Improvisation Pedagogies via Improvised Dialogues: Lessons from a Week-long
Course on Musical Improvisation for Youth

By

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Abstract

Musical improvisation is the negotiation of musical ideas and differences in the moment. Despite its considerable contributions to the development of music history, improvisation remains conspicuously absent from mainstream Western schooling. Its omission from the classroom is due in part to the scarcity of information on the topic of facilitating improvised music. My research explores the pedagogical applications of musical improvisation and the opportunities it presents for fostering creativity and cultivating critical reflection. In this thesis, I discuss my experiences teaching a week-long course on the topic of musical improvisation to nineteen students as a part of the Enrichment Mini-Courses Program. Together through co-investigation, the class and I unpacked issues and concepts concerning improvisation in theory and practice. Exploring frameworks for improvised music making, my findings are the product of verbal, written, and musical dialogues with the students, formulating pedagogies of improvisation that are themselves improvised.

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Introduction

Never Before Heard: Pedagogies of Improvisation

For as long as I can remember, I have viewed the world around me as a sonic playground for musical extemporization. My creative practice is driven by curiosity, which has prompted me to explore improvisatory modes of music making in pursuit of music that is ineffable and ephemeral. Derived from the Latin word "improvisus," improvisation literally translates to "never before seen," or for my purposes, "never before heard." (Gold and Villa 2012, 11) Improvisation is a vehicle for musicians who seek to push the bounds of their own creativity, maintaining what Joe Morris describes as a "perpetual frontier." (Morris 2012, 1)

One of the primary—though often tacit—objectives of arts education is fostering student creativity. As a proponent of creative expression, I feel that musical improvisation facilitates creativity and therefore deserves a place in all levels of music education, not as a replacement for current music pedagogies (which tend to focus on Western art music and its derivatives), but rather as an important complement to existing pedagogical methods. Unfortunately, musical improvisation has remained conspicuously absent in mainstream Western schooling historically.

In Derek Bailey's seminal book *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, the author begins by highlighting the contradiction: "Improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practised of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood." (Bailey 1993, ix) Bailey goes on to speculate about the source of society's ambivalence towards improvisation: "Defined in any one of a series of catchphrases ranging from 'making it up as he goes along' to 'instant composition', improvisation is generally viewed as a musical conjuring trick, a doubtful expedient, or even vulgar habit." (Bailey 1993, ix) This is a common misconception, and one that has positioned improvisation as inferior or subservient to

composition. However, I argue that the composition-improvisation binary is false; the two are inextricably woven into a continuum of creative music making. Moreover, many of the most celebrated composers were accomplished improvisers in their own right, using improvisation for the ornamentation of notated parts and incorporating entire improvised passages for the performer to interpret in the moment. (Stewart 2016, 1)

Many scholars have grappled with improvisation's institutional neglect. At a panel discussion at the 2000 International Association of Jazz Educators Convention, Alan Chase suggested that teachers' apprehension towards improvisatory music making was due to their unfamiliarity with improvisation and how to successfully implement it in the classroom, as well as teachers' uncertainty as to how to assess student development therein. (Borgo 2007, 68-69) In *Perpetual Frontier* (2012) Joe Morris calls for new language to talk about improvised music. He argues that the ambiguity of the language that improvisers use to describe their creative practice has "contributed to the notion that the music is not worthy of study or impossible to teach." (Morris 2012, 19)

Despite the tenuous relationship between improvisation and the academy historically, improvisation has garnered increased academic attention in recent years, due in part to the academic appointments of scholars specializing in improvisation studies including Pauline Oliveros, Anthony Braxton, George E. Lewis, Ajay Heble, and Jesse Stewart. The emergence of improvised music in the academy has also prompted the formation of improvised music ensembles such as the Contemporary Music Ensemble (CME) at the University of Guelph, of which I was a member for four years. These ensembles not only develop students' improvisation skills, but also showcase improvised music to the wider community.

Furthermore, improvisation has received increased attention as an object of academic study. For example, "Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice" is a research project based out of the University of Guelph dedicated to exploring and defining an emerging field of interdisciplinary inquiry. (Heble 2015) Describing the project's primary objective, project director Ajay Heble wrote: "The project's core hypothesis is that musical improvisation is a crucial model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action." (Heble 2015) The international research team includes scholars from a wide array of disciplines including musicology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, philosophy, and gender and women's studies. Together, ICASP has published numerous books on improvisation, hosted annual colloquia, and launched a peer-reviewed academic online journal called *Critical Studies in Improvisation.* In addition, the ICASP project has implemented a number of improvisation focused initiatives aimed at negotiating difference in partnership with numerous non-for-profit organizations such as KidsAbility, Head and Hands, Give Yourself Credit, and local community centers. (Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice, 2015)

I had the good fortune of working for two years as a research assistant with the ICASP project, gaining invaluable experience. My experiences with the project and the University of Guelph's Contemporary Music Ensemble furthered my interest in improvisation as both a mode of music making and an object of academic study. Combined, these experiences prompted me to explore the pedagogy of musical improvisation through Carleton University's Master of Arts Music and Culture program.

In the spring of 2015, I was given the opportunity to teach a course on improvised music through Carleton University's Enrichment Mini-Courses Program (EMCP). EMCP is an annual pedagogical initiative hosted by Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, La Cité

Collégiale, and St. Paul University in partnership with several public and Catholic school boards in the greater Ottawa area. The program aims to offer highly motivated students the opportunity to study at a post-secondary institution for one week. The students choose from a long list of courses that are designed and facilitated by university professors and graduate students.

The day before class started, each course instructor held an orientation meeting for the students and their parents to ask questions about the course and familiarize themselves with the campus. I explained the objective of my course was to explore improvised music with the class. One seemingly sceptical parent asked the familiar question: "How do you teach improvisation?" I answered that we would learn to improvise together in improvised dialogue.

I went on to explain that to teach improvisation requires that teachers reconsider their pedagogical approach, moving from the conventional transactional model of education in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the heads of students to a dialogical, transformative model. In the latter approach, students are empowered as agents to learn within their own social realities through dialogue and co-investigation as a community. I explained that improvisers draw upon their training and experience, which inform the musical choices that they make in the moment through a process of dialogue and negotiation with other musicians. I emphasized that it is through this process of negotiation that we learn to improvise.

In this thesis, I will discuss my approach to the pedagogy of musical improvisation, focusing in particular on strategies that I used to foster creative development among 19 students through the EMCP program. Drawing on the work of many improvisers and pedagogues, I will provide a detailed account of specific improvised music lessons and activities, and assess their effectiveness as pedagogical tools for the study of musical improvisation. In addition to my

own experiences and observations in the classroom, I will incorporate the students' voices by referring to things that they said in class or wrote in their reflection journals in order to examine the learning outcomes of the course more fully. I aim to demonstrate that improvisation can, in fact, be taught. Furthermore, it is my sincere hope that this thesis will provide other educators with some ideas, tools, and resources to facilitate the pedagogy of improvised music within their classrooms.

Chapter one provides an overview of the EMCP program in general, and my course in particular. I provide details about the students in the class and how we negotiated various forms of difference within the class. In chapter two, I examine the lessons that formed the core pedagogical focus of the class including the question "what is music?"; issues of sonic awareness and transparency; the notion of an improviser's sonic palette and the use of extended techniques; as well as the idea of musical mistakes and dissonance. In chapter three, I discuss the specific improvised music activities that I facilitated within the class. I begin by theorizing a repertoire for the pedagogy of improvisation, and explain the criteria I used for picking the repertoire for my EMCP course. Finally, I explain how I incorporated soundpainting, John Zorn's *Cobra*, graphic scores, Deep Listening exercises, as well as miscellaneous mini-activities and instrument building activities into the class.

Improvisation and Pedagogy: Theoretical Practices and Practical Theories

As an improviser, performer, deep listener, instrument builder, and critical pedagogue, my creative practice is an amalgamation of these varied yet interrelated disciplines, all of which inform my approach to improvisation and its pedagogy. I regard my experiences in these areas as both theoretical practices and practical theories that are directly applicable to the pedagogy of

improvisation. In addition, the growing body of academic research rooted in the fields of improvisation studies, improvisation pedagogy, and critical pedagogy informed my approach to the EMCP class and my analysis thereof.

The emergence of the field of improvisation studies over the past ten to fifteen years has prompted increased attention to the pedagogical value of improvisation and its potential classroom applications. (Stewart 2016, 1) The focus of this research has been split between theorizing a cohesive pedagogy and exploring its practical use in workshop and school settings. In realizing the inextricable links between theory and practice, I consider these types of research to be two halves of a holistic improvisation pedagogical praxis. In the present context, I will endeavour to summarize some of the important contributions to the field of improvisation pedagogy, and explain how they have influenced my own pedagogical practice.

George E. Lewis is a leading figure in the field of improvised music. As an improvising trombonist, computer music pioneer, composer, scholar, and educator, Lewis has been deeply involved in the development of improvisation studies and improvisation pedagogy. (Lewis 2000, 78) In "Teaching Improvised Music: An Ethnographic Memoir"—published originally in the first volume of John Zorn's *Arcana: Musicians on Music* book series—Lewis endeavors to explore the chief issues imbedded in the history of improvisation pedagogy. As a longstanding member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and a self-identified improviser in the academy (a rarity in itself, particularly at the outset of his illustrious career), Lewis is expertly positioned to offer valuable insights.

Lewis uses the familiar and highly contested question of whether improvisation can be taught as his point of departure. (Lewis 2000, 79) He goes on to offer examples drawn from his own experiences as both a student and a teacher of improvised music. He discusses the

controversies surrounding the "academicization" of improvisation, namely the idea that the academic study of improvisation could be detrimental to improvisation as a creative practice. (Lewis 2000, 80) This prompted me to unpack the issue of academicization and standardization as they relate to improvised music in dialogue with the students in my EMCP course.

Lewis goes on to consider his experience as a student and a teacher in musical apprenticeships through the AACM, where he learned to treat every musical activity as an opportunity for learning. Of particular interest to my own work is Lewis's description of a compulsory undergraduate course he offered at the University of California, San Diego on real-time music-making called Music 133. (Lewis 2000, 99) He explains that the majority of the students enrolled in the course had no experience or familiarity with improvised music. (Lewis 2000, 99) Lewis structured the course in two parts: the first of two weekly sessions was a general lecture and the second was a playing and discussion session. (Lewis 2000, 100) Lewis incorporated various types of music-making assignments related to the readings which "emphasized listening, sensitivity to environment, form and structure, location and tradition, and awareness of internal dialogue." (Lewis 2000, 100) The author's emphasis on music-making as a mode of inquiry inspired my own approach to the EMCP course.

Lewis incorporated journaling as a tool for self-reflection and feedback. Each journal assignment was directed by a topic for the student to unpack. (Lewis 2000, 103) Lewis used the process journals as a window into the student experience, gaining insight that helped him improve his teaching strategies. (Lewis 2000, 103) Though I chose not to assign specific topics for the reflection journals in my course, I too used common themes between journals as prompts for discussion.

In addition to Lewis's important work, John Stevens's *Search & Reflect: A Music Workshop Handbook* is a vital resource for teachers interested in incorporating improvisation into the classroom. The book is a collection of activities developed for improv workshops by the London, England based organization Community Music, which endeavoured to provide disadvantaged communities with the opportunities to make music. (Stevens 1985, ii) The activities in *Search and Reflect* cater to inexperienced improvisers and are easy to facilitate with limited improvisatory experience. (Stevens 1985, 1) The author explains the basic properties of sound and the fundamental elements of music, highlighting in particular the importance of rhythm and its communicative potential. (Stevens 1985, 1)

In addition to the plethora of improvised music exercises, Stevens imparts several important philosophical lessons about the pedagogy of improvisation that have left a lasting impression on my own approach to teaching improvised music. The author puts special emphasis on the inclusive nature of improvised music, aspiring to foster an environment "where people feel free to listen, experiment, interact and make mistakes." (Stevens 1985, 2) Moreover, he encourages teachers and students to contemplate the musical potential of every sound. He writes: "The person who uses a sound as a musical statement is the only possible judge of whether it is musically valid or not." (Stevens 1985, 2) The author encourages teachers facilitating improv activities to embrace mistakes as the inevitable product of experimentation. (Stevens 1985, 2) Stevens values the process of improvisation over the product, a mentality that I have adopted in my own teaching.

In addition to these foundational writings on improvisation pedagogy, a number of more recent writings have influenced my approach. For example, *Critical Studies in Improvisation* is an open-access peer-reviewed academic journal for the advancement of the study of

improvisation. The journal seeks to explore key issues pertaining to improvisation, with special attention to improvisation's cultural significance as both a musical and social practice. (Critical Studies in Improvisation 2015) A 2007 issue of the journal devoted to the subject of "Improvisation and Pedagogy" is of special importance to my own work. In particular, the essays by George E. Lewis, Keith Sawyer, Scott Thomson, and Ursel Schlicht have had a significant influence on my own pedagogical practice.

In his commentary, "Improvisation and Pedagogy: Background and Focus of Inquiry," Lewis provides historical context that echoes the concerns outlined in his ethnographic memoir. Moreover, the author poses several research questions that serve as avenues of inquiry for contemporary scholars and educators. (Lewis 2008) Of particular interest to me is Lewis's question: "What kinds of new theoretical and organizational models, as well as new practices, can be developed for the creation and nurturing of itinerant-institutional partnerships for the teaching of improvisation, the development of improvisation teachers, and theories of education that embed improvisation itself as a methodology?" (Lewis 2008) I would suggest that the Enrichment Mini-Courses Program, and my involvement therein, constitutes one such "itinerant-institutional partnership".

Sawyer's "Improvisation and Teaching" calls for a major overhaul of Western music education, advocating that teachers incorporate improvisation into the core of the music curriculum. Problematizing received notions about music education including the composer/performer binary, Sawyer critically examines the knowledge economy and theorizes its role in improvisation pedagogy. (Sawyer 2008) He identifies four types of knowledge: deep conceptual knowledge, integrated knowledge, adaptive expertise, and collaborative skills. (Sawyer 2008) Sawyer concludes that the current music education system fails to equip students

with the four types of knowledge, suggesting that pedagogies of improvisation can be an important corrective in this regard. Sawyer's polemic critique of the Western music education raises a number of important questions for teachers to contemplate. In particular, his research has driven me to question the types of knowledge that conventional music education seeks to impart and to consider the types of knowledge musical improvisation can cultivate.

Scott Thomson's essay "The Pedagogical Imperative of Musical Improvisation" is a comprehensive response to the question of how musicians learn to improvise and the kinds of skills and knowledge they gain in the process. The author provides a detailed account of the process by which improvisers learn their craft in conventional Western music education settings and in group improvisation settings, focusing in particular on the Association of Improvising Musicians Toronto (AIMT) as a case study. He concludes that regardless of the setting, improvisation must be taught through collaborative performance. He writes: "Such an environment in which collective aesthetics are cultivated and human and musical difference can be reconciled demands an ongoing, collaborative process of pedagogy that is the mark of a responsive, responsible improviser." (Thomson 2008) I frequently refer to Thomson's research when grappling with the collaborative nature of the improvisation pedagogy.

In ""I Feel My True Colors Began to Show:" Designing and Teaching a Course on Improvisation," Ursel Schlicht recounts her experiences teaching a course on improvisation, detailing the core elements of the multifaceted course. In addition to describing weekly rhythmic group warm-ups, open group improvisation, reflection components, as well as a personal project, Schlicht explains how she incorporated conducted improvisations into the class (drawing on Butch Morris's "conduction" method) as well as Pauline Oliveros's concept of Deep Listening. (Schlicht 2008) Schlicht's description and analysis of her course were very useful to me when

designing my own improvisation course. In particular, I wanted to emulate her dialogical method of instruction, which resonates with my interest in critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy emerged, in part, from a progressive education movement led by proponents of "an emancipatory ideal of democratic schooling in the United States during the twentieth century." (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 2) Major contributors to the formation of critical pedagogy include philosophers, civil rights activists, critical theorists, and educators, all of whom share a deep commitment to the transformation of structures and conditions that perpetuate unjust social relations and unequal distributions of power. One of the most influential critical pedagogy theorists is Paulo Freire, whose seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971) advocates for the dismantling of oppressive power relationships via dialogic education, facilitating social mobility for all members of society.

I subscribe to the teachings of critical pedagogy because they empower students to think critically about the role they can play in subverting hegemonic ideologies that marginalize certain groups of individuals. In "Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction," authors Antonia Darder, Marta Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres identify the key philosophical principles of critical pedagogy. (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 10) I would like to focus on three interrelated principles that are most evident in my teaching practices: dialectical theory, praxis, and dialogue.

A dialectical approach to education aims to expose the contradictions between objective knowledge and societal ideology that occur in interactions between individuals. (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 12) By critically engaging with the world around them and interrogating their own assumptions, students glean "new ways of constructing thought and action beyond how it currently exists." (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 12) Critical pedagogues seek to explore all facets of an issue, resisting tendencies toward dichotomous reductions, instead looking to

facilitate a relational understanding of the construction of knowledge as "both a product and a force in shaping the world." (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 12-13)

In critical pedagogy, praxis is defined as the synthesis of theory and practice from which human activity gains its power to transform reality. (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 15) Darder, Baltodano, and Torres explain: "All human activity is understood as emerging from an ongoing interaction of reflection, dialogue, and action—namely praxis—and as praxis, all human activity requires theory to illuminate it and provide a better understanding of the world as we find it and as it might be." (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 15) Through the alliance of reflection and action, students are empowered to construct their own ideas and combat systemic oppression.

Like the concept of praxis, dialogue is fundamental to the field critical pedagogy. As an educational strategy, a dialogic approach encourages students to become agents in their own realities, challenging the dominant educational paradigm that Freire calls the "banking" model (Freire 2003, 58) The banking model of education is predicated on the idea that the student's role in the classroom is that of an empty receptacle in which the teacher deposits knowledge. (Freire 2003, 57) Freire contends that the banking model of education is a tool of oppression used by those in positions of power to maintain the status quo, minimizing students' "critical social consciousness," and diminishing their creative power. (Darder, Baltodano, Torres 2003, 15) According to Freire, we must eliminate the teacher-student dichotomy in favour of a dialogic partnership based on co-investigation and what he terms "problem-posing education." (Freire 2003, 64) The problem-posing model is a reciprocal learning experience in which all participants engage with the material through dialogue. Describing the difference between these two disparate models of education, Freire writes: "Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The

former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality." (Freire 2003, 64)

Building on Freire's important work, Henry Giroux emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between two categories of classroom objectives: micro and macro. Giroux explains that micro objectives represent the specifics of the course content. (McClaren 2003, 71) In contrast, the macro objectives consider the implications of the course content beyond the classroom, in reference to society as a whole. (McClaren 2003, 71) In contemplating the social functions of classroom objectives and the types of knowledge they seek to impart, students develop a model by which they may come to understand the larger mechanisms of power that construct societal ideology.

As a critical educator, it is my job to encourage students to critically engage with multiple modes of discourse (musical and otherwise), considering the broader implications of every issue they encounter. One way that I do this is by challenging students to ask critical questions. For example, one day at the end of class, a student asked me if I had a favourite recording of improvised music that I could lend her. She told me that she had gone to her local record store looking for improvised music, but there was no section for improvised music. When she sought help from one of the sales associates, she was told that improvised music was not a real genre of music.

The next day, I asked the student to share her story with the class and consider what kinds of questions arose from the exchange. Here, I was using the problem-posing model of education to encourage the student, and her classmates, to critically examine an experience that they might otherwise dismiss or accept at a surface level. The student's experience at the record store prompted an especially productive discussion about the culture industries that surround cultural

production and the idiomatic identity of improvised music. One student suggested that the

ambiguity surrounding the identity of improvised music was related to the multiple names

associated with its practice. Together, we assembled a list of some of the most prevalent labels

associated with the idiom: contemporary music, free-jazz, creative music, new music, free

improvisation, free music, etc. We discussed the power dynamics inherent in these and other

genre labels, critically examining the cultural work that these terms perform. Another student

suggested that the bigger question was whether improvised music was an idiom or not. This

served as an important point of departure for our investigation.

We discussed the problematics surrounding the categorization of music based on genre

and style markers, noting that they are loaded with implicit expectations that risk putting undue

limitations on the creative mobility and agency of creative practitioners. Improvised music is not

impervious to this phenomenon. In *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*, Derek

Bailey makes the distinction between idiomatic and non-idiomatic improvisation, arguing that

improvisation can either be representative of an idiom (such as bebop) or an abstraction. (Bailey

1993, xi) According to Bailey, improvised music is non-idiomatic because it is not representative

of a singular idiomatic identity. (Bailey 2003, xii)

From here, the students and I considered Bailey's use of the term "idiomatic identity."

Together as a class, we agreed that an idiom is characterized by more than just style markers and

we decided that its meaning is subjective, and is actively maintained by a myriad of cultural

agents and institutions: musicians, audiences, the culture industries, the academy, and more. I

suggested that the identity of every musical genre or idiom is in a constant state of negotiation

between its history and the ways in which creative practitioners mobilize that history in the

present in the service of musical expression. When a musician is improvising, he or she draws on

his or her musical training and a myriad of experiences—musical, social, cultural, and otherwise—that inform his or her approach to the music in the moment; there is a reciprocal relationship between the improviser and the practice. From this dialectical process of dialogue and negotiation, a dynamic idiomatic identity emerges, one that transcends strict idiomatic borders. Returning to the original question, we came to the conclusion that categorizing improvised music as an idiom was not useful to our understanding of the music. We chose instead to frame improvised music as "pan-idiomatic," referring to the way improvisers draw on divergent ideas in the moment. The idea of pan-idiomatic improvisation—improvisation across idioms—provided a useful conceptual framework for the course and for the negotiation of various forms of difference as discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 1: An Overview of my EMCP Course

The Enrichment Mini-Courses Program (EMCP) is an annual pedagogical initiative designed to give highly motivated students from participating schools in Eastern Ontario and Western Québec the opportunity to enroll in a weeklong course pursuant to their own personal interests. Each year, students from grades 8 to 11 in Ontario and Secondary II to V in Québec are nominated by their teachers to forego attending their home institutions during the first week of May, and are sent instead to a university campus to enroll in a unique, custom designed mini-course. The courses are devised by teaching staff—faculty and designated graduate students—to appeal to a young audience and offer an enriched learning experience at one of four post-secondary institutions: Carleton University, University of Ottawa, La Cité Collégiale, and St. Paul University. In 2015, approximately 3000 students were accepted and assigned to a total of 164 mini-courses. The extensive list of courses offered in 2015 surveyed topics such as media representation, video game design, criminology, journalism, animation, the brain, feminism, and the arts. This cross-disciplinary approach is key to the program's aim to reach and invigorate students while teaching them valuable skills in a collaborative learning environment, stimulating their interest in pursuing post-secondary studies. Since being launched in 1981, EMCP has seen over 50,000 students from 22 school boards participate in the program. (Enrichment Mini-Courses Program, 2016)

I was initially intrigued by the prospect of facilitating a course on improvisation through EMCP because of the freedom instructors are given in constructing and implementing their course. In some educational contexts, educators are bound by prewritten course outlines that dictate the specific topics to be covered with prescribed learning outcomes measured and reflected by formal evaluation. In contrast, the "Tips and Guidelines for EMCP Instructors"

circulated as part of the instructor orientation reads: "The purpose of the Enrichment Mini-Courses Program is to challenge and stimulate students in an informal learning environment. It is our hope that the courses taught will be very different in approach, structure and subject matter from their regular high school classes." (Enrichment Mini-Courses Program, 2015) In addition, there is no formal evaluation component for mini-courses. Teaching a mini-course affords instructors the resources of the university without the typical constraints and pressures of institutionalized education such as student evaluation and mandated curricula.

Moreover, the program's weeklong format appealed to me for a number of reasons. In the past, I have facilitated and participated in one and two-day workshops on improvisation, and while short formats certainly have merits, I have always felt inhibited by the time constraint. In EMCP classes, students must be in attendance from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day, minus one hour for a lunch break. Working with the same students for five consecutive days for a total of 25 contact hours enables instructors to approach their subject from many angles and cover the topic more thoroughly than in single-session workshop formats. In addition, the generous time allotment gave me further flexibility to take the students outside of the classroom for regular breaks to reflect upon what we covered while giving our minds and ears much needed rest.

Finally, facilitating a course on improvisation with a range of age groups was an enticing opportunity. Where the typical high school class is composed of a sample of students of the same age, the EMCP model gives instructors the opportunity to teach a mix of students aged anywhere between 13 and 17 years old. Having a group of students interact in a musical setting with varying degrees of technical, as well as personal and social development was an enriching experience. While the social stratification among the students manifested other issues (which I

discuss in a later section), it also offered an extra layer of analysis for assessing the efficacy of my teaching methods as well as the activities I facilitated.

My Course

The call for course proposals circulated by Carleton University requested a short course description of 125 words or less accompanied by a "cool" title that would appeal to a young demographic. Beyond this, I wanted my course description to appeal to a variety of students interested in making music together regardless of the student's perception of their own musical ability. In fact, I wanted to attract a sample of students with as diverse a range of formal and informal musical training as possible and with an eclectic array of musical preferences so as to foster an inclusive environment for our practice-based inquiry. I titled the course "*Winging it: The Art of Musical Improvisation.*" The course description disseminated to all students eligible to register for EMCP read:

> Improvisation, the art of spontaneous musical creation, is a dynamic medium for musical expression, indigenous to every musical style and genre you've ever heard. This course invites musicians at any level, from a variety of musical backgrounds, to bring in an instrument of their choice and learn to play music in ways you've never imagined. What is free improvisation? How do we improvise? What else can my instrument do? What's a graphic score? How do I compose for improvisers? We will explore these questions in discussion, in musical games, and in improvisation. This course challenges its students to listen carefully, think creatively, and to play in the moment!

> The primary aim of the course was to expose students to improvised music. I wanted to give students the opportunity to explore modes of music making beyond the canonic repertoire of the Euro-classical and jazz traditions (and their derivatives) privileged by Western music education system. My hope was that the class would reconsider preconceived notions of music and musicality through improvisation, critically examining the implicit and explicit hierarchies in

music education. I wanted to foster students' creativity by exploring facets of musical performance not typically prioritized in most classroom settings.

My pedagogical approach is largely informed by the field of critical pedagogy, which endeavors to challenge hegemony in pursuit of social justice. In Paulo Freire's seminal writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), the author illustrates a binary framework by which we may theorize two disparate pedagogical methods that he refers to as "banking education" and "problem-posing education." Freire describes banking education as the process by which the teacher transmits facts to the student, who must systematically receive and memorize them for future testing. Within this paradigm Freire argued, "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor." (Freire 2003, 57) He believed the transmitted facts fail to transcend to the level of knowledge, as they are contextually void and therefore carry no attached meaning. Freire problematized the banking system because it leaves little room for student inquiry, mirroring oppressive society. This in turn inhibits students' ability to develop critical consciousness and creative power by taking away their agency.

In contrast, problem-posing education embraces a dialogical model as a means to transform the social relations endemic to the classroom. This model of education fosters a collaborative learning environment between the teacher and students in critical co-investigation, unlike the narratological banking model. Freire wrote:

> The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers his earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*. (Freire 2003, 64)

According to Freire, it is via dialogical pedagogy that opinions and beliefs construed as knowledge (doxa) are replaced by knowledge founded in rationality and reason (logos). (Freire 2003, 64) The dialogical nature of problem-posing education reconceptualizes the role of both the students and the teacher by affording them the opportunity to engage critically with the material, fostering a mutually beneficial learning environment. While problem-posing education may be construed as utopic epistemology, I subscribe to Freire's doctrine because it empowers students and teachers to challenge hegemony by thinking critically as active agents of a society.

To facilitate the course using a dialogical approach, I first had to acknowledge the socially constructed power that comes with my position as a teacher in a classroom. Critical pedagogy does not aim to circumvent the authority of the teacher—teachers still make and enforce rules, determine what material to cover in class, and decide when to take breaks—but rather to redefine the social relationships in the classroom in a way that allows students and teacher alike to learn in a way that is as uninhibited as possible by the hierarchy. In order to negotiate the teacher-student power dynamic, I positioned myself as a co-investigator. At the outset of the course, I put forward the idea of co-investigation and made it clear I was more interested in asking the right questions than I was in absolute truths. I also communicated with the class that my intention was not to explicitly teach students how to improvise, but to cultivate a dialogical learning environment in which students had the opportunity to develop their improvisatory voices through a collaborative learning process. By posing open-ended questions to the class, I encouraged students to engage in discussion and to construct their own understanding of the topics we covered through critical reflection.

In addition to my role as a co-investigator, I felt it was important to position myself as a researcher in the classroom. I used the orientation session that took place the day before class

began as an opportunity to share my research aims. I wanted to be up front and as transparent as possible about my intentions with both the students and their parents. I explained that my research focus was on exploring pedagogies of improvisation and that the findings I gathered through the EMCP course would be used as a case study for my master's thesis. I explained that I planned on using my own observations in combination with student feedback gathered via anonymous reflection journals and surveys, extending the dialogical and self-reflexive strategies that we explored in class to my research about the pedagogy of improvisation. I made it clear that I had received ethics clearance from Carleton University to conduct my research and that any participant could withdraw from the study at any time. Every student in the class was under the age of 16, and therefore each student signed a parental assent form (Appendix A) and their parents signed a parental consent form (Appendix B).

I structured the lessons and activities so as to facilitate meaningful discussion—verbally and musically—at every step. I began by introducing the concept, initiating a discussion as to how the lesson or activity may be beneficial to our creative practice. Next, we made music together, putting our newly developed ideas into practice. This was not only an opportunity to hone our improvisation skills, but was also a form of praxis as a mode of academic inquiry. Following the performance, we had open discussion, reflecting upon the music we made and asking questions, which invariably led to further questions. Following a period of reflection, we would either repeat the entire process or move on with the intention of revisiting the concept later in the course—a decision we made collaboratively.

Student Backgrounds

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a group of students who were driven by their innate sense of curiosity and strong desires to explore innovative modes of music making. However, it should be noted that the students deemed eligible to enroll in the Enrichment Mini-Courses Program were chosen based on their exceptional academic performance and therefore may be said to only reflect a segment of the student population. Nevertheless, based on my observations as a student and educator in a wide variety of contexts, the students' creative aptitudes were largely representative of all children when they are motivated to engage in artistic endeavors that they find invigorating.

At the beginning of the course, I handed out a survey to both gauge the class's musical experience, as well as to gain insight as to why they chose to enroll in the course and what they hoped to gain from the experience (Appendix C). The results from the survey informed my approach to facilitating the course when explaining concepts that assumed previous musical knowledge. Furthermore, the surveys helped me navigate topics related to improvisation in a way that would appeal to students.

I chose to administer a survey as opposed to asking these questions as a part of a group discussion because I felt that students would be more inclined to answer the questions honestly if they were not subject to any judgment by their peers. While most students adjusted quickly to the new social setting, I wanted to avoid any fear of embarrassment or inadequacy that some students might feel, particularly those with less musical experience than their classmates. In addition, the survey was anonymous so as to mitigate any discomfort students might feel sharing information with me. The questions on the survey were:

1. What musical instrument(s) do you play?
2. Why did you sign up for this course?

3. Describe your musical improvisation experience.

Upon reading the results from the survey, I was struck by the impressive number of instruments most students had experience playing. Students in the class had experience playing an average of three, for a total of seventeen different musical instruments. Thirteen of these were orchestral, suggesting the prevalence of classically trained musicians. Fourteen students played piano and eleven played guitar. I encouraged students who played multiple instruments to bring in a variety to experiment with so as to avoid having too many of any given instrument, though the guitar was the most predominant instrument throughout the course. The unorthodox array of instrumentation made the overall sound of our ensemble quite unique, and resisted conventional hierarchies between instruments and their perceived functionalities (such as solo or lead instruments plus backing rhythm section).

When students are selected to participate in EMCP, they are given a long list of course offerings and are asked to rank their top ten preferences. I was pleased to hear that nearly all of the students who enrolled in my course had ranked it in their top three choices. I believed it was important to ask students what compelled them to take the course because understanding their motivation provided me with valuable insight as to where students were coming from. Many of the students indicated that music was their favourite course and that they thought taking a weeklong course on improvisation would be fun. One student wrote, "Improv is an escape from my practice routine when I'm getting ready for my playing tests. Actually, I do it so often that [it's] part of my practice routine whenever I'm playing in practice rooms or I'm alone in my bedroom." While improvisation for some was a solo endeavor, others considered it an intrinsically social activity. Another student wrote and later shared with the class that he registered for the course for the opportunity to meet new people and get to know them via

improvisatory musical exploration. This student's commitment to fostering community through improvisation served to strengthen the collegial learning environment of the class and hints at the dialogical potential of improvisation.

Multiple students wrote that they took the course to gain confidence in situations requiring them to improvise, with one of the students going as far as to say that they were afraid of improvising. S/he wrote, "I'm simply not very good at improvising. I made a mistake at the jazz band concert and my teacher got really mad at me." I find these kind of statements troubling because I have met many individuals who have been dissuaded from improvising because of criticisms received from teachers who suggest that they are not good at improvising or that they played the wrong notes. I made a special effort to combat these kinds of statements by valuing every student's improvisatory voice and encouraging students to pursue their creative practice unencumbered by notions of "wrong notes" or the right way to play their instrument.

Many of the students' responses demonstrated a high level of maturity and self-awareness for their age. One student wrote, "I've been playing music and improvising since I was old enough to hit pots and pans with wooden spoons. I want to hone my creativity so I can keep growing as a musician." Another survey read, "I have always felt like improv was a skill I haven't taken seriously. We never do it in class. It's time to really start to work on improv if I'm ever going to get better." Both of these students acknowledged the importance of developing their improvisation skills to their overall development as musicians.

Two students perceived improvisation as essential to their future musical endeavors. The first wrote about their ambitions to become a composer, "Some of the most interesting pieces have improv sections. When I'm creating complicated arrangements, I want to be able to insert improv into my piece." The second student wrote, "I wish to become a music teacher and I would like to

use other perspectives and genres in my class." Both of these students were eager to incorporate improvisation into their creative practice. At the end of the course, the student who anonymously shared their teaching ambitions confided in me that the course had helped her solidify her goals to pursue post-secondary education and that she hoped to contribute to improvisation pedagogy.

I felt it was important to establish the amount of improvisatory experience students had before entering the course in order to effectively assess their development throughout the course. The number of students who claimed to have zero experience improvising astonished me. What I found perhaps more interesting than this answer was the rationale behind the answer. Multiple students' wrote that they simply did not know how to play their musical instrument without prescribed notation or explicit instructions from their teacher. This ambivalence emanates from being given total freedom to play whatever you want when you have become accustomed to being told what to play and how to play it. This kind of musical freedom can be daunting— particularly for new improvisers. Knowing this, I adjusted my pedagogical approach accordingly when designing and facilitating improvisation activities in the class. By practicing improvisation within a set of pre-established parameters such as a game piece or a specific kind of musical activity, students feel more comfortable developing their improvisatory voice. They benefit from the guidelines which limit the seemingly infinite musical options at their disposal while still empowering them with more agency and creative liberty than most forms of notated sheet music. The topic of working within parameters or constraints was the basis of a lesson that is described later in this chapter.

A few students wrote that they had experience improvising in formally assembled bands and informal jam sessions. One student wrote, "I play jazz with my brothers. One plays guitar. The other plays drums. Me? I just play the black keys on the piano." Another student was an avid fan

of the blues and a talented guitarist who spent a significant amount of time practicing blues guitar solos over prerecorded chord changes. This student had virtually no experience playing with other musicians, but was eager to collaborate when given the chance.

Finally, it is interesting to note that over half of the students said that their only experience improvising was during the warm up before playing standard repertoire in their respective music classes. I was intrigued by this response because it highlights a common role that improvisation plays in most music classrooms, one that I had not considered until teaching the EMCP course. I have mixed feelings about the idea of incorporating improvisation into the warm up portion of an ensemble rehearsal. On one hand, it highlights a potential opportunity to incorporate improvisation into more traditional music classroom settings. But on the other, it reinscribes the dominance of composed music in the sense that improvisation is relegated to the role of a warm-up exercise before the ensemble gets to the "real work" of playing previously composed material.

Negotiating Difference

The demographics of the class—including the diverse age, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status of the participants—played an important role in shaping the experiences of the members of the course. One of my primary responsibilities in my capacity as the facilitator of the course was to recognize and negotiate various forms of difference. Many of these differences were not self-evident, but rather emerged gradually over the duration of our time together. Like any society, each member's unique experience contributed to the dynamic of the class as a whole. This process of negotiation directly informed my decision-making when

planning curriculum and making impromptu deviations from my plan to address issues or accommodate new avenues of inquiry.

Where a typical class consists of a group of students of roughly the same age, my class consisted of thirteen grade 8 students, three grade 9 students, and three grade 10 students. Having an assorted age group afforded younger students the opportunity to learn from older students, and vice-versa. In general, older students seemed to have more honed musical abilities, having had more years of musical instruction than their younger peers. On numerous occasions, the older students offered younger students insight to guide and shape their approach to their instrument. However, the older students also had more deeply entrenched notions of musicality and, in turn, had more difficulty resisting previously developed musical tendencies during our improvisations. The course required students to be open to new ideas and critically rethink their assumptions regarding music and the classroom. Moreover, the older students were more self-conscious and reserved than the younger students during discussion, avoiding making any statements that showed vulnerability or gave the impression that they cared too much for fear of seeming uncool. These issues were less of an obstacle for the younger students. The younger students' uninhibited openness to new musical possibilities provided the more seasoned musicians with a refreshingly free approach to music and unreserved candidness during discussion.

I observed that while most students were equally motivated to develop their improvisation skills, students responded differently to various forms of feedback depending on their age. I noticed that the younger students required more positive reinforcement paired with gentle suggestions for improvement, whereas the older students appreciated more direct constructive criticism. I believe this reflects disparate levels of both confidence and maturity. It

was important to me that I treat all students equally in challenging them to become better musicians, while being cognizant that each individual student requires a different approach when guiding them to realize their fullest potential.

Upon reading the class list, I was pleased to see a near even male to female ratio. The class comprised of eleven female students and eight male students, which meant, including myself, our group consisted of 55% female participants and 45% male participants. In the past, I have participated in numerous classes and workshops on improvisation in which there was a disparity between genders. This gender ratio disparity suggested that creative improvised music was a male dominated idiom. Therefore, I was encouraged by the balanced roster of students in the EMCP course, which provided an opportunity to negotiate gender differences through our improvisatory music and discussions.

Despite the relatively even gender ratio, the male students had the tendency to dominate both the discussion and the music making unless I intervened. From the beginning of the course, I noticed that most of the female students spoke and played significantly quieter than the male students, and were often interrupted by the boys. I felt it was my responsibility to ensure that everyone in the class was afforded equal representation, regardless of gender. One of the ways I achieved this result was through a lesson in which I emphasized the importance of listening intently to everyone as equally as possible and to think carefully about what others said or played, striving to foster a sense of mutual respect. Before we would improvise, I asked the students to consider every perceivable musical sound's place within the layers of the piece, and their own role within the aural space. This effectively directed the students' attention to the social and gender implications of their interactions, guiding the class to be cognizant and respectful of each other.

Though it is impossible to entirely mitigate my position of authority within the class, which certainly includes my male privilege, I tried to lessen its impact by framing myself as a co-investigator, de-centering the conventional teacher-student paradigm. I also made a conscious effort when leading discussions, musical or otherwise, to ensure that both male and female students were given equal opportunity to participate. I did not force anyone to participate, but I strove to ensure that everyone had equal opportunity to do so.

The students' diverse cultural backgrounds created a rich and socially vibrant learning environment and influenced their unique perspectives and individual approaches to the music we made together. The class was made up of nineteen students from seventeen different schools in Ontario. Many of these students traveled every morning to Carleton University by bus for over two hours without knowing a single other student in the class; only two students knew each other. Twelve students attended secular public schools, five attended Catholic schools, and two attended Jewish schools. While I can not know the degree to which the students' religious attitudes or beliefs influenced their everyday lives, a number of students from both secular and parochial schools alluded to the profound impact their cultures' music has had on their own creative practices. For example, a student who identified as Jewish shared with the class that he learned to play guitar under the tutelage of a member of his synagogue's congregation and that he had only recently begun playing music outside of Jewish musical practice. Moreover, four students had experience singing in Christian-faith based choirs at their Catholic schools.

The students were all very respectful of their peers' theological values. The students' diverse religious and cultural backgrounds informed their approach to musical improvisation, but they did not appear to create any social barriers between students. Nonetheless, after attending an

EMCP training workshop and being cautioned to be vigilant of discriminatory behavior, I made a conscious effort to ensure the classroom was a safe space.

The majority of the students in the class appeared to come from families with sufficient means to provide their children with all of the basic necessities, as every student came to class wearing clean clothes and carrying a lunch. Moreover, the majority of the class owned multiple musical instruments and many were enrolled in private music lessons.

While I do not think any students in the class were experiencing extreme poverty, one student confided in me that his family could not afford to buy him a musical instrument and that he had only limited access to a clarinet at school. I was concerned that he might feel embarrassed about being the only student in the class without an instrument, so I changed my curriculum to incorporate homemade musical instruments made out of commonplace items such as plastic water bottles and cardboard tubes. This was effective for a number of reasons. In addition to encouraging a broader range of sonic experimentation, the use of homemade musical instruments mitigated the socio-economic differences in the class by providing students with the equal access to music, regardless of whether or not their families could afford musical instruments and private lessons.

In addition, I brought in a few different musical instruments of my own each day for students to experiment with in the hopes of broadening their musical horizons, while also providing instruments to students who forgot or could not bring an instrument to class. These instruments were primarily of my own design and were inspired by other instruments I had seen or heard, as well as a few which were entirely original creations. I provided students with step-by-step instructions complete with diagrams in the interest of making them readily accessible to all students. Moreover, the instruments were all built from relatively inexpensive materials and

were highly customizable, so as to suit the needs of each individual student while being cognizant of the materials they might have at their disposal. I was very pleased by the positive feedback I received from the students on my homemade instruments, as many of them went home and built instruments using the schematics I provided, including the student who had not previously had access to a musical instrument at home.

Chapter 2: Improvised Music Lessons

My Approach

Facilitating a course on improvisation is similar to teaching any type of musical practice in the sense that there are fundamental lessons that students must learn in order to continue to develop. I believe these topics are best unpacked via a two-pronged approach in which students investigate both theoretically and practically. As such, I designed each lesson to have a discussion component and an applied music component. Each discussion resembled a seminar in which students had the opportunity to voice their thoughts in an open forum. While I typically guided these discussions, the process emphasized co-investigation; one of my main roles was to steer students to ask questions. These discussions often yielded more questions than answers and prompted further discussion on related topics. In order to transition from a verbal dialogue to a musical dialogue, the students and I would decide on a simple hypothesis based on our discussion that we sought to test in practice. The dialectical nature of this approach ensured that students engaged critically with the material and that their reflection meaningfully informed their improvisation as well as their holistic creative practice.

While all of these lesson outlines were pre-formulated to some degree, I chose not to schedule them within a specific timeslot (with a few exceptions). Instead, we tended to discuss particular issues as they arose: issues including definitions of music, awareness, responsibility, and more. I prepared the lessons in anticipation of these issues, as it has been my experience that when facilitating musical improvisation with novice improvisers, certain issues and concepts tend to come to the fore. In my view, the pedagogy of improvisation is often best when it too is improvised to some degree. This notion is influenced by Keith Sawyer's proposition that the

most effective teaching is a process of negotiating curricular structure via collaborative improvisation using constructivist, inquiry-based, dialogic teaching methods. (Sawyer 2013, 2-3)

One of the challenges of facilitating improvised music with musicians who have little experience with the idiom is that most students do not know where to begin because they do not know what improvised music is "supposed to" sound like, unlike other more popular genres with which they may be more familiar. This is not to say that these more popular idioms are homogenous, but rather that most of society is aware of the distinct style markers of these idioms. I am not suggesting that improvised music is without style markers—on the contrary, I unpack this question of idiom in detail in one of the following lessons. I am merely noting that it is difficult for anyone who is unfamiliar with improvised music to engage with such an abstract musical form. In many ways, teaching students to play improvised music is more about teaching an ideology of music making that is about inclusivity, listening, and creativity. I used the following lessons as points of departure for a lifelong journey of exploration into a mode of music making that Joe Morris has characterized as a series of perpetual frontiers. (Morris 2012, 1)

What is Music?

This lesson served as the point of departure for the entire course. I planned on beginning with this topic because I believe it is important that students critically examine their own assumptions regarding the epistemology of music. The question of what may or may not be considered musical is an arbitrary distinction that is based on societal ideology and preference. These assumptions need to be critically examined because they place limitations on the scope of music and the creative expression of its practitioners. Questioning these assumptions is a necessary part

of the pedagogy of improvised music because of improvised music's fringe status. The goal of this lesson was to broaden the students' musical horizons, opening their minds to the idea that any sound can be musical.

To navigate such a broad question in the classroom setting, I modeled my lesson after a series of discussions on the topic between R. Murray Schafer and a group of students that was transcribed and published in his 1965 publication, *The Composer in the Classroom*. During this session, Schafer challenged students' preconceived notions about what constitutes music by raising questions about their perception of melody, rhythm, order, and noise, as well as the subjectivity of musical taste as it relates to the prevalent attitudes surrounding contemporary music in society. Schafer's pedagogy informed my own, particularly in his methodology, incorporating both discussion and music-making as vehicles for their investigation.

I began the lesson by simply asking the class, "What is music?" After a moment of brief hesitation, which I suspect was due to the rather abrupt nature of the question and its apparent simplicity, students began offering their answers. After a few minutes of discussion, we had accumulated an impressive list of possible answers to work with, which I wrote on the board:

- Universal language for the expression of emotion or ideas
- Sound that is pleasing to the ear
- Organized melody, harmony, and rhythm
- Any sound
- Aural activity

I proceeded to ask the class why we had so many different answers. One student responded, "Because music means something different to everybody." When I asked her to elaborate, she said, "I use music to express myself. Other people use it to relax while they're studying. Athletes use music to get pumped for the big game." As a class, we quickly came to the conclusion that music has a variety of different functions in society.

Building off this discussion, I raised some questions about the first point, the idea that music is a "universal language for the expression of emotion or ideas." While the expression of emotion or ideas may be one reason that some musicians make music (of which there are many), the efficacy of transmitting messages via music is suspect because it relies on the listener's interpretation. This is to say that while the musician may encode an intended message in their music, the process of interpreting the music is subjective and will be informed by the listener's own emotional outlook, personal preferences, and musical background. To the class, I suggested that encoding and decoding in improvised music is a process of negotiation that occurs in the moment among all participants.

I also took an informal survey of the students' musical tastes. Each student had the opportunity to share his or her favourite artist or genre of music with the class. As we went around the room, each student's answer was met with nods of approval from their peers, until one student said that they loved jazz. A couple of students rolled their eyes at his answer and another student made an audible groan. I took this opportunity to explain that everyone is entitled to his or her own musical preference, and then directed the class's attention to the board. I asked the class what they thought about the second answer to the question what is music, namely sound that is pleasing to the ear. "Whose ear?" I asked. One student responded, "Well just because someone doesn't like jazz and doesn't find it pleasing to *their* ear, that doesn't mean its not music. I love rap but everyone else at my school hates it, but it's still obviously music." After further discussion, we all agreed that our definition of music has to include all musics, and therefore individual preference could have no bearing on our definition.

To address the notion that music can be defined as "organized melody, harmony, and rhythm" I picked up the acoustic guitar and strummed a simple chord progression in G Major

while humming a tune overtop. I asked the class if they heard a melody, harmony, and rhythm in what I had played, and they unanimously agreed that all three aspects were present. Next, I played a disjunctive, atonal, erratic piece that lasted about ten seconds. When I asked the same question, the class was divided in their response. The majority of students thought that in comparison to the first, the second piece had little discernable melody, harmony, or rhythm. I suggested that the flaw was not in the music, but instead in our understanding of the aspects we sought to describe. I explained that melody and harmony did not necessarily have to be tonal and that rhythm was only a series of organized accents. Moreover, I clarified that music can be organized in many different ways and that these ways are not always apparent to the audience or even the musicians. I added that our musical training informs our perception of these elements and this training extends not only to how we play our instruments, but also to how we listen to music.

I asked the class to listen again to the piece that most had dismissed, but this time I had them listen for the specific elements we had discussed. After listening to the piece multiple times, the students successfully identified the melody, harmony, and rhythm, and showed a broader understanding of these elements. We also discussed the idea that these three musical components did not all have to be present in order for us to experience an aural experience as a musical one, nor were they more important than other musical parameters such as timbre, dynamics, and texture. We concluded that music is a synthesis of all of these components.

The class was unanimously in favour of "any sound" being a part of our definition of music, but a couple of the students suggested we exclude noise and sounds that were not explicitly intended to be musical. I was again inspired by Schafer, this time referring to his renowned 1967 publication, *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an experimental music course*. I described Schafer's Ear

Cleaning concept as the process of discarding one's aural predispositions; abandoning cognitive filters that discriminate against and construct prejudicial notions of undesired or illegitimate sounds.

Schafer coined the term "soundscape" to describe the immersive sonic environment of the world. (Schafer 1986, 95) In his notes, Schafer considered noise, silence, tone, timbre, amplitude, melody, texture, and rhythm as expressive potentials that make up the musical soundscape. (Schafer 1986, 68) I shared my favourite quote from John Cage: "Music is sounds, sounds around us whether we're in or out of concert halls—see Thoreau." (Schafer 1986, 94) I explained that Cage wrote this in response to a letter from Schafer, who had asked for his definition of music, and that Cage's mention of Henry David Thoreau was a literary reference to *Walden* (1854), Thoreau's memoir that depicts his own fascination with the sights and sounds of nature. This emphasis on inclusivity of sounds—as well as agents of sound—is fundamental to the practice of improvised music. This is particularly evident in our Deep Listening exercises, as detailed in a later section.

To conclude our discussion of what constitutes music, we formulated a hypothesis: Every perceivable sound can be a part of a musical piece if we are committed to ear cleaning. I took the class on a walk down by the water of the Rideau Canal on Carleton University's campus, where we spent time listening attentively to the soundscape, making note of every perceptible sound and reflecting on its place and musical function within the acoustic space, including our own sounds. This was our first group improvisation of the course, guided only by our listening.

Finally, we discussed as a class the idea of music as an "aural activity." I encouraged the class to think about music as a verb instead of as a noun. In Christopher Small's seminal writing, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (1998), the author proposed a new word

to be added to the English vernacular, which he called "musicking," to describe the act of taking part in a musical performance in any capacity. (Small 1998, 8) Musicking is of particular interest to improvisers because it provides another perspective for reflecting upon the meaning of a musical performance. According to Small:

> The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. (Small 1998, 13)

I encouraged the class to consider how Small's rhetoric might apply to our course. I explained that during an improvisation, we form relationships between individual musicians, as well as all who are involved in the performance, including the audience. Within the context of our class, these socio-musical relationships would be negotiated via improvisation. I encouraged the members of the class to consider these relationships, and the broader implications of those relationships, throughout the course.

I suggested that we improvise a short piece and test Small's hypothesis, paying special attention to the relationships that we form over the duration of the piece. The piece we played was texturally sparse, quiet, and tentative. I asked the class what they thought of the piece and how our ensemble functioned as a society. One student offered, "Everyone had their turn to play. It was like no one wanted to step on anyone's toes." Another student said, "Like a democracy. Everyone was equal." I pointed out that much like in our discussions, the most socially extroverted students tended to take more leadership roles within the piece. As in a democracy, some students allowed others to take more prominent roles in the piece, opting instead to function in a supporting capacity. I reminded the class that despite this illusion of a disparity of

power, all members of the ensemble had equal authority and that each member had agency to change the dynamic of the society. Moreover, I added that both of these types of roles are important, both in society and in improvised music. I attributed the general tentativeness of some players to their unfamiliarity with improvised music, and encouraged students to explore different roles in our micro-society and be cognizant of their role within the socio-musical space. Over the duration of the course, we frequently revisited Small's concept of musicking to gain additional perspective by considering the impact the relationships we formed within the ensemble had on our music.

One student asked how musicking in an improvised music performance was different than a performance of a composed piece of music. I asked him to consider the nature of the socio-musical relationships in both practices. The relationships in most performances of composed music (between, for example, the composer, arranger, conductor, performers, audience members) tend to be fairly stratified. In contrast, the relationships in between the participants in an improvised musical performance tend to be more egalitarian—or at least they have that potential. I concluded with a quote on the topic from Small: "In short, composed music is the account of the journey of exploration, which might well have been momentous, but is over before we learn it, while improvisation is the journey itself." (Small 1996, 176)

By the end of the lesson, the class agreed that our goal ought not to be to come up with our own strict definition of music, but rather to rethink some assumptions that exclude certain modes of music making. We adopted an understanding of music that was broad enough to be inclusive of a wide range of musical practices, formulating the following working definition: "Music is the communication of sounds and silence transmitted aurally and interpreted reflectively." I wrote our working definition of music in the corner of the board, noting that we may wish to revise it

as the course progressed. We did not end up altering our definition, but it proved to be a useful tool when we revisited questions of musicality.

Sonic Awareness and Transparency

Introducing novice improvisers to the concept of what I refer to as "sonic awareness"—an awareness of the sonic environment during a musicking experience-- is imperative because it emphasizes the importance of listening as an essential skill to their development as improvisers. I believe it is most effective when taught in response to a specific issue endemic to large group improvisation, namely the issue of transparency, which I define as the ability to listen to every sound in the piece and contemplate and negotiate its place within the soundscape. I introduced the class to the concepts of sonic awareness and transparency following our third group improvisation in which the entire class participated.

In a large-group improvisation, the density of the soundscape is often overwhelming, and in an effort to hear and be heard, inexperienced improvisers often deprioritize listening resulting in an impenetrable wall of sound. While this wall of sound aesthetic has its own merits and may be worthy of exploration, it can be creatively stifling because it is difficult to introduce and pursue new musical ideas when they are indiscernible to the majority of the ensemble. I refer to this as an issue of transparency (or a lack thereof), which relates to the density of the musical texture. When the improvisers in an ensemble are inexperienced, there is a greater propensity for this type of dense texture. In most public school and high school settings, music classrooms typically consist of over twenty-five novice improvisers. In such settings, it is essential that educators interested in incorporating musical improvisation into the curriculum address the issues of sonic awareness and transparency. By ensuring students are cognizant of the tendency toward the wall of sound and by training their ears toward reflective listening and greater sonic

awareness, they may begin to develop strategies to gain agency over the texture of their improvisation.

This lesson reflected an amalgam of personal experiences that I have had in improvised music settings including performances, workshops, and classrooms. Having played music in a number of ensembles of varying sizes and levels in Guelph, Toronto, and Ottawa, Ontario, I can attest to the impact that the size of an ensemble can have on its overall sound, as well as the correlation between the level of expertise of the improvisers and their ability to negotiate time and space within larger ensembles. As in any musical tradition, the number of musicians who can play improvised music in a given ensemble is flexible. However, as the number of musicians increases, so does the textural density of their music in most ensemble settings. This is not to suggest that playing solo improvised music is easier than group improvisation, but that playing in a larger ensemble requires a different skill set. To play improvised music in a large ensemble requires a tremendous amount of attentive listening and negotiation from the players.

Most of my experience as a performer of improvised music has been in small venues such as the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre and Silence in Guelph. Performing in these spaces increased my awareness of the distinct acoustic characteristics of the venue, which has since informed my approach to the topic of transparency. It is important to consider the acoustics of the space in which we perform, incorporating the reverberation of the spaces into the overall sound of the ensemble. For example, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre has very high ceilings, as well as hardwood flooring throughout the establishment. As such, improvisers playing music in the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre must be cognizant of the long reverberation time as it adds an extra voice to the texture of the music. In contrast, Silence is an extremely small space in which the audience is typically only a few feet away from the performers. Here, improvisers

must be cognizant of their volume to ensure both the rest of the group and the audience can perceive the entire ensemble. In both of these venues, it becomes exponentially more challenging to maintain transparency in the music as the number of performers increase because of the acoustic characteristics of these different socio-musical spaces.

I have had contrasting experiences playing in and observing larger ensembles with varying levels of improvisatory expertise. One of the most enriching of these experiences was with the Contemporary Music Ensemble (CME) at the University of Guelph. The ensemble consisted of over a dozen musicians, and was open to all music majors as well as members of the community interested in pursuing improvisatory modes of music making. As such, the ensemble featured an eclectic and diverse range of musicianship skills and varying improvisatory experience. The dynamic of the ensemble changes from each semester, primarily because of the rotating membership. Many of the members (including me) participated in the ensemble throughout their university education at the University of Guelph.

Joe Sorbara, a prolific improviser based in Toronto, led the ensemble during my tenure with the CME. The more experienced improvisers tended to be more proficient at negotiating the texture of the soundscape, and they generally led by example. In years when the membership consisted of less experienced improvisers. the music tended to be   noticeably less transparent. Sorbara fostered a culture of listening and respect, teaching the ensemble to support each other's musical ideas by listening attentively. Sorbara explained that the piece remains transparent regardless of the size of the ensemble by prioritizing this philosophy of listening. Sorbara's methods profoundly informed my own approach to teaching students about transparency.

While there is a wealth of literature on the importance of listening by scholars such as Pauline Oliveros *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice* (2005) and R. Murray Schafer's

The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education (1986), the language used to describe the issue of transparency varies. These differences in language reflect a number of different approaches to the same issue. Some scholars have compared improvisation to a conversation. For example, Ed Sarath explains that the same listening skill that is so valuable to a verbal conversation is used in music. (Sarath 2013, 21) Although I am inclined to agree with this insight, I would note one significant difference: in musical conversation, we can listen and "speak" simultaneously whereas in spoken conversation, we generally cannot. Sarath uses the term transparency to describe musical ideas that play a supportive role, contributing to the texture of the music without overshadowing the other players. (Sarath 2013, 21) He suggests that musicians may participate in a collective improvisation by contributing silence, simply listening and supporting others' ideas while avoiding playing sounds that may dominate the soundscape. Alternatively, they can contribute to the sonic fabric of the music, assuming more of a soloist role. (Sarath 2013, 21) Sarath explains: "When all of the musicians in an ensemble are able to sustain a level of engagement that permits them to move between roles—silent listener, transparent supporter, or soloist—truly exciting and magical results are possible." (Sarath 2013, 21)

I began teaching this lesson following our third collective improvisation and revisited the topic periodically whenever I felt students were not considering the transparency of a piece. Following a particularly loud and abrasive improvisation, I asked each member of the class to describe a sound that one of their peers from the opposite end of the room had played. Most students admitted to not being able to discern any specific sounds, let alone where they may have come from. One student went so far as to say that he was too focused on what he was playing to be able to concentrate on his classmates. I explained to the class the importance of being aware

of every discernible sound and encouraged everyone to contemplate each individual sound's contribution to the piece of music that they were co-creating. I asked the class to close their eyes and to imagine looking out their bedroom window, only for their view to become obstructed as the glass begins to fog. As the transparency of the window is compromised, so is their view. I suggested that playing music is similar in that extremely dense and loud music can create a barrier that inhibits one's ability to listen and reflectively participate in the music.

I asked the class to close their eyes and improvise using only their vocals, suggesting that they find different sounds to sing, hum, or otherwise make with their mouths. This activity required students to listen particularly attentively because of the homogenous instrumentation. We ran this exercise multiple times. Following each piece, I asked the students to identify the sounds their peers made, with gradually better results each time.

When I asked the class to describe the music they had made, the majority of the class agreed that it was not very interesting. One student elaborated that the music wasn't interesting "Because it didn't go anywhere. We were all really tentative." I suggested that this might be because we were all assuming the same roles, making it nearly impossible to develop musical ideas. Borrowing from Sarath's work, I described three potential roles each student could play in an improvised piece depending on what they wanted to contribute: silence, supportive material, or forefront soloist material. I divided the class in three, assigning each student one of these roles. I taught the class a hand gesture and explained that it indicated dynamic change. This meant that whenever I signaled dynamic change, students had approximately fifteen seconds to finish their musical idea before changing roles. Most importantly, I reminded students to practice attentive listening and encouraged them to allow their ears to guide the piece. The class and I agreed that the ensuing pieces were much more interesting because the students allowed their

ears guide the piece, listening attentively in order to facilitate dynamic changes throughout the entire improvisation. We frequently revisited this exercise, often using it as a warm-up at the beginning of the day to refocus the ensemble on the importance of listening.

An Improviser's Palette and Extended Techniques

Playing improvised music with musicians who have ample experience in other musical traditions can present challenges because they tend to hold preconceived notions about the functionality of their instruments and their respective roles within the ensemble. A musician's understanding of what kinds of sounds their instrument is "supposed to" make and how their instrument fits within the ensemble is informed, in part, by their experiences playing in idiomatic musical settings. The inherent hierarchies of sounds in idioms such as rock, jazz, or Western classical traditions dictate particular musical behaviors during a performance. For example, in a performance of a jazz bebop standard, a bass player's role is typically to play a walking bass-line, outlining the harmonic progression of the piece while providing rhythmic support. Most of the sounds the bassist plays in this idiomatic setting are prescribed: low-register pitches, the duration of which is primarily quarter notes, predominate and they tend to be subservient to the melody.

In contrast, hierarchies of instrumental roles and sounds are not endemic to improvised music. To challenge the tendency towards a specific manner of playing and to encourage an ethos of experimentation within the class, I asked students to compile a list of all the different sounds they can make on their instruments and explore how they can be incorporated into their creative practice. I noted that their respective lists would be (and would remain) incomplete as they continued to discover new sounds and new methods of sound production on their instruments.

I encouraged students to consider their expanding collections of sounds as their respective "palettes." Much like a painter's palette, from which the painter can choose and mix colours, an improviser's palette represents all of the sounds that are available to them during a performance of improvised music; improvising musicians can combine various sounds and techniques from their palette to invent new sounds to fit specific musical contexts. By taking an unorthodox approach to playing an instrument, students discover unconventional techniques to coax different sounds from their instrument, and in so doing form a collection of extended techniques. I refer to the sounds at an improviser's disposal as their palette, but a variety of other metaphors (notably that of vocabulary) are in circulation (Bailey 1993, 106) While such terms seem to be used by improvisers in a more-or-less analogous manner, I am partial to the term "palette" because of its artistic connotations and because of its resonances with the concept of soundpainting discussed in the following chapter.

The sound palette lesson was largely heuristic. While there exists a wealth of written resources on extended techniques, they tend to be instrument specific and often represent a lifelong journey of sonic experimentation that is somewhat unique to the author. Among these resources are Robert Dick's *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques: Flute Etudes and Instruction* (2008) for the flute and Daniel Kientzy's *Saxologie: du potentiel acoustico-expressif des 7 saxophones* (1990) for the saxophone. Instead of referring students to these types of resources, I asked the class to think critically about their assumptions regarding the functionality of their instrument. This process of reflection led the class to a simple question that became the basis of our investigation: What else can my instrument do? This question prompted a comprehensive analysis of each student's approach to music and of his or her respective instruments.

I gave the class fifteen minutes to make a list of all the different sounds they could make on their instrument, and encouraged them to use whatever techniques necessary to elicit extraordinary sounds. These techniques could include making percussive sounds on the keys of the saxophone, scraping their fingernails on the sides of the snare drum, removing and then blowing through the mouthpiece on their flute, changing the timbre of the guitar by sliding paper between the strings, and using other foreign objects to coax new sounds that they could use in an improvisation. Once all the students had compiled their lists, each student took turns showing their classmates a sound that they had discovered. After each student demonstrated their sound, I asked the entire class try to translate that sound to their own instrument. I explained to the students that each one of these sounds represented a different sonic resource that could be translated and integrated into their own creative practice.

In addition to challenging students to expand their respective sonic palettes, I tried to exert some critical pressure on the discourses surrounding musical technique, which so often set up a false binary between "traditional" technique and so-called "extended techniques." I emphasized that all musical techniques have been developed through an ongoing process of experimentation, and that many of the techniques that are presently considered the norm were once regarded as extended. For example, the use of wire brushes on drums was once a novel approach to the instrument, but is now common practice, particularly among jazz drummers. I concluded that lesson with a quote from saxophonist Jack Wright:

> In the early decades of free improv, when new techniques were the mark of a fresh approach to traditional instruments, they were often considered the new standard to be displayed. But at this point I find players using a more integrated technique, where nothing is 'extended' because no technique by itself connotes a radical departure. (Wimoth 2016)

Mistakes?

I wanted to address the subject of musical "mistakes" within the course in response to students' overwhelming sense of hesitation in the early stages of the course, which seemed to stem from the students' fear of playing wrong notes. Students were both intrigued and disconcerted by the apparent sense of freedom inherent in improvised music. While some students embraced the freedom to exercise their creativity and innate sense of curiosity, others held reservations about making sounds that they perceived as dissonant. These students were encumbered by the prevalent notion in dominant models of music education that there are correct and incorrect notes. In such models of music education, mistakes are generally stigmatized.

In many modes of musical discourse, a mistake is a perceived deviation from a universal standard. However, I believe that the real mistake is assuming that these standards are consistent across all performance practices and all modes of music making. What may be perceived as a mistake in one musical context may be perfectly acceptable in another. For example, harmonic tensions and performance practices that are commonplace within jazz may be deemed mistakes in the Western classical tradition. Paul Rinzler explains:

> A jazz musician is expected to develop an individual and personal approach to sound, and this is sometimes mistakenly perceived as deviation from some universal standard that might apply for classical music or some other music but which does not apply in jazz. If one tries to impose such a universal standard, then one might find all sorts of apparent mistakes. Thelonious Monk's dissonant harmony, Miles Davis's range of tone colors, and even the cockeyed angle at which Lester Young held his saxophone are all examples that could be incorrectly judged as mistakes if one ignores the individual and personal aesthetic in jazz." (Rinzler 2008, 145)

Rinzler goes on to note that a player's intention is essential to notions of correctness and incorrectness within a particular musical. He adds, "The stark dissonances of Thelonious Monk may sound like mistakes to jazz neophytes just like Davis's unfocused tone, but those dissonances are actually the consistent result of clear intent from a great musical mind that saw

creative possibilities in harmony and dissonance that no one else in jazz had before." (Rinzler 2008, 145)

I emphasized the idea that all sounds are welcome in improvised music. The absence of explicit hierarchies surrounding the relationships between pitches and sounds in improvised music means that sound combinations that might be perceived as mistakes in other contexts are not as conspicuous within improvised music. Indeed, the very notion of mistakes, of musical correctness and incorrectness, becomes rather tenuous within improvised music wherein there aren't any right or wrong ways to play one's instrument; there are merely different choices that we can make as improvising musicians. Musical intention is still important, but even when something unintentional happens—an unanticipated squeak on a saxophone or the squeal of guitar feedback for example—the unforeseen musical elements aren't mistakes so much as they are new opportunities for musical exploration and discovery. Drawing on my own experiences as an improvising musician, I told the class that some of the most interesting music that I have been involved with developed from unintended squeaks on reed instruments, accidentally dropped drumsticks, and unanticipated feedback from amplifiers. The important thing is how we react to newly introduced sounds, even if they are unintentional.

Within pedagogies of improvised music, when a student plays something that might seem like a mistake because of our prior musical conditioning, the focus ought to be on encouraging students to react to the new musical idea so that it does not function as a mistake but rather as a new musical opportunity and, by extension, a new learning opportunity. By encouraging musical risk taking and framing "mistakes" as positive musical opportunities—and learning opportunities—teachers facilitating improvisation within the classroom can further foster

students' creative development, and reduce fear, which can be a powerful impediment to musical growth.

For most of the students in the class, playing improvised music represented their first foray into a music in which the preeminence of tonality was not assumed. As such, many students characterized any pitch that sounded in conflict with what they perceived to be the tonal center of the piece as dissonant and incorrect. In his introduction to the section on dissonance in *The Improvisation Studies Reader*, Jesse Stewart writes:

> Repeated exposure to a particular system of musical logic—and to the cultural codes embedded therein—also contributes significantly to our perceptions of dissonance. For example, twelve-tone equal tempered tuning, in which octaves are divided into twelve equally spaced pitches, has become so omnipresent in music of the Western world over the past century that intervals that lie outside this framework often sound dissonant to many people's ears." (Stewart 2015, 214)

I wanted to broaden the students' conceptions of harmony (including conceptions of consonance and dissonance) in order to accommodate departures from tonality and encourage the exploration of the myriad of different textures, timbres, and tunings in improvised music. This built on some of our previous work with R. Murray Schafer's Ear Cleaning concept because I was asking students to discard their preconceived notions regarding the primacy of tonality.

Unpacking the term "dissonance" was an important step in re-conceptualizing its meanings and implications. As Stewart explains, "'Dissonant' literally means 'apart sounding.' Thus, in its most general musical sense, the term refers to a lack of agreement between sounds." (Stewart 2015, 213) Building on this definition of dissonance, we can suggest that dissonance refers to a lack of musical cohesiveness. In a performance of improvised music, players generally achieve a sense of musical stability by establishing and exploring a shared musical ground, which might be thought of as constituting a sense of consonance. (Stewart 2015, 215) Within such a context, deviations from the cohesiveness of the piece might be perceived a form of

improvised dissonance. Such dissonances, which may take the form of textural or timbral juxtapositions, often serve as vehicles through which improvisers introduce new musical materials. When an improviser diverges from the musical status quo, their co-performers decide either to join them in their new avenue of musical investigation or to continue to occupy the space that they had been exploring. Such dissonant passages involve a process of musical negotiation that can be sustained and explored, or they may serve to create a temporary moment of musical tension that is quickly resolved.

Within the EMCP class, I suggested that we improvise a series of different sonic "spaces" that explored the role of texture and timbre in establishing a sense of stability and cohesiveness within each space. From there, I asked students to consider how sounds that diverge from the sonic space, sounds that might be thought of as mistakes in other contexts, might play a musical role in either embellishing that space or in developing the piece by prompting a transition to a new musical space. This exercise was enlightening for the entire class because it gave us a holistic understanding of consonance/cohesiveness within the ensemble, and it gave students some tools to work with dissonances/mistakes, effectively de-stigmatizing mistakes.

Stewart notes that while dissonances may be a productive avenue for developing a piece, they can have a negative impact on a performance. (Stewart 2015, 215) He recalls: "I have witnessed numerous performances, for example, in which an improviser or group of improvisers consistently undermines the musical contributions of their co-performers by interrupting their musical contributions or ignoring those contributions altogether." (Stewart 215) Such instances of dissonance are problematic not only because they risk ruining the performance for the rest of the ensemble and the audience, but also because they often reflect—and reinforce—larger systemic forms of oppression in which minoritized voices are devalued or silenced altogether.

The choices we make as improvisers, like the choices we make as educators, are rarely—if ever—neutral or free of the power dynamics that permeate so many facets of society. Within the classroom, musical deployments of power compromise the stability of the classroom dynamic and students' abilities to learn and grow. In order to foster as productive a learning environment as possible, it was crucial that we exert critical pressure on such socially disruptive dissonances, while reinforcing the generative possibilities of musical dissonance. I was pleased to witness a tremendous amount of progress in this regard throughout the course as the students became more adept at negotiating dissonance (and difference) and treating "mistakes" as musical opportunities.

Chapter 3: Improvised Music Activities

Developing a Repertoire for the Pedagogy of Improvisation

As in pedagogical methods associated with classical music and jazz, a repertoire of improvisatory musical activities can be developed and adapted for the classroom. I hesitate to frame these collections of activities as "repertoire" because of the canonic histories and standardized pedagogies that the term so often evokes. However valuable such canons might be to the development of musical technique and the acquisition of genre-specific skills, I am wary of standardized pedagogical methods because of what I perceive to be their propensity to limit musical creativity and agency, two factors that are vital to improvised music and, I would argue, to the pedagogy of improvisation. Despite these apprehensions, I use the term "repertoire" in this context in order to challenge teachers to re-evaluate the concept and purpose of musical repertoire, framing it as a set of pedagogical tools—a musical means to an array of musical ends—rather than an end unto itself. The question then becomes: is it possible to equip teachers with a repertoire of improvisatory musical activities while resisting the tendency toward standardized pedagogical methods?

Following Adorno, I view standardization as the calcification of musical conventions including form, harmony, melody, and other musical materials. It is important to realize that this calcification of conventions applies to both the music itself, as well as the pedagogical methodologies used to implement repertoire in the classroom.

In his essay, "The Pedagogical Imperative of Musical Improvisation," Scott Thomson suggests that the standardization of musical practices is perpetuated in conventional music education systems. He writes:

> Most students learn to play music in a particular style or genre, often starting as children, and the goals of their education correspond with the established aesthetic criteria of the

style in question. As a result, certain technical, formal, and methodological approaches are necessarily privileged while others are proscribed toward an effective duplication of pre-ordained models of musical excellence. Instrumental *mastery* is an ultimate (though often tacit) goal within such an educational model and entails not only that virtually all of the techniques of the genre are available to the performer, but also that those that are outside the generic purview may be rendered technically impossible or philosophically inconceivable. Thus, conventional music education demands a process of both *mastery* and *exclusion*. (Thomson 2008, 2)

Thomson argues that the pedagogy of improvised music makes no room for traditional notions of

mastery and exclusion. He continues:

In contrast, collective improvisation does not uphold dominant aesthetic or technical criteria that players must master as a benchmark of their "education." As a working methodology, improvisation does not proscribe sounds, sound sources, or instrumental technique and, though the priorities of each performer will inform the aesthetic goals of any performance, strict notions of technical excellence are difficult to locate and assess. The range of potentially musical sounds is broadly diversified, and criteria for excellence resist the empirical reference to mastery and exclusion. (Thomson 2008, 3)

In my view, improvisers do demonstrate musical mastery when they are able to find creative

ways to push the boundaries of a given performance, and enter into musical dialogue with one

another in order to co-create something new in the course of performance.

In his seminal book *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*,

Bruno Nettl discusses the ways in which expectations are conveyed in musical notation. He

makes a distinction between prescriptive and descriptive forms of Western notation. (Nettl 2005,

82) For the most part, performers today interpret notated classical music in a prescriptive

manner, striving to interpret the notated scores as accurately as possible. In contrast, a

performance of improvised music is an ephemeral musical dialogue between a group of

improvisers who draw on their technical skills, experiences, and creativity to make music.

Though a performance of improvised music can be shaped by predetermined parameters, these

descriptive constraints tend to leave more room for performer agency than do the prescriptive

notational conventions that characterize most composed music traditions. For example, an

improviser who is working within a descriptive parameter that states that he or she should use short sounds has more creative agency over the music than a performer who is interpreting a piece of music written in Western notation. Furthermore, an improviser who plays a series of five pieces within identical descriptive parameters will most likely create five distinctly different pieces, whereas a performer who plays the same prescribed piece will produce relatively similar music. I contend that the absence of any strictly prescribed elements in improvised music minimizes the risk of the conventions surrounding improvised music calcifying.

Nevertheless, while improvisation is ostensibly resistant to standardization, teaching students improvised music by way of a predetermined set of activities runs the risk of creating a new canon of sorts. Teachers should beware of the propensity to privilege specific composers and their work in music education—as demonstrated in many classes on European classical music and jazz—because of the assumptions that such privileging inscribe (about musical genius, about gender, etc). By focusing on a narrow range of creative practitioners, teachers send the message, often unintentionally, that the ultimate goal of music education is for students to achieve these heights and if they don't, music might not be for them. To avoid this "great man" narrative, teachers should use their repertoire of activities to work toward more inclusive learning outcomes. The two goals to which I aspired within the EMCP course were to teach students to improvise within a variety of prescriptive parameters, and to foster a creatively stimulating environment for students to develop their improvisatory voices, both individually and collectively. By developing their improvisatory voices, students accrue an inventory of skills and experiences that they can later draw upon in less structured improvised music settings.

In my view, it is imperative that teachers utilize a contrasting array of activities that appeal to different students' strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. A diversified and

purposeful approach to the pedagogy of improvisation ensures that students are exposed to, and challenged by, improvised music, while also serving to decentralize the curriculum in such a way that no one activity is privileged over others.

Selecting EMCP Repertoire

The repertoire of improvised music activities for my EMCP class consisted of a variety of frameworks created by improvisers as vehicles for their own creative practices. Many of these activities have since been adopted by other musicians working within the greater improv community. I believe these frameworks carry with them opportunities for innovative forms of music education. I chose improvisatory activities that have contributed significantly to the development of improvised music, and were of particular value to the student's improv education. I also had to consider criteria unique to the EMCP model including the students' relative inexperience and the limited contact hours due to the accelerated nature of the course.

To navigate these issues, I organized the activities into categories, ensuring that students had the opportunity to survey and engage in a variety of learning opportunities. I grouped activities into three general categories: conducted languages, game pieces, and "comprovisation" practices. The conducted languages are systems of gestures organized into syntaxes that the prompter(s) use to illicit a specific type of musical response from the performers. Game pieces are frameworks for structured improvisation that use encoded musical parameters (shaping such parameters as form, texture, and the number of participants) that the improvisers navigate via set game rules. The term "comprovisation" is a portmanteau of the words composition and improvisation. Comprovisation practices overtly challenge the ostensible composition-

improvisation binary, incorporating elements of both composition and improvisation to create hybrid activities.

Due to time constraints and the introductory nature of the course, I had to omit some influential improv activities from the course despite their broad influence on the history of improvised music. In his book *Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music*, Joe Morris identifies four seminal methodologies that have shaped the history of improvised music: Cecil Taylor's Unit Structures, Ornette Coleman's Harmolodics, Anthony Braxton's Tri-Axiom Theory, and European Free Improvisation operational methodology. (Morris 2012, 75-105) Though I believe all four methodologies have tremendous value as tools for the pedagogy of improvisation, they were outside the scope of a beginner-level improvised music class.

In my experience, conducted languages are particularly valuable tools for teachers working with inexperienced improvisers because they provide students with more explicit direction, alleviating some of the pressure when choosing from infinite musical possibilities. Each conducted language has an inventory of descriptive parameters that are used to guide the piece, which serve as points of departure for performers to interpret and explore. Conducted languages are also highly effective tools for facilitating improvisation in large ensembles because the prompter can encourage a greater level transparency by shaping the density and dynamics of the piece. Like any language, a successful performance of improvised music using conducted languages relies on the participants' shared understanding of the syntax and lexicon, as well as an emphasis on fostering musical dialogue. I focused in particular on Walter Thompson's conducting method known as "soundpainting" because I have extensive experience with it as both a soundpainter (i.e. who prompts the performers) and as a performer.

Another valuable conducted language is Butch Morris's system that he refers to as "conduction." In his own words, conduction is:

> A vocabulary of ideographic signs and gestures activated to modify or construct a real time musical arrangement of any notation or composition. Each sign and gesture transmits generative information and provides instantaneous possibilities for altering or initiating harmony, melody, rhythm, articulation, phrasing, or form. (ROVA:Arts 2007)

Though the two languages are quite similar, I suspect that I have had more success with soundpainting because the gestures are literal visual representations of the sounds, as suggested in the name's allusion to the visual arts. If given the opportunity to work with students over a longer period of time, I would have liked to have tried out both systems in the class, perhaps borrowing from each to create a new hybrid system.

Game pieces provide a unique avenue for students to make music because of the emphasis the improv games put on interactivity, which in a musical setting necessitates highly attentive listening. The rules of a game piece range in complexity and often use a combination of hand gestures, cue cards, and other materials to call for changes in musical direction. In order to facilitate a successful performance of a game piece, all participants must thoroughly understand the game rules because the improvisers have agency over the evolution of the piece. I chose to focus on John Zorn's *Cobra* because it demands a level of engagement from the students that other simpler game pieces do not, such as Zorn's earlier game pieces such as *Fencing* (1978) or *Pool* (1979). (van der Schyff 2013, 3) The complexity of the game is furthered by the fact that the game rules remained unpublished for the majority of the piece's 30+ year history. For the most part, the piece has circulated as an oral tradition, which adds further intrigue to its already enigmatic aura. Unofficial rules (however abbreviated and incomplete) have, in recent years, found their way onto the internet. Having learned and practiced *Cobra* as a member of the

Contemporary Music Ensemble at the University of Guelph, I was confident that it would provide beneficial learning opportunities for the students in the EMCP course.

I chose to teach *Cobra* instead of other renowned game pieces such as Iannis Xenakis's *Duel* (1959) or works by Christian Wolff e because I have much more experience facilitating Zorn's music. However, *Duel* in particular presents an excellent opportunity for playing improvised music in large ensembles; Xenakis designed the game for an orchestra of 50-60 musicians, divided in two groups, each lead by their own conductor. (Harley 2010, 25) Describing the mechanics of the game, James Harley wrote:

> Xenakis composed six musical modules, or blocks of material: three for strings (one of short sounds, one sustained, and one of glissandi), and one each for percussion, winds, and silence. Each conductor is free to choose which module, or "tactic," to deploy at any given time (along with the possible combinations: a string module with percussion or winds, etc.), constrained only by the points assigned to each "coupling" of tactics between the two ensembles. (Harley 2010, 25)

One way in which *Cobra* and *Duel* differ is in the fact that *Cobra* privileges the creative agency of the performers by giving them control over the direction of the piece, whereas in *Duel*, the conductor makes the majority of the decisions. (Harley 2010, 25) Like Zorn's *Cobra*, *Duel* is very complex, particularly in its point system. Similarly intricate, Wolff's game pieces are important contributions to the history of improvised music. My choice not to include Wolff's game pieces in the EMCP course was informed in part by the fact that Wolff expressed discomfort with the game piece label, so I did not want to frame his work as such within the course. (Lewis 2013, 6-7) Nevertheless, both Xenakis and Wolff's music deserve consideration as pedagogical resources for educators incorporating improvisation into the classroom. In a course with less restrictive time constraints, a broader survey of game pieces would be an enriching educational experience for students and teachers alike.

By conceptualizing comprovisation as a combination of composition and improvisation, teachers afford students the opportunity to move beyond received binaries to expand their creative practice. The ambiguity of the term "comprovisation" is furthered by its equally nebulous etymology, but I contend that its broadness is useful in that it offers a lens to compare seemingly disparate modes of music making. I characterize both graphic scores and text scores as comprovisation because they overtly challenge the conventional power dynamic between the composer and the improviser, by outlining descriptive parameters that are to be interpreted musically by the improviser. As such, no performance of a graphic score or text score is ever the same. As a pedagogical tool, comprovisation activities are effective for collaborative expression with any size class.

I opted to teach the class about graphic score notation by having them create their own. I favoured this approach to the medium over simply introducing the class to the works of well known graphic score composers such as John Cage, R. Murray Schafer, and Anthony Braxton because the process of creating a graphic score forces students to reflect upon the relationship(s) between music and the visual arts. In addition, putting together a graphic score is an opportunity for collaborative learning. After exploring the art of graphic musical notation on their own, we looked at and performed other composers' graphic scores for additional inspiration. John Cage's *Notations* (1968) and Theresa Sauer's *Notations 21* (2009)—published in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Cage's influential book—are anthologies of graphic scores written by composers dedicated to developing innovative forms of music notation. In Sauer's book, Sylvia Smith suggests that diverse forms of notation facilitate creative music making: "To standardize notation is to standardize patterns of thought and the parameters of creativity. Our present abundance of notations is as it should be. It makes our differences more clear." (Sauer 2009, 11)

The text scores I chose to facilitate were from Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* (1974)—a collection of text scores that exemplify her concept of Deep Listening. Deep Listening represents an important influence on my own creative practice and is a skill I consider to be essential for improvised music making. *Sonic Meditations* provide insight into what it means to listen attentively and is a valuable resource for the pedagogy of improvisation.

Facilitating Improvised Music Activities

The following discussion of the improv activities that we explored in the EMCP course is intended to complement existing resources and literature on improvisation in the classroom. It is my hope that teachers interested in incorporating improvised music activities in their own classroom settings can benefit from my experiences.

Painting with Sound

I introduced soundpainting to the students in the EMCP class as a gestural language for guided improvisation. One student immediately challenged me on the idea that soundpainting was a language, referencing our earlier lesson in which we critically examined the notion of music as a "universal language". Drawing connections between topics, the student's observations caused me to rethink the language I used to describe and teach soundpainting. This exchange demonstrates the benefits of dialogical pedagogy.

Using the student's comment as a point of departure, we revisited the idea that language facilitates dialogue using a lexicon and syntax that together create shared meaning and understanding. Thompson created soundpainting as a system of negotiation between the conductor and the performers to communicate musical ideas. Soundpainting has since evolved

into what Thompson describes as "The Art of Live Composition" for working with musicians, dancers, actors, poets, and visual artists in the medium of structured improvisation. (Thompson 2006, 2)

I asked students to think of each performance as an individual *soundpainting*, that is co-created by the *soundpainter* using the sounds of the improvisers. I elaborated that while the soundpainter certainly has some degree of control over the development of the piece, the gestures only represent requests for musical ideas; the manifestation of these ideas relies on the creative interpretation of the improvisers. Thompson describes each soundpainting as a conversation in which both the soundpainter and the ensemble are reacting to each other in reciprocal dialogue. (Thompson 2006, 3) One student commented on this improvisatory dialogue in their reflection journal: "Soundpainting is different than composition because the soundpainter doesn't know what is coming next, he is reacting to what gets played and then signing something in response. The performers aren't the only ones improvising, so is the soundpainter!"

Teaching students soundpainting can seem daunting because the soundpainter must choose from a plethora of gestures to create coherent phrases that will prompt interesting music; the ever-expanding conducting language currently comprises of over 1200 gestures. (Thompson 2015) Thompson's series of soundpainting workbooks are excellent pedagogical resources because they use pictures to depict each gesture along with descriptions of the respective sounds they elicit. In *Soundpainting: The Art of Live Composition, Workbook 1*, Thompson explains:

> …the gestures in Soundpainting first identify *Who* is going to perform, followed by *What* type of improvisation is going to be performed, *How* the improvisation will be performed, and *When* to begin performing. An example of this is Whole Group (Who), Long Tone (What), Volume Fader – pianissimo (How), Play (When). (Thompson 2006, 4)

I began by teaching the class a few different "Who" function gestures. Among the most useful of these gestures, "Groups" allows the Soundpainter to divide the class into sections. (Thompson 2006, 18) This is very useful for juxtaposing disparate musical ideas and putting them in dialogue with each other. Next, I taught the class a few simple "What" sculpting gestures such as "Air Sounds," "Long Tone," "Pointillism," and "Hits." I begin with these gestures because they describe the sounds explicitly. Later, we learned gestures that require more liberal creative interpretation from the performers. "Minimalism" quickly became the most popular gesture among students, which requests a short cyclic groove played in sync with a pulse conducted by the soundpainter. (Thompson 2006, 27) One student wrote about "Minimalism" in the reflection journal, "I thought it was really cool that everyone could be playing weird avant-garde stuff and then suddenly a new layer would come in with someone playing a bluesy jazzy riff. I really like layering different ideas and putting them in conversation with each other."

"How" sculpting gestures shape the dynamics of a soundpainting performance. I taught the class "Volume Fader" and "Tempo Fader." While most of the class understood "Volume Fader" immediately, "Tempo Fader" proved to be conceptually more challenging. I believe this is because in most musical practices the word "tempo" is used to describe the speed at which the performers play, often measured by beats per minute. While I understand Thompson's inclination to use established musicological terms, students were confused because discernable pulse was conspicuously absent in the majority of our soundpaintings. I suggested another term to clearly describe the desired affect: "Density Fader."

The "When" function gestures are variations on ways to prompt beginnings and endings. There are the straightforward "Play" and "Off" gestures which are decisive prescriptive parameters used to start and stop sounds, as well as "Enter Slowly" and "Exit Slowly", which

give the improvisers more agency over timing. I am partial to the "Finish Your Idea" gesture because it is less abrupt and tells the improviser to find a natural conclusion to their musical statement within an approximate minute. (Thompson 2006, 45)

These are but a few of the many soundpainting gestures that we explored over the duration of the EMCP course. Approaching soundpainting as a language and clearly delineating the roles each gesture plays helps build a strong foundation. From there, I taught gestures as needed to accomplish a desired musical affect. For example, a student asked if there was any way to revisit a sonic space later in the piece. This prompted me to introduce the "Memory" sculpting gesture because it facilitates repetition by asking the performers to capture the quality of the material being performed and then recall that material later in the piece. (Thompson 2006, 29)

Once the students are fluent in the soundpainting language, the teacher can give the students the opportunity to be the soundpainter. This is an effective way of challenging the conventional power paradigm in the classroom. Over the duration of the weeklong course, I was adamant that each student should try being the soundpainter. However, there were a couple of particularly shy students who were not comfortable leading the class on their own. This presented the opportunity to have multiple soundpainters gesturing simultaneously. Having two or three soundpainters added an extra layer of negotiation between all participants, as the soundpainters had to work as a team and the performers had to choose which soundpainter to follow. One student reflected, "It was so fun painting with other people because sometimes when I didn't have any ideas, the other painter would gesture something that fit perfectly with the music, and then I could run with it and add on to it. But it was also hard sometimes not to step on the other painters' toes!"

Cobra in the Classroom

Teaching John Zorn's *Cobra* to a group of experienced improvisers can be challenging; the game piece is governed by a complex set of rules and uses a combination of hand gestures and cue cards to develop the piece. Teaching the perplexing game to a group of novice improvisers presents a larger host of challenges, as well as a variety of unique opportunities.

I introduced *Cobra* to the class as a musical game devised by a composer who took an unconventional approach to composition: Zorn wanted to compose music for improvisers. A number of students were confused by the seemingly paradoxical proposition of piece composed for improvisers. This prompted a discussion that resurfaced at various points throughout the remainder of the course, namely the idea that composition and improvisation are part of the same continuum. For the purpose of teaching *Cobra*, I explained that instead of composing melody, harmony, and rhythm, Zorn composed structured sonic spaces. In Zorn's own words, "I wanted to find something to harness the personal languages that the improvisers had developed on their own, languages that were so idiosyncratic as to be almost unnotateable (to write it down would be to ruin it). The answer for me was to deal with form, not with content, with relationships, not with sound." (Zorn 2004, 199) I characterized these structures as sonic spaces because I wanted the students to consider each space as it functions musically. The descriptive parameters for each sonic space denote changes in the musical material being performed and who is performing the material. As such, a performance of *Cobra* is a series of unfolding musical events, which Zorn refers to as changing blocks of sound. (Marr 1992, 20:45)

I continued by stating that the unfolding of events in *Cobra* is entirely controlled by the improvisers during the performance, instigated by signaling the prompter using a hand gesture

that corresponds to a cue card which represents one of 19 events. I concluded by emphasizing that each performer can make executive decisions that effectively steer the development of the performance. When teaching *Cobra*, it is important to emphasize that the agency belongs to the performers and not the prompter—the prompter simply communicates the requested event with the rest of the ensemble.

After outlining the "rules" of the game, I was compelled to add my own addendum to *Cobra* that I think offered another learning opportunity. The title of Zorn's game is derived from a simulation game featured in a 1977 issue of a war-game magazine called "Strategy & Tactics." (Brackett 2010, 44) It should therefore come as no surprise that much of the language in the game has strong associations with war, as made evident by categorizing the core event cues as "Operation 1" and incorporating guerilla squads to rebel against strictures of form. While these are important aspects of the game, for pedagogical purposes I exerted critical pressure on the piece's contentious terminology as a way of opening up questions related to musical and discursive deployments of power.

Like any mode of improvisation, a successful performance of *Cobra* in the classroom is contingent on all participants being dedicated to the collegial process of making music together. To play *Cobra* cohesively as a group, all participants must be aware of the socially constructed power dynamics within the ensemble and make decisions that facilitate opportunities for everyone to partake in the game. I said:

> If you have something to say, play it! If you recognize someone has an idea they want to explore, support them. If someone has had control of the piece for too long, take it away. If the pacing of the game is too slow for your liking, go on a prompting spree. If the piece is overwhelmingly loud, contribute silence. Every musical idea aesthetic is welcome in *Cobra*, so long as it is not at the expense of the freedom of expression of others. Above all else, don't forget to have fun and be musical.

Teaching *Cobra* in a comprehensive way was beyond the scope of the EMCP course. Instead, I opted to teach some of the basic rules and cues to capture the essence of the game. I began by teaching proper procedure for prompting new events. I distributed an index of cues—which serves as a pseudo-score of sorts—and directed the class's attention to the way in which it is organized. (Zorn 1984) On the left side of the page, there are 19 events, numbered and organized into groups under one of six headings: mouth, nose, eye, ear, head, and palm. I explained that to call a new event, the caller must get the prompter's attention and point to the corresponding body part with one hand and show the the number beside the cue with the other hand. For example, if the caller wants "Pool," he or she must make eye contact with the prompter and point to their own head while holding up one finger. The prompter can then choose to accept or decline the caller's request, usually only declining when the requested event does not make sense within the context of the music at a given moment (for example, the "Substitute" cue can not be called when no one is playing). If the prompter accepts the request, he or she shows the entire ensemble the imminent event using the corresponding cue cards. The new event is cued when the prompter lowers the card, constituting a downbeat. Improvisers can call for a new event at any time, though in strict *Cobra* rules other improvisers may veto their fellow musician's call. I asked the students what they thought of the veto rule, and we collectively decided not to include it in our version of the game because we felt it was at odds with our commitment to fostering an inclusive music making environment.

At first, we only used cues from the mouth group. The first cue in the mouth section is "Pool," which denotes a new section of music distinct from the previous sonic space. In "Pool," every member of the ensemble gets to choose whether or not he or she plays. The other three cues in the mouth group are "Runner," "Substitute," and "Substitute Crossfade," all of which

designate who is to play. When a player calls "Runner," he or she chooses who participates in the section. "Substitute" calls for every performer currently improvising to abruptly stop playing and every improviser not playing to begin improvising. The rules for "Substitute Crossfade" are the same as "Substitute," except the players who were improvising fade out and the players who were silent fade in, creating a more dynamic and less abrupt change in the music.

We spent an hour playing *Cobra* using only the four mouth cues, practicing the procedure for calling changes in the midst of the performance and exploring improvised music from the vantage point of a game. The students progressed quickly, learning that negotiating transparency in "Pool" was only possible if some opted not to play. One student reflected, "I remember when we talked about silence at the start of the course and I didn't really get how that was a contribution to the song. Then when we did *Cobra* and everyone was playing during Pool I realized silence was the perfect thing for me to contribute."

Once the class had successfully mastered the procedure for calling cues, it became apparent that their focus shifted to developing the piece musically; the progression of cues demonstrated an acute understanding of how to move from sonic space to sonic space. During one of the discussions after a particularly successful game of *Cobra*, one student said, "In the first few games it seemed like everyone just wanted to call an event and we weren't really thinking about the music. But then I noticed we've been getting better at listening and reflecting and requesting events with the music in mind."

I explained that the game aspect of *Cobra* is found in creating musical dialogue between performers by both playing music and calling for changes in material. Our next iteration of the piece featured a distinctly playful passage during which three students traded solos using the "Runner" cue and the rest of the ensemble listened silently, occasionally interjecting using

"Pool" cards before revisiting the sparse aesthetic with three new solo improvisers. Multiple students reflected on this especially memorable game of Cobra, which one student described as "the ultimate highlight of the day."

Over the course of the next few hours, we explored a variety of other cues available to the ensemble. The only "nose gesture" we discussed was the "Events 1, 2, 3" cue. I chose not to introduce the other nose gestures because the "Runner" cue effectively achieves a comparable musical aesthetic and I did not want to risk confusing the students with too many similar cues. However, the "Events 1, 2, 3" represents a change in texture, creating an aesthetically sparse sonic space in which improvisers may only use a limited number of short sounds. One student wrote, "I really liked when we would go from something really busy like Pool and then play Events because it was really transparent. You could hear every little tiny sound! It was a good chance to use the extended techniques we learned yesterday because a lot of those are really quiet and not as many people are playing at once in Events."

In my experience, the most difficult cues to successfully execute are the eye and ear cues. I chose not to include either of the eye cues in our classroom version of *Cobra* because of time constraints. The ear cue that I decided was most pertinent to the pedagogy of *Cobra* was "Volume △" because it directly connotes dynamic change, prompting players playing quietly to play loudly and vice versa.

All three head cues are used to save the current musical material being played so it can be recalled later using the corresponding memory cue. In the interest of simplifying an already complicated set of rules, I chose to only introduce "Sound Memory 1." Similarly, in the interest of simplifying the game, I planned on only teaching one of the three palm cues—which are used to cue the end of the piece—but some of the students expressed that they wanted more variance,

unsatisfied by the abrupt "Cut" ending. One student elaborated, "I was really glad that we started using more than just the cut-off ending because endings aren't one size fits all. Every musical piece has a perfect ending and its important to find it."

Finally, I ended the day by describing an abbreviated version of Zorn's guerilla systems. I explained that at any point in the game, an improviser can become a guerilla, meaning that they are no longer restricted to playing within the strictures of form and can play whatever they would like. I offered that the guerilla system is an excellent opportunity for a student to take an extended solo unimpeded by the changing of events. I explained that a player can become a guerilla by putting on a hat and that when they are done they simply take the hat off. I added that if a player has been guerilla for too long, another player can gesture for the guerilla to take off their hat, thereby ending the guerilla's sovereignty. This is a slight adjustment from Zorn's rules, where another performer "kills" the guerilla by doing a throat-slitting gesture, which is clearly inappropriate for the classroom. (Drury 2016) After class, a student asked me why Zorn chose gorillas and not another animal. This delightful misunderstanding prompted me to buy party hats covered in pictures of monkeys and gorillas, which we used to facilitate solos within the piece when we revisited *Cobra*.

After practicing the piece for multiple days in a row amidst other activities, one student wrote an especially perceptive and insightful journal entry about the sound and essence of *Cobra*:

> I was telling my dad about *Cobra* and he seemed really confused. I felt like I got better at the rules of Cobra just by explaining it to him. It's like a game, but the goal of the game isn't to win or anything, it's to make music with your classmates using this new system. When he asked me what it sounded like I told him it never sounds the same, but it is always a series of cascading sonic spaces where everyone is playing together, even if they aren't always playing the same thing. I told him about the [guerilla] mode and said it was an opportunity to play solos overtop of the sonic spaces. I think I learned a lot about

improv playing *Cobra* and I'm hopefully going to teach it to my friends at school and maybe even the [music] teacher.

In a later discussion, one student expressed interest in learning the other cues that I had not showed them and asked if there was an official rule book that she could purchase. I told her that *Cobra* was conceived as an oral tradition, and though there are multiple annotated copies of the cue sheet that have been in circulation since the early 1990s, the piece remains unpublished. (Drury 2016) I explained that Zorn has deliberately chosen not to publish the game rules because he argues that the ontology of *Cobra* consists of a combination of intangible musical and social factors, and that reducing the game to a set of rules would be essentializing. (Zorn 2004, 197) This question prompted a lengthy discussion on the epistemology of *Cobra*, which is of significant importance to its pedagogy. One student was concerned that the game was too complicated for it to remain intact without an accompanying text as it is transmitted orally from generation to generation. In response, another student postulated that preserving the game's original form was inconsequential and instead theorized the benefits of an ever-changing *Cobra*. This co-investigative discussion was productive for honing my own understanding of Cobra, as I had never previously contemplated *Cobra*'s ontological status as a meta-music. However, this idea is implicated by Zorn, who makes the distinction between authorized versions of *Cobra*, which are organized by Zorn himself, and amateur/outlaw versions of the piece, which are organized without his presence. (Zorn 2004, 197) My contention remains that a comprehensive account of the rules and nuances of the game is needed because it would make the game accessible to individuals who do not know how to play it but are interested in learning.

Sounding Imagery

In my experience, when teaching graphic notation, it is important to first interrogate preconceived notions about the score itself. I asked the class, "What is a musical score?" This open ended question yielded very little response, as the class could sense that the seemingly simplistic question was more loaded than it appeared. Narrowing the scope, I asked the class to brainstorm examples of things that make up a score. As expected, the response was largely influenced by Western Art Music traditions. The class mentioned clefs, time and key signatures, tempo markings, and notes. I added that these symbols represent music not because they are inherently musical, but because we have developed systems for interpreting them musically. As we discussed this possibility, one student hypothesized that any shape could be interpreted musically. This became our avenue of inquiry. Together, we came to define the score as a framework for notation that of arranged codified parameters from which musicians interpret music.

I explained that the codified parameters in any score can be prescriptive or descriptive. Some scores leave room for a more liberal interpretation than others. I asked the class to consider prescription and description as a part of a continuum rather than a binary. Working with our definition of the score and the ideas of prescriptive and descriptive types of notation, we began investigating the process of interpreting a score. One student who identified as a jazz and blues guitarist answered, "If I'm playing the head from a [jazz] standard, I play the written notes that form the melody, and then later when I take a solo I improvise by following along with the chord changes." We discussed the different types of notation used in the jazz standard, highlighting the prescriptive nature of the written melody or head, and the more descriptive parameters

delineating chord changes that are used to guide the improvised solo. I added that the ways in which any score is interpreted are tied to the musical tradition to which it belongs.

I drew a U-shaped parabolic curve on the chalkboard and asked the class to interpret the line musically, treating the chalkboard as the score. The majority of the class played a chromatic melodic line that descended and then ascended, starting from the top of their instrument's register down to the bottom, and then back up. Analyzing their collective interpretation of the line, most had interpreted the line as a descriptive parameter that loosely defined pitch. Next, I asked the class to perform the same graphic score, this time interpreting the line as a prescriptive parameter for volume dynamics. The class improvised a piece that was cohesive, moving dynamically from loud to soft sonic spaces before returning to the louder aesthetic. I added that what distinguishes graphic scores from other types of scores is their exclusive use of descriptive parameters, typically leaving the codification of said parameters to the performers. Therefore, every interpretation of a graphic score is improvised.

The next day, I covered a section of the chalkboard in white paper and proposed that we collaborate on a graphic score. Together, we created a colourful and elaborate score using markers. The score was approximately four feet long and used a combination of abstract shapes and onomatopoeia. The class named the piece *Comprovised Swoosh*. Then we discussed the myriad of possible approaches for interpreting the score. One student proposed an activity in which the class breaks off into four groups and each group formulates their own unique approach to playing the score. Next, each group explains their interpretation of various elements of the score and performs the piece for their classmates, who listen closely and learn from their peers' performance.

The last group to perform the piece took an especially ambitious approach: each performer interpreted the elements of the score as different descriptive parameters. The first student interpreted the figures as relative pitch markings, the second as indicators of dynamics, the third constructed a relationship between colour and timbre, and the fourth read the text from right to left. Despite interpreting the text using different descriptive parameters, the performance was remarkably cohesive, and the entire class agreed that this performance stood out from the others. When asked why they thought their performance was so successful, one of the students in the group offered, "We might have all been coming at the piece from a different place, but we were really focusing on listening more than strictly playing every little line in the graphic score. We were representing the spirit of the piece and letting our listening guide us." This student's statements demonstrated a nuanced understanding of graphic score notation and group improvisation. His explanation resonated with the entire class, including me, and represented an important teaching moment for the class.

Listening Deeply

After spending the majority of the week reiterating the importance of listening in our creative practice, the course culminated with the introduction of Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations*. Oliveros's Deep Listening practice—from which her *Sonic Meditations* are derived—effectively tied together some of the most prevalent ideas explored in the course, including creative expression, introspective reflection, inclusivity, and community building.

I began by describing Deep Listening as the ongoing meditative process of expanding and heightening one's awareness to the entirety of the sonic world. Here I quoted Oliveros from her book *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*:

Deep coupled with *Listening* or *Deep Listening* for me is learning to expand the perception of sounds to include the whole space/time continuum of sound—encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible. Simultaneously one ought to be able to target a sound or sequence of sounds as a focus within the space/time continuum and to perceive the detail or trajectory of the sound or sequence of sounds. Such focus should always return to, or be within the whole of the space/time continuum (context).

Such expansion means that one is connected to the whole of the environment and beyond. (Oliveros 2005, xxiii)

I explained to the class that one of the things that makes Deep Listening distinct from conventional conceptions of listening is the emphasis on listening beyond boundaries, as implied by the word "deep." Striving to perceive sounds beyond one's immediate vicinity, both physically and temporally, challenges musicians to engage with music on a metaphysical level. I emphasized that Deep Listeners endeavor to consider all perceptible sounds in the soundscape as musical, taking time to contemplate and appreciate sounds as conducive elements for their creative practice.

I introduced Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* as a collection of text scores devised to facilitate guided listening intensives for improvised music making that embody the spirit of Deep Listening. These text scores are useful tools for practicing Deep Listening as a class, as they have the potential to transform one's conception of listening with the "willing commitment to the given conditions." (Oliveros 1974, 1) I told the class that Oliveros outlined the procedure at the core of each of her texts, which I wrote on the board and encouraged each student to internalize.

1. Actually making sounds
2. Actively imagining sounds
3. Listening to present sounds
4. Remembering sounds (Oliveros 1974, 1)

After taking a moment to contemplate Oliveros's words, I asked the class to close their eyes and set down their instruments, as I was going to improvise a guided deep listening intensive with Oliveros's outlined procedure in mind. First, I instructed each student to listen to

the sounds of the room, to their own breathing and heartbeats, as well as those permeating through the walls and windows. I encouraged each student to push the boundaries of their listening and contemplate their own position within the soundscape. Continuing, I asked the class to imagine the sounds that lie just beyond what they could physically hear, and to imagine how they might harmonize and interrelate with those sounds. Next, I asked each student to remember individual sounds they heard that morning, as well as those from outside on their walk across campus, from the music activities from the day before, and from as far back as they could remember. I let the students ponder and listen to the soundscape they were creating in their minds for several minutes before quietly suggesting that they may begin to contribute to the piece by vocalizing sounds. The piece ended about fifteen minutes later when students opened their eyes one by one.

Following the activity, the students took turns discussing our improvisation. I stressed that each member of the ensemble experienced a different piece depending on the sounds that they perceived. One student offered, "On the one hand, I think we all perceived something different... [long pause] But on the other hand, the music we made was only possible because we were performing it together. Even though I couldn't hear what everyone else was listening to exactly, we were all contributing to one larger piece."

We experimented with a variety of Oliveros's text scores. The students' willingness to commit to the process grew increasingly with each Sonic Meditation. However, I still sensed that a couple of students were not convinced and were therefore not engaging in the Deep Listening exercises as deeply as they might. I asked the students what we could do to improve their Deep Listening experience. One student pointed out that the environment is a reoccurring theme in

Oliveros's writing and suggested we move outside for a richer acoustic environment. This was

an excellent suggestion that benefitted the entire class's Deep Listening experience.

I took the class outside to sit by the Rideau Canal for the last two hours of the day. We

brought a variety of small homemade instruments that the students had constructed during

various instrument building activities over the duration of the course. The class's commitment to

Oliveros's outlined procedure was striking; each student seemed rejuvenated and inspired by

their new sonic environment. We sat on the steep incline by the water and worked through

multiple text scores from *Sonic Meditations*. The most memorable of these performances

featured a passage of musical dialogue between the environmental sounds coming from the water

and light breeze, intermingling with the soft textures produced by the students' voices and small

shakers. This piece was an interpretation of Oliveros's tenth *Sonic Meditation*, which is untitled.

> Sit in a circle with your eyes closed. Begin by observing your own breathing. Gradually form a mental image of one person sitting in the circle. Sing a long tone to that person. Then sing the pitch that person is singing. Change your mental image to another person and repeat until you have contacted every person in the circle once or many times. (Oliveros 1974, X)

We discussed at length the subjectivity of the Deep Listening experience, focusing on the ways

in which the physical and metaphysical sounds contribute to an entirely unique musical

experience for each participant in the ensemble. One student grappled with the subjectivity of the

Deep Listening experience in her journal:

> When we were first talking about the difference between listening and hearing, I felt like I got the idea pretty quickly, but with Deep Listening it really puts the theory into practice. When we were doing one of the *Sonic Meditations* outside by the water, I realized I wasn't just listening to the sounds we were making and the sounds of the environment, but also the sounds that I was remembering and the sounds that I was imagining. They all were a part of the piece. But then it occurred to me that every listener in the ensemble was experiencing the same piece, but differently, because the sounds that weren't physically present, like the ones that we were remembering or imagining, were different for each listener.

Miscellaneous Mini-Activities and Instrument Building

In addition to the array of elaborate systems developed for playing improvised music, there are many simpler activities available to improvisers. The majority of these miscellaneous mini-activities are transmitted orally and cannot be credited to any one individual; they are the product of the improv community more generally. When teaching students improvised music, I frame these activities as musical premises; most function as points of departure rather than strict formal parameters. Like any of the activities in my repertoire, they are ideas that serve as malleable frameworks that can be adapted for pedagogical purposes.

An example of a mini-activity would be "Short Sounds," described earlier in this chapter in which students are instructed to create a piece of music using only short sounds. This was one of my favourite activities for warming up, as it is quick and easy to facilitate and promotes transparency. Another common mini-activity is "Duos." A performance of Duos begins with two improvisers. After a short while, a third improviser joins the piece, prompting the first improviser to finish their musical idea and then drop out. This process is repeated until every member of the ensemble has contributed to the piece. One reflected upon Duos in one of their journal submissions:

> The thing I liked so much about Duos was it was like a musical dialogue that told a story. Two people would start, and they would be playing together, saying something with their music, and then someone else could jump in and start steering the story in a different direction, developing the piece, adding their ideas to the story. Maybe Duos should be called "Musical Storytelling?"

While most of the miscellaneous mini-activities could be categorized as either game pieces or comprovisation, they are unique in two specific ways. First, mini-activities can be easily explained in a couple short sentences and are easy to facilitate without much explanation. Second, the limited descriptive parameters in a mini-activity are less restrictive than other

improvised music activities by virtue of their simplicity. These activities are imminently applicable for facilitating warm-ups and conveying specific lessons about improvised music.

The majority of my repertoire of improv mini-activities stems from my past experiences in a variety of improvisation workshops and improvised music ensembles. I also frequently work with students to create new mini-activities to cater to specific conditions. An example of this occurred during one of our breaks outside. The students were playing Frisbee when a sudden sun shower hit and the entire class was forced to take shelter under a nearby tree. I took this opportunity to ask the students how we might incorporate the sounds of the rain in our creative practice. One student suggested we add rain sounds to our sonic palettes, finding ways to make rain sounds on our instruments, with our voices, or using materials immediately available. Another student proposed we make music under the tree while listening to the rain, considering its role in the soundscape. Combining both students' ideas, the class collaborated on writing a mini activity that we named "Rain Sounds." The resulting text score reads: "Make a piece using only rain sounds—the literal sounds of the rain and sounds you can make that imitate, resemble, or complement the sounds of the rain."

Another way that teachers can empower students to explore their innate sense of curiosity is by facilitating musical instrument building activities. Repurposing objects to make music is an important part of the pedagogy of improvisation because it encourages experimentation in pursuit of innovation. Furthermore, instrument building workshops are an effective teaching strategy for fostering community because students collaborate on creating an entirely unique assortment of instruments. The inimitable orchestration that results from this collegial process becomes a rich new sonic palette for the ensemble to use in their improvisations. Moreover,

instrument building provides individuals whose families can not afford conventional musical instruments or training equal opportunity to make music.

In my own creative practice, I have built a number of unconventional musical instruments that reflect my commitment to experimentation, curiosity, and DIY/maker culture. I brought my experiences as an instrument builder to the EMCP course and encouraged the students to build instruments of their own. There are a number of resources available for teachers facilitating instrument building workshops in the classroom. Most of these resources are organized by instrument type and feature illustrations that depict step by step construction. One such book is Bart Hopkin's *Making Simple Musical Instruments: A Melodious Collection of Strings, Winds, Drums & More* (1995), in which the author provides a list of materials, building instructions, as well as suggested design variations for each instrument. (Hopkin 1995) I circulated this book as a source of inspiration and suggested that students flip through its contents to get for ideas for their own instruments. In addition, the magazine *Experimental Musical Instruments*, also published by Bart Hopkin from 1985 to 1999, is a treasure trove of ideas for instrument building. Though the periodical is out of print, the complete set of back issues is available on CD ROM.

The students were passionate about instrument building. Each day, I brought in a few of my own custom-made instruments for the students to experiment with, prompting brainstorming sessions for their own instruments. The students were particularly interested in my water-kalimba, a plucked prong instrument made of steel. The instrument is a variation on the "thumb piano," which typically consists of metal tines and a rectangular wooden resonating chamber. My water-kalimba consists of a stainless steel bowl with a fixed steel lid. To play the instrument, the musician first pours water inside the bowl through the sound hole on the lid and plucks the

spring-steel tines. By tilting the instrument and shifting the water inside the bowl, the musician can bend the pitch of the instrument.

I encouraged students to search their homes for miscellaneous household objects that they thought could be used to make music. Our collection of materials included empty water bottles, shoeboxes, paper towel tubes, elastic bands, twine, aluminum foil, popsicle sticks, plastic beads, buttons, rice, and stones. I divided the class into six small groups and gave each team five items picked at random, as well as a hot glue gun. Each group was tasked with constructing a musical instrument in under twenty minutes using only the materials provided.

Once the construction was complete, each group presented their instruments to the rest of the class, sharing their approach to building their instruments and demonstrating the different sounds they could produce. Together, the class built seven wonderfully unique and decorated instruments: water bottle shakers, rainsticks, elastic shoebox guitars, and stone percussion kits, among others. We decided to leave the instruments in the classroom for anyone who wanted to exchange their personal instruments for something out of the ordinary during any of our improvised music endeavors.

I was particularly impressed by a group that made a percussion instrument out of aluminum foil, popsicle sticks, elastic bands, and copious amounts of hot glue. The group explained that they built their instrument—which they called the "Hot Glue Drum"—by gluing together popsicle sticks to create a hexagon-shaped frame and then stretching aluminum foil across the frame to create a membrane. Next, they broke an elastic band and made balls of hot glue approximately three inches in diameter. They attached the hot glue balls to each end of the elastic band, creating a stretchy double sided mallet. The rest of the class was quick to point out

their resourcefulness, as it had not occurred to any other group to use hot glue as a material beyond its primary function as an adhesive.

On the last day of class, I brought several packages of balloons and announced to the class that we were going to create a balloon orchestra. This activity drew on many of our previous lessons and activities, making connections between the theoretical and the practical. I pointed out that one of our jobs as improvisers was to discover the musical potential in the world around us. I gave each student a balloon and five minutes to investigate the different kinds of sounds they could make, compiling a palette of sounds unique to the balloon instrument. Among the most popular were the sounds created by deflating the balloon while pinching the nozzle to modulate its pitch, inflating the balloon, rubbing the balloon, and of course, popping the balloon.

I passed around a fresh set of balloons and subsequently divided the students based on the colour of their balloon. I told the class to imagine they were putting on a sold-out improvised music concert and they had a twenty-minute set that would comprise of a series of short pieces. I explained that each section of the ensemble would improvise one of the pieces. I added that the challenge was to transition naturally from one group to the next in musical dialogue, as there was no predetermined queue or sequence; the order was to be determined extemporaneously during the performance. Finally, I reminded the students to take advantage of the balloon's unique palette and to think about each individual piece as a part of the whole, integral to the development of the holistic performance.

Each group developed an interesting piece using a variety of balloon techniques, textures, and dynamics. One student wrote, "I thought the balloon music piece was our best improvisation because everyone was really focused on transitions. It reminded me of when we talked about

sonic spaces because it seemed like everyone knew where we were at and where we wanted to go. We didn't even talk about it but everyone was on the same page."

Overall, the students and I gained valuable experience from each of the improvised music activities. Derived from the creative practices of important figures in the improv community, these activities served as dynamic roadmaps for our praxis.

Conclusion

Much of the pedagogical value of improvised music stems from its basis in dialogue—dialogue that takes place in the musical (as well as cultural, social, gender) negotiations between improvisers and in the form of the discussions that surround improv sessions and musical performances. In addition to improvisation's crucial role in the development of a myriad of musical traditions throughout history and its importance as a skill in itself, teaching students to play improvised music is an opportunity for teachers to foster and emphasize the value of collaboration and creativity, both of which are central to arts education.

Going forward, I believe it will only become more important for educators to embrace a dialogical approach to music education given the accelerated rate of change that characterizes contemporary cultural life. By abandoning the prevalent banking model of education in favour of the problem-posing model, teachers foster the necessary conditions for students to become critical thinkers who reflectively engage with their social realities. A dialogical pedagogy of improvisation empowers students to enter into a co-investigative and co-creative process with their teachers, who guide the process and offer insights drawn from their own experiences. In exposing students to a combination of lessons and activities for exploring improvised music, teachers foster a fluid classroom environment in which the form of their pedagogy reflects the content and vice versa: the pedagogy of improvisation is itself improvised to a certain extent, informed by classroom dynamics and discussions.

Teaching the EMCP course was a transformative experience for both the students and me. Having participated and facilitated improvisation workshops, classes, and ensembles in the past, I came prepared with ideas on how to facilitate lessons and activities. However, I was struck by the intuitiveness and insightfulness of the students; not only did they pick up concepts

quickly, but they contributed valuable insights that informed my approach to the class and to improvisation pedagogy more generally. For example, during a soundpainting performance, the student soundpainter leading the session broke from the language framework and showed the class the *Cobra* cue card "Memory 1," and subsequently flipped back and forth between the two methodologies for the duration of the piece. When asked about her approach, the student said she had momentarily forgotten the corresponding soundpainting gesture for inscribing and recalling memories and saw an opportunity to communicate her idea using a different medium. The student explained that she saw similarities and differences between the two improvisation frameworks and decided to incorporate both into the piece. Her innovative thinking inspired the class to explore other hybrid activities, something I had not previously considered.

As part of the final reflection journal, I asked the class to list their favourite lessons and activities in order from what they perceived to be most valuable to least valuable. I was anticipating a varied response with the discussion-oriented lessons at the bottom of the list. I was pleasantly surprised by the dissimilarity between the students' lists; each lesson and activity was declared at least one student's favourite and there was no singular activity or lesson that was unanimously disliked. The students' contrasting feedback has since led me to the conclusion that there is no "best" way to teach improvised music. Instead, I believe the best way to approach improvisation pedagogy is via a diversified set of tools implemented in a dialogical educational setting.

In this thesis, I reframed the common question of whether improvisation can be taught with a question of my own: "How can teachers foster the conditions in which students may develop their improvisation skills?" I discovered that effectively teaching improvisation involves implementing a problem-posing model of education in which the teacher outlines a framework

within which learning can take place. Drawing on critical pedagogy, I embraced a dialectical approach to the pedagogy of improvisation in which the teacher and students work together through a co-investigative, dialogic process, combining both theory and practice for a praxis-informed avenue of inquiry. In the first chapter, I explained the scope and purpose of the EMCP program, as well as the objectives of my own course. Using survey data, I described the students' backgrounds and experience with improvised music and their aspirations for the course. I discussed my approach to the negotiation of various differences in the class, fostering an inclusive space where every student could develop their improvisatory voices equally. In the second chapter, I described the types of lessons that I facilitated, lessons that I consider to be fundamental to the study of improvised music. This process involved challenging our preconceived notions of musicality and creating our own working definition of music. I emphasized the importance of listening to the study of improvisation, which I facilitated through lessons on sonic awareness and transparency. I encouraged the students to explore their instruments and take advantage of all of the sounds available to them, developing an improvisatory sonic palette consisting of various extended techniques. We also discussed the notion of musical mistakes, discrediting the notion that mistakes are negative occurrences and reframing them as musical opportunities. In chapter three, I reclaimed the word "repertoire" for improvisation pedagogy, and explained my process for selecting the repertoire of activities that formed the core focus of the EMCP course, activities including soundpainting, *Cobra*, graphic score notation, Deep Listening, as well as a few miscellaneous mini-activities and instrument building activities. For each improvised music activity, I offered some contextual information, as well as a brief overview of the mechanics of each activity. Throughout the course, the feedback

from the students, their ideas and opinions, informed my pedagogical approach to a significant extent.

In order to incorporate improvised music in the classroom, further research is required. My approach to the EMCP course represents only one of a myriad of approaches to teaching improvised music. I believe the set of lessons and activities that I used were effective; however, I have no doubt that a person could teach improvisation using an entirely different set of tools. For example, other teachers have made effective use of Butch Morris's conduction method, Iannis Xenakis's game piece *Duel*, and graphic scores written by a wide variety of composers such as Anthony Braxton and R. Murray Schafer. My course served as an introduction to improvisation and improvised music for beginners; a more advanced improv course could explore other more complex methodologies such as Cecil Taylor's Unit Structures, Ornette Coleman's Harmolodics, and Anthony Braxton's Tri-Axiom Theory.

The EMCP model has a number of limitations. Though the intense nature of a week-long course has merits, playing music all day for five consecutive days quickly results in ear-fatigue. Moreover, the course felt rushed at times as we moved from one activity to the next fairly quickly; learning to improvise is a gradual process that develops over an entire lifetime. Improvisation pedagogy is optimal as a long-term endeavor. It is my hope that the week-long introduction piqued the participants' curiosity and encouraged them to continue exploring improvisatory modes of music making long after the course ended.

There is no formal assessment component to EMCP courses. While that might make sense within the context of an extra-curricular course for high achieving students, further research is required on the topic of assessment and evaluation if improvised music is to be incorporated into mainstream music education. In any education setting, the purpose of

assessment is to gauge student development and motivate students by highlighting their strengths and encouraging them to work on their weaknesses. One of the challenges when it comes to assessment in arts education is determining the criteria by which teachers can effectively assess student development. Teachers evaluating a musical performance of a composed piece of music typically focus on a student's musicality, technique, and their ability to interpret the musical score effectively. Teachers assessing a performance of improvised music may assess a student's ability to incorporate what they learn in the classroom (such as the use of extended techniques), as well as their ability to effectively negotiate musical differences with their peers, in the moment of performance. In addition, teachers may assess a student's ability to correctly interpret the codified parameters of a given improvised music activity such as the soundpainting gestures or the cues in *Cobra*.

Going forward, when I introduce improvisation into classroom settings in which formal assessment is required, I plan to develop evaluative criteria in dialogue with the students, challenging them to consider the purpose of assessment and extending the dialogical nature of improvisation pedagogy to the evaluative process. Doing so will provide additional learning opportunities for both the students and me. By engaging more directly with the micro and macro learning objectives and outcomes of a course on musical improvisation, we may glean further insights into the nature of improvisation, as well as our ability to successfully negotiate differences inside the classroom and, hopefully, out.

It is my sincere hope that teachers interested in incorporating improvisation into their classrooms may use my thesis as a point of departure, one that will complement their existing approaches to music education. In the hands of innovative teachers who are intent on cultivating

a climate of inclusivity and creativity, improvisation has the potential to be a transformative

force in music education and of significant impact on the lives of students and teachers alike.

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Survey/Journal Parental Assent Form
(For Participants Under 16 Years of Age)

Title: Introducing Musical Improvisation into the Classroom

Date of ethics clearance: May 4th 2015

Ethics Clearance for the Collection of Data Expires: May 8th 2016

This is a study on the educational value of musical improvisation. This study aims to determine a variety of ways in which teachers can incorporate musical improvisation in the classroom. **The researcher for this study is Andrew Sproule in the School for Studies in Art and Culture department at Carleton University.**
He is working under the supervision of Dr. Jesse Stewart, Professor of Music at Carleton University.

This study involves two short surveys and a daily journaling assignment.

The researcher will administer a survey at the beginning of the course to assess the participant's musical experience. Moreover, at the end of class each day, students will be asked to write a short journal entry (one to two paragraphs) discussing their thoughts on the musical activities they participated in that day. **These will be submitted as a set of entries at the end of the course.** Finally, at the end of the course, the researcher will administer a survey in which students will share their thoughts on the course and rank each activity in order from their favourite to their least favourite. Students have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions and all data will be submitted anonymously. **Participants may withdraw from the study at any time.**

All research data will be transferred to digital form, at which time all hard copies will be destroyed. The data will be stored on an encrypted computer until the end of the research project in May 2016. Research data will be accessible only by the researcher and the research supervisor.

If you would like a copy of the finished research project, you are invited to contact the researcher to request an electronic copy which will be provided to you as long as the safety of all participants will not be comprised by doing so.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research. Should you have questions or concerns related to your involvement in this research, please contact:

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_____   _____
Signature of participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix B

Survey/Journal Parental Consent Form
(For Students Under 16 Years of Age)

Title: Introducing Musical Improvisation into the Classroom

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_____   _____
Signature of parent   Date

_____   _____
Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix C

Winging it: The Art of Musical Improvisation

Entry Survey

What musical instruments do you play?

_____

_____

Why did you sign up for this course?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe your musical improvisation experience.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____