played, then do more of what I would call an antecedent/consequent
> relationship, where I make a musical statement and then they make a
> response to that statement that is similar in mode but more of a
> variation rather than a full on improvised tune. (Luc, personal
> communication, November 6, 2014)

Luc's statement shows that *sequential experiences*, an essential theme that
arose in my previous research (Shevock, in-press-a), are a key component to
aural instruction. Further, that early imitation and call/response activities
provide a scaffold for students' later "full-on" improvisation.

Compositional Thinking. The theme *compositional thinking* was
made up of the codes *palette*, and *rhythm*. For Damian, who believes "a
whole lot of people are a whole lot of scared when they start improvising"
(personal communication, November 7, 2014), his approach could be
described as *simplifying structures* and scaffolding onto those to develop a
sense of *compositional thinking*. He suggested students are unconfident,

> Because they've been given too broad a palette of tools with which to
> improvise or because they haven't been given any tools, so they lack a
> very specific and finite collection of tools that will get them started,

which won't overwhelm thought and creativity. (Damian, personal

communication, December 21, 2014)

To develop *compositional thinking*, then, Damian recommends building from

simplified structures (these themes were interconnected) and help students

develop a broader *palette of tools*. This was in line with Harper, who said, "I

think that what I'm really teaching them is a way to organize their thinking, to

plan and process ideas" (Harper, personal communication, November 5,

2014). The *palette of tools* discussed might include developing comfort with

dissonances. For Geraldo, it is important to help young improvisers become

"comfortable with all of the wrong notes" (Geraldo, personal communication,

December 26, 2014). This is a *compositional thinking* issue because students

learn not just to become comfortable with dissonances, but also to resolve

them. Geraldo then teaches students how to resolve any "wrong" note they

may play during the improvisation.

Free Improvisation. Many participants employ *free improvisation*,

and even those who suggested they did not early in the interview, considered

free improvisation activities beneficial to develop CMI in certain situations.

Many participants had difficulty defining *free improvisation*, which may

account for the varied responses. For some participants *free improvisation*

was a pedagogical tool, and for others it was a genre of music, an offshoot of

Ornette Coleman's free-jazz style. For instance, Margery initially said she did

not employ *free improvisation*, but after considering it, she admitted she

would turn off the lights and have the students improvise to "broaden their

palette" (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014), which

connects this theme to *compositional thinking*. Inspired by Hickey's (2015)

research, *free improvisation* was understood as a group (at times a group of 2)

improvisation that is non-idiomatic, with few- or no-rules, and both a

pedagogical technique and a genre in its own right. For the present research,

free improvisation as a pedagogical technique, and not as a genre, was of

interest. This was because participant descriptions of *free improvisation* were

pedagogical – teaching students to improvise.

 Free improvisation activities can be used to show how music is

dialogue, and involves constructing a story. For instance, Geraldo does free

improvisation with a group of students, allowing for a "safety in numbers

approach" (Geraldo, personal communication, December 26, 2014), and

gradually cut students out until fewer and fewer students are improvising.

> When I teach free improvisation, and cut it down two students, then
>
> one student, when it becomes one person they eventually realize,
>
> "Even when I'm playing by myself it is dialogue. I'm playing
>
> something and asking myself what I want to hear next. I'm having a
>
> conversation with myself." (Geraldo, personal communication,
>
> December 26, 2014)

Geraldo's focus on improvising as *dialogue* seems to support Sawyer's (1992)

discussion of jazz within the context of a "dialogic nature of the interaction

among the coperformers" (p. 255). Geraldo, however, extends this concept of

dialogue to include, even, solo improvising. *Free improvisation* can also be

used in private lessons. "We'll play free duets in lessons. They'll play something and I'll play in a way that shows them I'm listening and supporting it either rhythmically, or outlining some kind of harmonic aspect, or building a melody" (Julian, personal communication, November 6, 2014). Julian connects this *free improvisation* activity to *compositional thinking*, connecting these themes to aural instruction more broadly.

Teaching Through Questions, Time, and Visuals & Technology

The three themes, *teaching through questions, time,* and *visuals & technology*, were smaller themes of praxes of CMI. In the instance of *teaching through questions*, and *time*, these themes were part of participants' conversations, though often not the focus of the discussions around confidence. In the case of *Technology*, it was discussed quite a bit by one participant, but not by others. *Teaching through questions* was an emergent theme of the case study of a jazz camp (see chapter 3 of this dissertation). It was also a theme in the current research. In their interviews, participants described instances when they posed questions to students. Because this theme was treated heavily in the previous research, I will not deal with it extensively here.

Time was a theme of praxes of CMI. Most of these teachers dedicated significant amounts of time to improvisation activities, especially in comparison to less-expert improvisation teachers. "It was worth devoting an atypical amount of rehearsal time on improvisation. I was willing to sacrifice some polish and shine in order to get this. Frankly, I felt it was actually a net

gain" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014). These findings were consistent with Kennedy (2000), who suggested creativity requires "time and space… to bloom" (p. 133). These teachers may have been successful in developing student confidence because they devoted *time* to improvisation activities.

Visuals & Technology was another theme of praxes of CMI. Participants described *visuals* including hand symbols, handouts, and what they write on the board to support student improvising. Luc utilizes *technology,* including sound effects to inspire early improvisation. He has students "fool around" with major scales and a delay pedal.

> I use an electric violin and a delay pedal that has about a 1-second delay. With a nice, long delay, you can create extemporaneous canons. I use this technique because I began improvising this way, by fooling around with electric violins and electronics. I really believe the biggest pitfall is people trying to do too much, too quickly. (Luc, personal communication, November 6, 2014)

This was in line with my previous research (Shevock, in-press-c), in which I found technology was able to support jazz improvisation instruction, and in another study (Shevock, 2014, April) exploring how improvisers used technology to support music practice.

Gender

Gender was an important issue related to CMI for some of the participants. *Recruitment,* and *role models* were the two themes of *gender*.

Societal Expectations is a theme that was discussed extensively by some female participants, but was not identified as a teaching praxis (see Narrative 4.1: Societal Expectations). However, each of these teachers suggested *gender* does not change teaching praxes. Participants pointed out that teaching practices were tailored to individual students strengths and weaknesses. For instance, when asked if *gender* affected teaching practices, Hank suggested, "I try not to worry about if a student is a boy or a girl when I'm talking to them. They fall somewhere on the confidence continuum, and I try to speak to them where they are" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014). Damian changes teaching praxes based on instrument. As he stated, "If it becomes instrument specific, I've had more female students who sing, and we do different things if you're a singer. But it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman singer" (Damian, personal communication, November 7, 2014). While instrument may suggest *gender* in general, *gender* itself is not a deciding factor for these teachers in how to teach students.

Two female participants (Harper and Margery) and one male participant (Julian) talked more extensively about gender issues in jazz improvisation. Julian (and other participants such as Hank, Damian, Margery, and Luc) pointed out that, traditionally, fewer women participate as men in jazz, which can be a problem because, "they're massively outnumbered and that makes them very insecure, because they don't have the support of other girls" (Julian, personal communication, November 6, 2014). Julian's approach to improving female improvisers' confidence involved increased

recruitment of women into his university and high school jazz ensembles. This is in line with McKeage's (2014) research, which found, "Encouraging girls to play jazz should begin in the elementary grades. Students should be encouraged to explore instrument choices outside the traditional sex stereotypes" (para. 43).

Through her long career as a jazz teacher and performer, Margery, and her sister who is a jazz teacher in California, have served as "role models" for her female and male students.

There really were some good ole boy band directors back in the day, who were convinced that girls couldn't play as well as boys… it wasn't our goal to set out to be role models, but we were role models for young women as well as we were for all the young men that came to study with us. They don't have any qualms or questions about the fact that women jazz players know a lot and can play well. (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014)

These findings are in line with McKeage (2014), who, in her qualitative research, found female role models to be essential to mentoring students.

Safe Environment

Safe environment had two themes, *games* and *peers*. Building a *safe environment*, of "cooperation, support, and trust" (Elkind, 1975, p. 3) is important in theatre improvisation education, and *criticism-free environment* was an essential theme of CMI (Shevock, in-press-a). Margery suggested it is important to make improvisation activities "a fun game," where it is "okay to

make mistakes" (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014). In theatre, *games* are used to develop a *safe environment*. As Madson (2005) suggested, "Playing with consideration and kindness promotes a sense of security. This is necessary when we are doing crazy, risky things – it is essential during chaos. Competition is replaced by cooperation" (p. 131). Among the expert music improvisation teachers in the current study, a *safe environment* was fostered to harness the positive power of *peers*. As Hank suggested, "They don't want to suck in front of their peers" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014), and Geraldo pointed out the importance of creating a "safe environment" by addressing "what they fear the most" (Geraldo, personal communication, December 26, 2014). Participants mentioned a danger of students showing off. *Peers* could also be used to support unconfident students. "It's a trusting and safe environment. And at the same time, I try not to take the kids I know who can really play and let them play these 24-bar solos, because all that does is reinforce to the kids who are new at it that they stink" (Hank, personal communication, October 20, 2014). Contrastingly, Heath suggested,

> Henri just goes for it. That gives me confidence, knowing if he's just
> going to go for it, and he's going to play all sorts of things, I can sit
> right underneath him, or with him, and play whatever I think is good.
> (Heath, personal communication, December 17, 2014)

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand praxes of teaching CMI, that is, how expert improvisation teachers conceive the techniques they use to increase student confidence to improvise music. In looking at these expert improvisation teachers' praxes for developing CMI, the central theme was *aural instruction*, which included themes *culture of improvisation, simplifying structures, compositional thinking*, and *free improvisation*. The themes *gender* and *safe environment* were explored, as well as smaller themes *teaching through questions, time*, and *visuals & technology*.

There were two research questions addressed in this study. What teaching praxes do participants use to help unconfident students become confident music improvisers? How does student gender affect teaching praxes? The emphasis on *aural instruction* among the participants in this study is in line with Watson (2010), who suggested, "Educators should strongly consider the incorporation of aural imitation tasks and exposure to exemplary models into their improvisation teaching methodologies" (p. 250). These expert improvisation teachers employed *aural instruction* heavily in their teaching praxes. The theme *culture of improvisation*, especially around guitar, drums, and saxophone, may align with Lucy Green's (2008) research on informal learning through popular music. Guitar and drums, at least, are the primary instruments in popular music ensembles. Green suggested a connection between popular music and confidence. "Playing popular music in a band tends to raise the self-esteem and the perceived peer group status of the

participants" (p. 9). Perhaps this self-esteem leads to confidence at improvising music, a confidence of guitar students that my participants perceived.

The theme *simplifying structures* seems to point toward an instructional scaffolding process, "the process of controlling task elements that are beyond the learners' capabilities so that they can focus on and mater those features of the task that they can grasp quickly" (Schunk, 2004, p. 297). The initial practice among the participants was to simplify the music, in one of many ways. Aural instruction activities are scaffolded to gradually build students' confidence to improvise.

Compositional thinking was an aim of many of the participants. Thornton (2013), who recommended beginning with improvisation to teach composition, explored the connection between improvisation and composition. "Improvisation for all musicians opens doors to a depth of understanding about the music, about their instrument's capabilities, and their personal musical expression" (p. 15). This thought is consistent with the positions of participants in this research, especially Damian, Harper, and Geraldo.

Free improvisation was the final theme within *aural instruction*, and findings align with Hickey's (2015) research into the teaching of free improvisation teachers, described above. In contrast, where her participants were "comfortable being flexible and spontaneous, and confident that the rehearsals would unfold successfully despite not having a clear plan" (p. 438),

my participants seem to have clear plans for using *free improvisation* to teach students to improvise. This may be due to a difference in participants. Where her participants were noted *free improvisation* teachers, mine were well-respected improvisation teachers, university and high school jazz instructors with years of experience, a high school orchestra teacher, and a keyboard improvisation teacher. My participants use *free improvisation* as a tool for other aims, such as *compositional thinking*, and confidence. Also, this difference could be due to data collection type – my primary data collection method was interview, with an observation used to reinforce (or challenge) the theoretical structure emergent from participants stated intentions.

A limitation of this study was that I only interviewed two female improvisation teachers, and both of my *core participants* were male. This was due to the nature of recruitment – core participants were identified through triangulation as expert improvisation teachers. Though these participants focused on individual student needs above considerations of *gender,* the findings in this study were in line with other research suggesting, "Women do not participate in instrumental jazz in the same numbers as their male colleagues at either the high school or college level" (McKeage, 2004, p. 355). The current research suggests *recruitment* might help allay this problem, and that female *role models* might be important to help female students become confident music improvisers. Further, by serving as *role models*, female improvisation teachers may benefit both female and male students. Future research needs to purposely sample more female improvisation teachers to

more fully understand issues around gender and improvisation teaching praxis, particularly by considering the role of *recruitment* and *role models*. For instance, do female teachers foster more confident female student improvisers?

The theme *safe environment* aligned with theatre improvisation scholarship (Elkind, 1975; Madson, 2005). The current research addressed *games* and the positive and negative aspects of *peers* to CMI. This theme also connects to the essential theme of CMI, *criticism-free environment* (Shevock, in-press-a).

Most of my teachers were jazz improvisation teachers. I was unable to recruit a Baroque improvisation teacher through my contacts. Bernhard's (2014) suggested, "teachers who had no experience with jazz reported less confidence teaching improvisation than those with jazz experience" (p. 10), and the comparative ease of recruiting expert jazz improvisation teachers to participate may reflect a limitation to the study's implications more broadly. However, by interviewing two improvisation teachers who did not primarily teach jazz improvisation (Harper and Luc), an attempt was made by the researcher to broaden the scope of these findings.

Chapter 5: Postlude

Summary

This dissertation represents a line of inquiry into confident music improvising (CMI). As such, my evolving understanding of the concept, CMI, through qualitative research was presented. Research into confidence and music improvisation has looked at teacher confidence to teach improvisation (Bernhard, 2013; Bernhard, 2014; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007) and confidence to improvise within the construct of self-efficacy, especially as confidence is affected by aural instruction (Watson, 2010) and gender (Alexander, 2012; Wehr-Flowers, 2006). While this previous research had employed survey and quasi-experimental design to help us understand confidence and music improvisation, the line of inquiry presented in this dissertation was qualitative in nature, presented from the lifeworld experiences of semi-professional improvising musicians (chapter 2), observations of a summer jazz camp (chapter 3), and conceptions of teaching praxes of expert improvisation teachers (chapter 4). This dissertation was guided by the question, how do effective music improvisation teachers teach students – who may be unconfident – to confidently improvise music?

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discussed a phenomenological study published in *Research Studies in Music Education*. There were two research questions. What is the essence of confidence in music improvisation? What experiences do confident improvisers describe as educative? The purpose was to

explore the essence of the experience of CMI. Three semi-professional improvising musicians described experiences that helped them build their confidence to improvise. Using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method, essential themes were revealed. The themes that emerged were *listening*, *criticism-free environment*, *sequential experiences*, *passion for a style*, and *openness to learning*. Three of the themes (listening, criticism-free environment, and sequential experiences) were labeled as pedagogical themes, and two (passion for a style, and openness to learning) dispositional themes.

In chapter 3 of this dissertation, I presented a case study. The case was the jazz portion of a summer music camp. The guiding question was, what techniques do instructors at a summer jazz camp use to increase the confidence of students to improvise music? The purpose was to document CMI techniques used to teach high school students attending a summer jazz camp. The primary data was observations of improvisation teaching during the camp, online documents describing the camp, and interviews with a past participant and the camp's founder. The pedagogical essential themes (*listening, criticism-free environment,* and *sequential experiences*) were present among the camp's classes, reinforcing the strength of these themes. This study represented my change in focus from learning CMI to teaching CMI. The emerging theme, *teaching through questions,* was the initial teaching praxis identified in this line of inquiry.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation represents a widening of my understanding of CMI. Building on chapter 3, my purpose was to understand praxes of teaching CMI, that is, how expert improvisation teachers conceive the techniques they use

to increase student confidence to improvise music. There were two research questions. What teaching praxes do participants use to help unconfident students become confident music improvisers? How does student gender affect teaching praxes? A responsive interviewing design (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) was used, centering in on several in-depth interviews with triangulating data, including an observation of a participant's teaching, and documents including participants' pedagogical and published materials. Theoretical and snowball sampling were used to identify expert improvisation teachers, and two core participants were identified through triangulation, recommended by multiple improvisation teachers. Through data analysis, the following thematic structure emerged.

- Aural instruction
    - Culture of improvisation
    - Simplifying structures
    - Compositional thinking
    - Free improvisation

- Gender
    - Recruitment
    - Role models

- Teaching through questions

- Time

- Visuals & technology

- Safe environment
    - Games
    - Peers

Watson's (2010) research indicates students' self-efficacy improves through aural instruction (in comparison to notated instruction). The most prominent theme of praxes of CMI was *aural instruction*. Taken together, these studies reinforce the

importance of aural instruction to fostering confidence in students learning to improvise music. Previously, I defined aural instruction in contrast to notated instruction (having students play *off of the page* / without notated music). Aural instruction consists of aural imitation teaching activities. This line of research expanded my understanding of aural instruction. For instance, aural instruction has a cultural element, especially in that certain instruments, like guitar and drums, have a culture of improvisation because instruction is often aural. Further, aural instruction can be taught through simplifying structures and by developing, in students, compositional thinking. Additionally, free improvisation can be employed as aural instruction praxis to help students become confident music improvisers.

Returning to the idea of Small's (1998) *musicking*, improvising musicians enact rituals that represent a certain set of values – e.g. the importance of individual and group expression, creativity – that may add weight to the importance of confidence, especially in school music settings. If a musician is unused to being expected to improvise, to compose music in the moment of performance and to listen to and adjust to what other musicians in the group are improvising, improvised musicking can become a struggle. In *cultures of improvisation* (guitar and drums) where improvisation is the norm, all students experience CMI. Confidence is important in music improvising because music improvising is not the primary way many musicians in school music programs regularly music.

The findings around gender are in line with McKeage (2004), who found female students do not participate in jazz as much as male students. *Recruitment* as a praxis of CMI becomes paramount. McKeage (2014) also found female role models important for female jazz students. The current dissertation extends McKeage's (2014) writing by suggesting female *role models* may be important for male as well as female students.

Discussion

I taught improvisation in elementary band and orchestra in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. This teaching inspired me to return to university to earn a doctorate in music education with the intention of researching improvisation. Guided by an interest in music improvisation, I realized there was not enough research exploring CMI and that many musicians seemed to have confidence issues around improvising music. While conducting this line of research, I reread the first book on improvisation I read, Stephen Nachmanovitch's (1990) *Free play: Improvisation in life and art*, and was surprised how relevant (25 years after its publication) this short philosophical treatise is, and how consistent his theory is with my findings.

For Nachmanovitch (1990), improvisation is one expression of a larger concept, *the free play of consciousness*, which has a spiritual aspect connected to *spontaneous creation*, *Zen*, *liberation*, and *authentic voice*. An improvising violinist, Nachmanovitch "came to see improvisation as a master key to creativity" (p. 6). He described the creative process as like a crystal.

No matter which facet we gaze into, we see all the others reflected… [we]

look into a number of facets, then keep returning to them from different

angles as the view becomes deeper and more complete. These

interreflecting themes, the prerequisites of creation, are playfulness, love,

concentration, practice, skill, using the power of limits, using the power of

mistakes, risk, surrender, patience, courage, and trust. (Nachmanovitch,

1990, p. 12)

Reflecting on Nachmanovitch's *interreflecting themes*, it became easy to see the

essential themes (which helped confident improvisers build confidence to

improvise music) of my phenomenological study in Nachmanovitch's work.

Further, the praxes for CMI are present (see Figure 5.1: Interreflecting Themes) –

e.g. *simplifying structures* reflects *the power of limits*, and *free improvisation* and

safe environment align with Nachmanovitch's (1990) *practice*, "totally judgment

free, discrimination-free" (p. 70).

In the same interreflecting way, the essential themes of my

phenomenological study are reflected in the themes of praxes of CMI that I shared

in Chapter 4. The primary essential theme, *listening*, has a direct relationship

with the most prominent theme of the praxes of CMI, *aural instruction*. We, as

improvisation teachers, teach students to listen to each other while performing,

and to listen to recordings to learn an improvisatory style, but Nachmanovitch

adds a layer to aural instruction, listening to *the muse*. "The whole essence of

bringing art into life is learning to listen to that guiding voice" (p. 41). The muse

whose voice we must hear is the *genius* of the individual, and the *genii* of a group

of improvisers. Because the ways we music represent *ideal relationships* about what we believe of the world (Small, 1998), improvisation pedagogy has implications far beyond the school walls or concert halls. I believe a pedagogy empowering confidence can free musicians to play, improvisationally, in musical dialogue with others, and can, in-turn, fuel confidence to live creatively and respect others, essential qualities for democratic living in the 21st century.

Recommendations

Further research and theoretical work is recommended exploring CMI, and should include historical design. Historical research into CMI might provide insights that go unconsidered by 21st century teachers. Due to both the current study and my historical research on the spiritual aspects of improvisation pedagogue Satis Coleman's music education philosophy (Shevock, in-press-b), I began to wonder if confidence was an issue for her students. Historical research may illuminate her awareness of issues of confidence to improvising music. It may be that she and other historical improvisation teachers, such as Carl Orff and Donald Pond, were aware of the confidence issue. My research into the spiritual aspects of Coleman's music education philosophy helped me consider spiritual aspects of teaching and learning I had not previously considered.

Other research designs might also provide fruitful ways to further our understandings of CMI. Just as the pedagogical essential themes of CMI were reinforced through a case study, a case study using the themes of praxes of CMI might be used to confirm this theoretical structure. Such a case study might explore one theme in depth. Survey research might be used to find the extent to

which teachers are using each of these themes to build students confidence, and experimental design can be used to confirm each of these themes within specific contexts.

Conclusions

Conducting this line of inquiry has been fulfilling for me as a music teacher and scholar. This is a line of inquiry I intend to continue exploring. Since praxis involves informing teaching with theory and theory with teaching practice (Freire, 1970/93), researching CMI has made me more sensitive to issues of student confidence, and how teaching praxis can foster confidence to improvise, empowering students to create. It has also provided a structure around which I can construct lesson plans with the express intention of improving student confidence to improvise.

Confident improvisers may be better prepared to be agents acting in the world through musical action. As I teach improvisation in the future, I will saturate the learning environment with *aural instruction*, including exercises to help develop *compositional thinking*, such as helping beginning improvisation students develop a wider palette in relation to dissonances. I also intend to make more use of *free improvisation* as a pedagogical tool. I have, in my work with *Jazz Combo Lab*, taught free jazz, and allowed students to group-compose their own free jazz pieces. I have not, however, used free improvisation in private lessons, nor early in class instruction, and *free improvisation* may have pedagogical benefits for students I have underexplored.

I believe that the findings around *gender* have also affected how I think about my teaching praxis. I have not previously focused on *recruitment* or on bringing in female *role models* to perform for my students, though these actions may help female and male students. And an understanding of evolving societal expectations (see Narrative 4.1: Societal Expectations) for women improvisers can increase my awareness as a teacher.

I think more needs to be understood about CMI, especially around the theme of *gender*. Previous research has looked at gender issues in relation to jazz improvisation. Is the gender issue relevant to non-jazz styles? Future research exploring the nature of CMI and *gender* should prove fruitful. Nonetheless, this dissertation represents a substantial, inductively formed addition to the Music Education profession. The research in this dissertation, when understood in context with the work of other researchers in confidence to teach improvisation, confident improvising, gender, and aural pedagogy, can guide music teachers to nurture confident, agentic, creative improvisers.

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Appendices

Table 4.1: Sample Interview Segments

Luc
11/06/2014

Time	File name	Descriptive coding
00:00 – 01:00	Seg1.Interview.11.6.2014.Luc.mp4	Introductory discussion
01:00 – 04:31	Seg2.Interview.11.6.2014.Luc.mp4	String students often have good ears but classical training. Technology – Delay pedal, extemporaneous canons. Major tonality. Blues tonality foreign. Pitfall – too much too quickly. Well-known melodies. Diatonic. Comfortable with modality. Off page (aural).
04:31 – 07:30	Seg3.Interview.11.6.2014.Luc.mp4	Beginning of improvisational instruction, folk tunes. Full-on aural instruction. Antecedent/consequent. Aural teaching is everything. Suzuki helps. Oriented toward listening. Ear to hand. Strolling experience, away from page in style. Classical improvising.
07:30 – 09:44	Seg4.Interview.11.6.2014.Luc.mp4	Classical training Question. Vast majority are not comfortable. Traditional environment, exactly what's written. Creativity and expression inside of the written. Improvising violinist. Improvisation changes everything.
09:44 – 11:53	Seg5.Interview.11.6.2014.Luc.mp4	Culture of improvising question. A garage/bedroom culture. Trial and error. Cultures come in a lot of shapes and forms. Appalachian fiddle. Turtle Island String Quartet, strong public presence. String students are much more apt to try improvising.

Table 4.2: Participant Information Pseudonyms

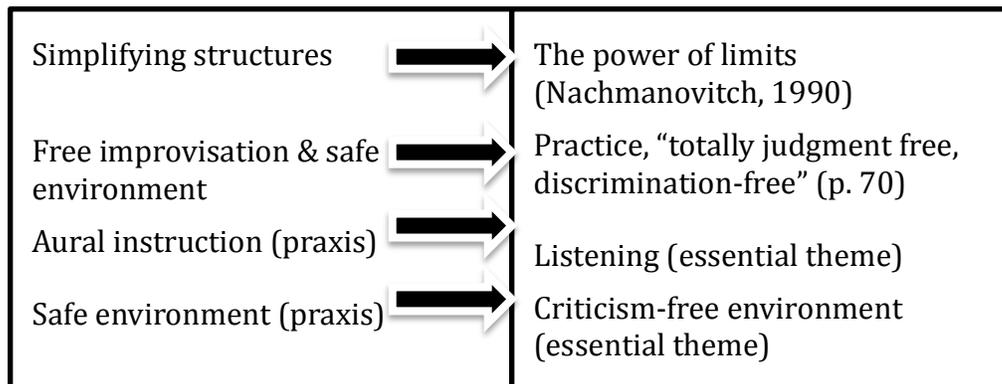| Participant	Data	Instrument	Sex	Style(s) taught	Sampling
Hank	Interview (in-person) – 10/20/2014 Pedagogical documents Interview (in-person) 11/6/2014 1PM Observation (in-person) 12/8/2014	Saxophone	Male	Jazz	Initial interview – recommended as an "expert improvisation teacher" by two university-level jazz band instructors, and one music education professor who conducts improvisation research and gives clinics on improvisation.
Hunter	Interview (in-person) – 10/22/2014	Guitar	Male	Jazz	Theoretical – based on Hank's description of guitar students as more confident than wind students.
Harper	Interview (in-person) 11/5/2014	Piano	Female	Classical, Improvisation	Theoretical – based on Hank's discussion of piano students. Female improvisation teacher.
Luc	Interview (phone) 11/6/2014 10AM	Violin	Male	Smooth jazz, pop	Theoretical – looking for potential contrasting opinion, based on different medium and style taught.
Julian	Interview (phone) 11/6/2014 5PM	Saxophone	Male	Jazz	Snowball – Recommended by Hank
Damian	Interview (phone) 11/7/2014 Interview (phone) 12/21/2014	Bass	Male	Jazz	Recommended as an "expert improvisation teacher" by two university, and one high school-level jazz band instructors
Henri	Interview (in-person) 12/10/2014	Saxophone	Male	NA (Student)	Theoretical – Student taught in Hank's observation
Margery	Interview (phone) 12/16/2014	Voice, Bass	Female	Jazz	Snowball – Recommended by Hank. Female improvisation teacher.
Heath	Interview (in-person) 12/17/2014	Tuba	Male	NA (Student)	Theoretical – Student taught in Hank's observation
Geraldo	Interview (phone) 12/26/2014	Trombone, Piano	Male	Jazz	Snowball – Recommended by Hank

Figure 4.1: Sampling Chart
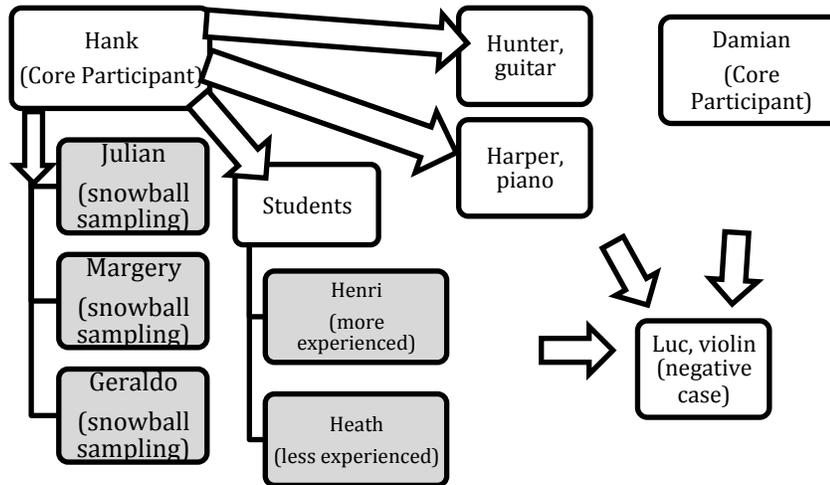
Narrative 4.1: Societal Expectations

Both Harper and Margery saw female confidence issues with music improvisation as connected to *societal expectations* of women, generally. "Boys are encouraged to break boundaries and innovate. And girls, I think, are more often raised to obey the rules. I think that improvisation, often, is associated with the breaking of boundaries" (Harper, personal communication, November 5, 2014). Margery sees the situation as improving.

> It's that their parents brought them up to be more soft and tender. For years it really had been an issue. It has been an issue that the girls just didn't have the same strong attitude in their playing that the boys did. Now that's changing in our society, and girls are portrayed as everything from sports players, to superheroes, to CEOs. Women are portrayed in much stronger roles and I think that is starting to balance out. There are not as many differences between the way boys play and girls play, and I'm glad to see that happening. It's pretty equal now, but years ago it was not. (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014)

The theme, *societal expectations*, aligns with Lucy Green (1997) who, in her discussion of composition and improvisation wrote, "Rational man has been constructed as in control of his body, emotional woman as subject to its vicissitudes; technical man as in control of nature, sensuous woman as part of it, to be controlled" (p. 85). I believe this understanding of man as *in control* but of women as vessels *to be controlled* can negatively affect female students'

confident to improvise music. The findings on *societal expectations* suggest it

may be that this *construction* is improving for women improvisers; what Green

labels "patriarchal conceptions of femininity" (p. 113) seem to be in the process

of being *interrupted*. The portrayal, in the media, of women in "much stronger

roles" (Margery, personal communication, December 16, 2014), as well as

women improvisers serving as strong *role models*, may be helping both women

and men understand women as able to be *in control of nature*, in this case,

through confidently improvising music.

Figure 5.1: Interreflecting Themes

Simplifying structures ➡	The power of limits (Nachmanovitch, 1990)
Free improvisation & safe environment ➡	Practice, "totally judgment free, discrimination-free" (p. 70)
Aural instruction (praxis) ➡	Listening (essential theme)
Safe environment (praxis) ➡	Criticism-free environment (essential theme)

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Music Educators Journal (Refereed journal)

RECENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS:

*"Context for the content": Exploring the possibility of a democratic application of
Gordon's music learning theory*, Research presented at the 9th International
Conference for Research in Music Education, Exeter, England, UK. April 15,
2015
Reflections on anti-authoritarian pedagogy in a jazz combo lab, Research presented
at the MayDay Group Colloquium 26: Co-constructing our musicing
education. Gettysburg, PA. June 20, 2014.
*"I was the only Black person in the class": An African American undergraduate's
experience navigating music education at a predominantly White institution*,
Research presented at the 2014 NA*f*ME Music Research and Teacher
Education National Conference. St. Louis, MO. April 11, 2014.
*A grounded definition of confident music improvisation: Perceptions among
university improvisation teachers*, Research presented at the 3rd Annual
Society for Music Education in Ireland/Cumann Ceol Oideachais na
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RECENT REFEREED WORKSHOPS:

Fighting institutional marginalization in music education, Session presented at the
2014 NA*f*ME Music Research and Teacher Education National Conference.
St. Louis, MO. Presented with Kruse, A., Palkki, J. & Hess, J. April 11,
2014.
Democracy in band: Strategies for greater student ownership at all levels, Session
presented at the 2014 PMEA Annual In-service Conference. Hershey, PA.
Presented with Thornton, L. C. & Gossett, J. B. March 28, 2014.

RECENT PANELS (INVITED):

Panel on democracy and education, Giving Voice to Democracy in Music Education
Conference, Montclair, NJ. Facilitator: Marissa Silverman. Respondents:
Jennifer Robinson, Daniel J. Shevock, and Emily James. June 21, 2014.