

EXPLORING IMPROVISATION PEDAGOGY BASED ON PARTICIPATORY AND  
M-BASE CHARACTERISTICS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Sarah Celina Suchan

Advisor

Dr. Sheelagh Chadwick

**Brandon University**

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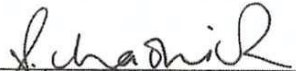
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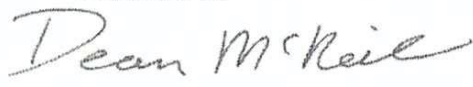
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Date: July 24, 2020

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor:  
Sheelagh Chadwick

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee member:  
Michael Cain

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee member:  
Dean McNeill

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## ABSTRACT

This action research study explored my personal pedagogy of improvisation through a combined lens of Thomas Turino's (2008) participatory field of music and the M-base collective. Influenced by the imbalance between performance-based goals and presentational music-making in high school settings and my personal lack of experience teaching improvisation, this study focused on learning how to teach improvisation away from typical educational outcomes such as assessment, curricular outcomes, and presentational values. Four high school students and two post-high school musicians participated in four two-hour sessions which took place at the Bassment in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Through the use of an action research cycle, several key themes emerged based on the participants' experiences in regards to the purpose, process and reason for teaching improvisation. I came to the following four conclusions based on the actions that occurred during the study: a teacher needs to create attainable levels for successful improvisation; the facilitator role requires time for reflection and practice; participating allowed me to recognize and challenge personal self-doubt around improvisation; and improvisation can thrive in a non-traditional environment through a balance between structure and freedom. The thesis concludes with future recommendations for educators, researchers, and myself.

Keywords: improvisation, participatory, M-base, secondary, music education, action research

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## **CHAPTER 1 RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH**

### **Statement of Problem**

The teaching of music improvisation in Canada is currently caught within a cyclical systemic problem attributable to one leading factor: large ensembles and their goals dominate the pedagogical environment of music education. In addition, many music educators - myself included - are reluctant to dedicate instructional time because we are uncomfortable teaching improvisation and lack the knowledge and experience with improvisation to do so effectively. As well, music educators also subscribe to the belief that there is a shortage of instructional time for curricular outcomes such as instrumental technique and performances preparation. As a result, improvisation is often unconsciously or even deliberately ignored and rarely present within classrooms across North America. If improvisation is found within secondary music education, it is taught solely through the jazz idiom and despite the strong affiliation between jazz and improvisation, this idiom's ability to nurture improvisation has changed (Currie, 2016; Solis, 2016; Swanson & Campbell, 2016). While improvisation in jazz may have started out as creative, its incorporation into the large ensemble and academia has altered it into a performance-driven process. Improvisation is limited to: “chord-scale modern-jazz methods, if taught at all” (Currie, 2016, p. 153) that focus on “providing a toolbox for idiomatic playing” (Solis, 2016, p. 99). This approach to teaching improvisation, combined with the assumption that improvisation is found solely in jazz, diminishes the incorporation and value of improvising and contributes to improvisation’s growing absence within music education.

An example of how this problem is both systemic and cyclical is evident from my personal musical experiences in elementary school, high school, post-secondary school, private instruction, and community ensembles. My musical experiences were overwhelmingly product-

focused and teacher-centered, prioritizing printed notation, instrumental techniques, and presentational performance skills. As a result, when I became a teacher, my pedagogical approach unknowingly accepted what I have come to understand as an imbalanced method of instruction: prioritizing my past teaching experiences through favouring the associated skills and focus of large performance ensembles. It was not until after I graduated from university and began teaching band, jazz band, and general music that I noticed a deficiency in my approach to musical instruction - specifically, an absence of tools and skills for teaching improvisation. Since my pedagogical approach focused mostly on performance outcomes and skills, teaching improvisation - an alternative method to making music which has the ability to foster collaboration, communication, creativity, empathy, and inclusiveness – was absent in my classroom.

**Cyclical lack of inclusion of improvisation.** Recent research has brought attention to the aforementioned issue with regard to the lack of improvisation being taught at all levels of music education. While elementary music teachers can integrate improvisation through various pedagogical methods (i.e. Orff and Dalcroze), Gruenhagen and Whitcomb (2014) found that 58% of veteran elementary teachers dedicated less than 10% of their instructional time towards teaching improvisation. Music undergraduates reported a lack of meaningful opportunities - those of which contributed to their overall musicianship - for improvising from elementary through post-secondary education (Snell & Azzara, 2015), and a survey of 321 university instrumental methods teachers showed that these teachers ranked improvisation among their lowest priorities (Stringham, Thorton, & Shevock, 2015).

Stringham et al. (2015) also discovered that improvisation was not taught in university because of either a lack of time or the assumption that improvisation was being taught or should

be taught elsewhere, specifically within jazz studies courses. And while improvisation is found within jazz at all levels of education, researchers have questioned whether or not this is the appropriate place for improvisation, as jazz ensembles rehearsals often tend to withhold instructional time from teaching improvisation (Snell & Azzara, 2015; Stringham et al., 2015; Watson, 2010b). Perhaps a more significant justification for avoiding the teaching of improvisation is the assumption that improvisation is both difficult to do and to teach. A recent study involving 397 undergraduate music education majors reported that students' personal confidence in teaching improvisation "decreased as [the] grade level [they were teaching] increased" (Bernhard II & Stringham, 2016, p. 383). In sum, opportunities for students to improvise and the teaching of improvisation gradually diminish across the educational spectrum the further students progress in their studies. If music education, including teacher preparation, is not providing pedagogical instruction or improvisational opportunities, then preservice and music educators will not feel adequately prepared to teach improvisation (Sarath, 2013; Snell & Azzara, 2015; Stringham et al., 2015; Swanson & Campbell, 2016), perpetuating this problematic cycle of exclusion.

**Status-quo of presentational large ensembles.** Another obstacle facing educators who wish to teach improvisation is the presentational large ensemble, a pedagogical approach embedded in almost every music education program in North America. As characterised by ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008), the presentational field of music is music which is "prepared by musicians for others to listen to" (p. 52). Turino (2008) and music education specialist Thomas Regelski (2009) have acknowledged that the presentational approach to music in both North American society and education is exclusive because of its singular focus on the development of performance skills. While these ensembles are of educational value, studies have

shown that presentational large ensembles may fail to foster inclusivity (Regelski, 2009) and lifelong learning (Bowman, 2012; Bradley, 2012; Monteiro, 2016; Randles, Griffis, & Ruiz, 2015; Regelski & Gates, 2009; Thibeault, 2015). Consequently, music educators have fallen into habitual teaching methods and techniques linked specifically to the performance of printed notation “instead of confronting the more elusive challenges of nurturing musical amateurism (and) devising ...[their] own instructional strategies in response to local needs” (Bowman, 2012, p. 64). The most unfortunate repercussion for continuing the status-quo pedagogy is that opportunities for exploring and understanding music-making through different contexts such as composition, improvisation, and informal, community, and popular music-making are frequently pushed aside in schools (Green, 2008b; Regelski, 2009; Thibeault, 2015). Therefore, it is outside of the presentational large ensemble context where a part of music education should live. Monteiro (2016), Waldron (2016), and Regelski (2009) state that the current process of music-making must be reassessed in order to “meet twenty-first century music learners’ needs” (Waldron, 2016, p. 107). Bowman (2012) further states that:

The value of music and the success of music education depends on the ends they serve: the life-wide and life-long differences they make; the ways they enrich and transform people’s lives; the human needs they discernibly serve long after students have left school...the successes we celebrate are quite fragile and our programs quite vulnerable. We have claimed success for music education without critically considering the criteria by which musical and educational successes will be gauged in a twenty-first century whose values, priorities, and musical practices diverge substantially from those with which we are familiar. The sustainability of music education is ultimately at issue. (p. 49-50)

Bowman is adamant that music education pedagogy should nurture abilities and focus on opportunities for students to be active musicians within their communities after secondary studies; the template for teaching students based on an educator's experience, however recent, may no longer be feasible or effective in the twenty-first century. Both Bowman (2012) and Regelski and Gates (2009) agree that teachers "have grown comfortable" (Bowman, p. 64) and state that change is needed in which creativity and a "wider and more global diversity of music" (Regelski & Gates, 2009, p. 2) making is explored within the classroom. Educators should question which values and musical outcomes result from their pedagogy being centered around the presentational large ensemble model, or what Regelski (2014) refers to as "confronting the elephant in the room." In an attempt to address large ensemble dominance, Regelski (2014) further implies that "If the musics addressed by 'music' education are to be more fully representative of the wider world of music, we need to resist the hegemony of presentational performance promoted by university music models" (p. 79). In a similar vein, Turino (2008) suggests that "All four (fields) should be equally valued, and hence made available and legitimate, for what they can offer to different types of people and in different types of situations" (p. 89).

**Improvisation and creativity.** Many researchers, supported by curriculum documents, agree that improvisation should be a vital component of education (Currie, 2016; Manitoba Education & Advanced Learning, 2015; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 1993; Stringham, 2010; Swanson & Campbell, 2016; Thompson, Lamont, Parncutt, & Russo, 2014; Wilson, 2009), yet improvisation and improvisational pedagogy are absent from many institutions of higher learning (Ladano, 2016). Despite the acknowledgement that there "appears to be a very personal creative process that unfolds during the creation of an improvisation that can affect

individuals in very different and potentially powerful ways” (p. 57), Ladano further critiques the absence of improvisation from universities as “a great disservice to music students” (p. 57). The general absence of improvisational instruction could be a result of the dominance of the large ensemble model goals and an unfortunate reality is that large ensembles fail to foster creativity (Ladano, 2016; Regelski, 2009; Sawyer, 2012; Swanson & Campbell, 2016). “At the heart of the creative process” as explained by Robinson (2009), is “collaboration, diversity, the exchange of ideas, and building on other people’s achievements” (Robinson & Azzam, 2009, p. 25).

Although large ensembles can be collaborative in some ways, students are rarely given the opportunity to significantly shape the direction of the class through the exchange of their personal experiences. Rather, the conductor and the ensemble’s purpose as a whole in the presentational model is “to communicate another creator’s vision faithfully, not to be creative themselves” (Sawyer, 2012, p. 344). Conductors are largely tasked with pre-determining and funneling creative decisions and interpretations regarding tempo, phrasing, dynamics, and overall presentation. In addition, the social environment for music education exists almost solely through the presentational large ensemble, which in turn is influenced and motivated by evaluation. When and if improvisation is approached in such an environment – which is largely focused on assessment or presentational goals – the creative process itself will undoubtedly be affected and potentially render the act of improvisation moot. Amabile’s (2017) positionality towards general creativity states that “the social environment can have significant impact on creativity by impacting motivation” (00:04:18-00:04:26), explaining that if the motivating factors are competition and evaluation, students are less likely to be creative. Therefore, music educators must consider possible learning environments for improvisation which can address the

inclusion of creativity while being held accountable to curricular assessment and presentational values.

### **Participatory and M-Base Music-Making**

Although not specifically addressing music education, Turino (2008) recognizes an imbalance in today's Western society, specifically the emphasis on presentational music making. In pursuit of balance, Turino strongly emphasizes a need for more experiences with the participatory field of music. Turino (2008) states, "If at times I seem to emphasize participatory music more than the other fields, it is because participatory music is both the 'most democratic' - potentially involving the most people - and the least understood and valued within the capitalist-cosmopolitan formation," (p. 92) further adding that all four fields (participatory, presentational, studio art, and high fidelity) should be made "available to everyone in a number of different, equally important ways" (p. 89). Participatory music-making is characterized as follows: "there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role" (Turino, 2008, p. 26). In addition, successful participatory music-making occurs when "attention is on the sonic and kinesic interaction among participants" (p. 28) and a proper level of challenge is met (where the participant is not bored or anxious), allowing the individual to experience a state of flow; in other words, successful participatory music-making takes place in a social environment focused not on product-driven outcomes but on the social and individual participation of making music (Turino, 2008). The music explored is chosen from a collection of pieces which are arranged differently for each social gathering and often consists of



short, open and repeated forms, repetitive bass lines, consistent rhythm, meter and groove, with feathered beginnings and endings, and dense textures (Turino, 2008 p. 59).<sup>1</sup>

Another approach towards music-making which values both process and collaboration above those of performance-specific outcomes is the of the M-base collective philosophy. M-base (Macro Basic Array of Structured Extemporizations) is a collective of musicians who first came together during the 1980s in the United States. The musicians formed this collective in the hope of shaping “an identity for themselves outside of straight ahead jazz” (Clayton, 2009, p. 161) through creating a space for personal and group growth by creating and playing original compositions “as opposed to jazz standards” (Clayton, 2009, p. 94). In addition to their prior experience and knowledge of jazz, the musicians in this collective also brought with them a variety of musical influences, such as the popular rhythms of the 1960s and 1970s, the popular and funk music they enjoyed during their youth, African-American music forms, bebop’s melodic and rhythmic intellectual complexities and speed, modal jazz vamps, and repetitive chord structures (Clayton, 2009). From these influences emerged the two musical pillars of M-base: structure and improvisation (Coleman, 2015). Structure is found within dense rhythmic repetition, repetitive bass ostinatos or specific walking bass lines, and specific roles of melody and harmony (as opposed to ‘free jazz’). Improvisation, the second pillar, emphasized creativity and the production of new compositions in contrast to the repetition of “museum” compositions and improvisations. In general, the collective of “M-Base meant: a large group of people coming together to improvise within a given set of compositional structures” (Clayton, 2009, p. 170).

M-base and participatory music share a multitude of musical characteristics, including

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix H and Appendix I for participatory characteristics.

frequent repetition, a consistency of groove and meter, dense textures, time and harmony assigned as core roles, and sparse use of notation (Clayton, 2009). More importantly, M-base and participatory music are musical environments that do not favor competition, evaluation, or presentation, but rather cooperation, process, the individual and the collaborative interaction between musicians. While sharing many similarities, their differences are found within improvisation and creativity. While improvisation is one of the foundational pillars for M-base, the participatory field of music, however, does not promote individual or virtuosic improvisation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Deficiencies in Literature**

Extensive research has been conducted on improvisation within a variety of classroom settings, such as elementary classrooms (Brophy, 2005; Coulson & Burke, 2013; Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014; Guilbault, 2009; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Whitcomb, 2010) and middle school settings of general music, jazz band, band, and orchestra (Beegle, 2010; Gagne, 2014; Knaster, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Research on improvisation in universities within private lesson studios (Gamso, 2011) and preparation courses for music teachers (Snell & Azzara, 2015) has also been conducted. Alongside these studies, which are based within a typical classroom setting, other studies have also been conducted outside of the classroom in extra-curricular music clubs with 12-year olds (Burnard, 2002), grade five instrumentalists (Wall, 2018), and high school students (Burnard & Dravogic, 2014). These alternative settings – not bound to assessment – allowed for improvisation to thrive by allowing students to be engaged in the activity for and of itself. While research has been undertaken on participatory music-making in a high school setting (Monteiro, 2016), the intersection between teaching improvisation to

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix H and Appendix I for M-base characteristics.

secondary students and incorporating participatory and M-base characteristics is virtually non-existent. The most relevant article suggesting improvisation in a participatory setting is Randles, Griffis, and Ruiz's (2015) study, which presents the reflections of three different perspectives – teacher, graduate assistant, and student – during a university class that focused on the implementation of Turino's four fields of music demonstrating a student centered approach to music making. Research into the domain of improvisational music education, specifically in regards to participatory and M-base concepts, will help expand and enrich the research and teacher inquiry on this topic.

### **Purpose of Study**

By reflecting on my personal pedagogy, I hope to develop a process-oriented and student-centered practice that can create a space for students to engage with improvisation in an inclusive environment while fostering creativity and the lifelong skills to become active musicians within their music community. The purpose of this study therefore is to develop my personal pedagogy of improvisation by using the characteristics of Thomas Turino's participatory field of music and of the characteristics of the M-base collective through an action research methodology by reflecting on how, why and where I teach improvisation in order to be inclusive of improvisation through a non-presentational method of education. Research questions are as follows:

1. How can I teach improvisation to high school students with a participatory and M-base lens to develop my personal pedagogy of improvisation?
2. How do students respond to improvisation taught in non-traditional environments?
  - a) Specifically in regards to non-presentational expectations.
  - b) Specifically in regards to the absence of assessment.

3. What strategies are used to adapt or change my improvisational pedagogy in response to students' experiences with the participatory and M-base lenses?

### **Limitations of Study**

The research for this study will be conducted outside of the high school music program because the researcher will not be teaching in a full-time position during the research period. It is also important to point out that the participants come from a mixture of ages, musical experiences and educational levels. As well, the study was originally scheduled for 8 sessions however because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was unfortunately cancelled and the research was reduced to 4 sessions.

### **Summary of Chapters**

The proceeding chapters will provide the following information: Chapter 2 will outline the literature on improvisation, specifically focusing on studies that highlight the purpose, process, and non-traditional settings for improvisation. Chapter 3 will explain the action research cycle methodology, the varying roles of the researcher, background information about the researcher, the setting and participants, ethical considerations, and data collection. Chapter 4 will summarize the findings including the actions taken during the sessions, and the participants' experiences, concluding with Chapter 5, which will present the final reflections, suggestions for future researchers, and conclusions of the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Creative Process:** "collaboration, diversity, the exchange of ideas, building on other people's achievements" and "original ideas that have values" (Robinson & Azzam, 2009, p. 25).

**Grades Levels in Canada:** Varies province to province. Elementary students may be as young as four years old in kindergarten and most high school students will be 18 years old the year they

graduate. Elementary K-6 or K-8; Middle School 7-8; High School 9-12 (EduCanada).

**Improvisation:** a way of making music collaboratively, that “embod(ies) real-time creative decision-making (and) risk taking” (Willox, Heble, Jackson, Walker & Waterman, 2011, p. 116).

**Lead Sheet:** “A score, in manuscript or printed form, that shows only the melody, the basic harmonic structure, and the lyrics (if any) of a composition” (Oxford Music Online).

**M-Base:** a collective of musicians whose goal is to express their experiences through the use of improvisation and structure.

**Jam Session/Jamming:** the “meeting of musicians, in private or public, where the emphasis is on unrehearsed material and improvisation’ (Oxford Music Online).

**Participatory Field of Music:** a group of musicians that play music together without an audience, only participants “whose primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role” (Turino, 2008, p. 26).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Improvisation has been taught in a variety of settings, with a variety of techniques, and with many overarching aims within the past twenty years. These three parameters – setting, process, and purpose – will be the foundation and focal point for building my personal pedagogy for improvisation. This literature review will group studies by their aims for teaching improvisation, demonstrating a focus on curricular outcomes such as creativity, followed by the techniques used to teach improvisation, such as the removal of obstacles and learning by ear. These two parameters (purpose and process) demonstrate similar characteristics found in M-base and participatory music making which will be briefly explained, followed by the final section of the literature review which will present studies undertaken in non-traditional environments (setting), which are not involved in assessment and curriculum standards, such as the informal, extracurricular, and participatory settings.

#### **Research on Improvisation**

A myriad of music education research exists exploring educators' approaches to and experiences with teaching improvisation (Brophy, 2001; Burnard, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Gagne, 2014; Gamso, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Saetre, 2011; Taylor, 2018; Whitcomb, 2013; Willox, et al., 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), as well as investigating students' processes both during and after the outcomes after improvising (Beegle, 2010; Brophy, 2005; Burnard, 2002; Burnard & Dragovic, 2014; Guilbault, 2009; Knaster, 2016; Snell & Azzara, 2015; Varvarigou, 2017; Wall, 2018; Whitcomb, 2010).

Many of the overarching aims of improvisatory activities reflected in the research “involve[s] utilizing improvisation as a tool to aid other areas of music learning” (Wall, 2018, p. 119), rather than for its own intrinsic value. In many cases, improvisation has become a vehicle

for teaching outcomes such as musicianship (Monk, 2012), composition (Burnard, 2000a, 2000b; Knaster, 2016; Saetre, 2011), and creativity (Beegle, 2010; Knaster, 2016; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009). Understood in combination, improvisation's overarching aim in educational research appears to be in support of curricular expectations in music, and by association, focused towards assessment.

Teaching improvisation to fulfil curricular standards and expectations can begin as young as pre-school (Whitcomb, 2010) and elementary school (Beegle, 2010; Knaster, 2016). However, motivation from curricular standards could be detrimental to the positive outcomes of improvisation. Higgins and Mantie (2013) are adamant on avoiding predetermined outcomes and checkboxes of standards for improvisation and Larsson and Hemming-Georgii (2018) further state that “the imperative demand to incorporate improvisation in music education and the urge to legitimise improvisation in the curricula leads to a compliance with prescribed knowledge criteria and instrumentally-oriented studies” (p. 57-59). Although a sequential method is a sensible approach for teachers who have difficulty teaching improvisation (Brophy, 2005; Snell & Azzara, 2015), suggested step-by-step methods by researchers, however, have demonstrated that improvisation shifts from being process-oriented to a “musical product that must be shaped to conform to acceptable sounds in the improviser's society, to please an audience of listeners” (Kratz in Brophy, 2005, p. 131).

**Improvisation and creativity.** Another justification for teaching improvisation found in the literature is its association to creativity. The word creativity, valued in education programs around the world, is present in all of the six secondary music and instrumental curricula of Canada and because creativity can be both a curricular outcome and attached to improvisation, improvisation becomes linked to assessment. Influenced by the national curriculum (DfEE/QCA,

1999), Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves' (2009) quasi-experimental study of primary students (6 years old) in England assessed creativity through improvisation, specifically the effects of improvisation on creativity. Their study analyzed creativity through Webster's Measure of Creative Thinking in Music (MCTM-II), revealing that improvisation "promotes musical flexibility, originality, and syntax in children's music-making" (p. 251). Coulson and Burke's (2013) research in an elementary music classroom in the United States established specific guidelines for the assessment of improvisation and creativity, assessing students performances based on measurable goals, specific objectives and problem-solving through the following criteria: "steady beat, mallet technique, phrases with appropriate beat, ends on 'do', question ending not on 'do', and incorporating part of the question in the improvisation" (p. 440).

**Improvisation and assessment.** As creativity and improvisation become entwined, assumptions for the assessment of improvisation and creativity are found. In Rozman's (2009) study of elementary students and teachers in Slovenia, the researcher assumed that assessment of improvisation would take place asking not *if* teachers assessed improvisation, but *how* teachers assessed the musical creativity. Some of the assessment criteria found for the creative activities, such as improvisation, in this study were based on: originality, the effort of the student, and congruency, while "other points of view, such as fluency of ideas, expressiveness, tonal coherency" (Rozman, 2009, p. 71) were absent. Approaching improvisation through assessment conveys a message to students early on, whether intentionally or not, that one can err in improvisation, thereby influencing and possibly undermining the creative process of improvisation itself. One elementary teacher in Sætre's (2011) research, although referring to composition rather than improvisation, acknowledged the difficulty of assessing creative forms, explaining that one "main aim (of creative forms of music making) is that all students participate,



in a supportive environment for musical activity” (p. 42), rather than making music for specific rubrics and assessment. Varvarigou (2017) would also agree that through the research of undergraduate students’ experiences in small groups, “the developmental value of group creative activities such as improvisation lies with supporting music learner’s collective decision-making; identity and relationship development; participation over competition; celebrating group risk-taking; and valuing musical collaboration and experimentation” (p. 301). The challenge facing educators therefore lies in how educators adopt or alter improvisation within an educational system that demands curricular outcomes such as improvisation, creativity, and assessment.

### **Techniques for Teaching Improvisation**

The second aspect of the research literature is how improvisation has been taught in music education. It is evident that a variety of techniques have been used to teach improvisation, such as collaborative group learning, learning by ear, the removal of obstacles, and the adjustment of the teacher’s role.

The first technique used to teach improvisation was collaborative group learning. Rabinowitch, Cross and Burnard (2013) explored group interaction during improvisational games and focused on the process of engagement over a longitudinal study, discovering that group improvisation may have the capacity to promote “positive social-emotional capacities such as empathy” (p. 484). While Sawyer (2008) was initially afraid group learning would overshadow individual ability, Sawyer’s study concluded that group collaboration did not hinder individuality but caused it to flourish, further suggesting that “our educational methods should place greater emphasis on group interaction” (Sawyer, 2008, p. 57). Burnard’s (2002) research based on student-led group improvisations discovered that students were collectively able “to exceed their individual potentials by negotiating the rules and roles that were played out as the

ethics of music-making established both inside and outside the performance event” (p. 167).

Burnard also discovered that the moments of discussion, both during and outside of the improvisation, were the most beneficial learning moments, allowing students to make decisions collectively, create communicative gestures, and assign roles. Beegle (2010) adopted Burnard’s model and further explored improvisation in groups with elementary students through different prompts such as a painting, a composition, and a poem, finding that group interactions again led to the assignment of different roles in each group regardless of which prompt was used. Roles such as leaders and followers were established in Beegle’s study, and group interaction allowed students to communicate, reflect and make decisions about their improvisations.

The second technique found in the literature, and similar to Green’s approach in informal research, was the use of an aural approach through the imitation of a recording by ear (Snell & Azzara, 2015; Varvarigou, 2017). This approach to learning music has been widely used in improvisation, and not surprisingly, was a normalized method of learning jazz before bebop, academia, and method books transformed the pedagogy of jazz. Gamso (2011) recognized this historical use and value by assimilating jazz techniques such as listening analysis, the transcriptions of solos, and improvisation into the Aural Learning Project in the hopes of helping classical students in a one-on-one setting find a balance among “all the learning modalities applicable to musical study” (p. 67). Playing music without notation continues to prove its value and is consistently recommended to be included in music education (Baker & Green, 2013; Campbell, 2014; McPherson, 1997; McPherson, Bailey, & Sinclair, 1997; Varvarigou & Green, 2015; Woody, 2012; Woody, & Lehmann, 2010).

The third technique used to teach improvisation was the removal or adaptation of obstacles, such as the psychological barriers of fear and anxiety (Coss, 2018; Snell & Azzara,

2015). Undergraduates in Snell and Azzara's (2015) research "identified the importance of overcoming fear of improvisation by being "less inhibited, less afraid of making mistakes, more willing to take musical chances, and willing to immerse themselves further in the improvisation process" (p. 63). Researchers also found that students improvised with greater ease through the limitation of fingerings and note choice (Whitcomb, 2013), the use or implementation of easier chords progressions, (Miksza, Watson, & Calhoun, 2018) and specific attention to listening and improvising solely on root progressions (Guilbault, 2009; Snell & Azzara, 2015). Other studies that involved undergraduates learning to improvise also acknowledged the importance and enjoyment of following a sequential order when learning to improvise (Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Snell & Azzara, 2015), and a survey of 148 participants in general music education in the United States found sequencing, a method which builds learning based on previous knowledge, to be a normalized method of instruction when teaching improvisation in elementary music (Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014).

The fourth technique that was used when teaching improvisation in research was shifting the teacher's role in the distribution of knowledge to students, ranging from teacher-centered practices to student-centered methods. Guilbault's (2009) study, which focused on improvisation in elementary classrooms, places the responsibility of "providing quality guidance, sequential skill learning instruction and improvisation performance opportunities within the music classroom..." (p. 88) on the teacher. Since both teachers and students best learn by doing (Pietra & Campbell, 1995), researchers have suggested that teachers learn alongside students (Whitcomb, 2013; Willox, et al., 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Alternatively, research has also identified mentorship as a positive technique for improvisation (Barron, 2007) and researchers have proposed that teachers act as facilitators who guide interventions, questions,

difficulties, and structure (Beegle, 2010; Burnard, 2002). Teachers who act as facilitators could also promote peer learning, an approach that Green (2008b) advocates for in her research and that Varvarigou's (2017) study of undergraduates found to be one of the most powerful learning strategies in group improvisation through the encouragement, problem solving, and environments which "nurtured a general atmosphere of playfulness and experimentation" (p. 297). These four techniques discovered in the literature – group learning, learning by ear, the removal of obstacles and shifting the teacher's role – demonstrate the numerous research articles based on how to teach improvisation.

### **Reason for Participatory and M-base Environments**

These techniques and aims share similar and different characteristics to M-base and participatory music-making. Contrary are the aims of improvisation in M-base compared to improvisation in music education: improvisation in M-base is for itself while improvisation in music education has become attached to meeting curricular goals, expectations and assessment. In terms of their similarities, M-base and participatory music-making are social environments built on verbal and musical communication, group collaboration and an emphasis on the activity of making music itself (technique #1 above). M-base and participatory music both consist of short and open forms, highly repetitive bass lines, a consistency of rhythm, meter, and groove, dense textures, offer a variety of musical roles, and are conducive to improvisation in that they remove obstacles during improvisation (technique #3 above) (Coleman, 2015; Turino, 2008). As well, M-base and participatory both approach music-making by ear (technique #2 above) and approach music not from a teacher-centered approach but through the actions of mentors and facilitators (technique #4 above). From this observation, I decided to use the lenses of M-base

and participatory, as they encompass many of the techniques and aims suggested by past literature and research.

### **Non-Traditional Environments for Improvisation**

The following section will explore the final category of literature based upon non-traditional music education environments and approaches, such as informal learning, extracurricular settings, and participatory music-making.

**Informal learning.** While large ensembles continue to prevail as the pedagogical approach to music education in North America, alternative approaches have recently become a trending research topic. Lucy Green's (2002, 2008b) research on informal music learning, which argues for the integration of informal music in education based on learning popular music through a holistic approach (Green, 2008a), has been one of the most influential studies and pedagogies conducted and applied within the past twenty years. Green's research created a domino effect on music education and music education research, resulting in multiple studies using and adapting Green's informal approach in both elementary (Davis, 2014) and undergraduate settings (Varvarigou, 2017). Furthermore, Green's research has been applied to study different learning styles and strategies in ear-playing assignments (Varvarigou & Green, 2015) and used to analyze the benefits of ear training in small group environment lessons through the Ear Playing Project (Baker & Green, 2013). These various applications have demonstrated that informal learning can lead to positive outcomes (i.e. aural skills, student-centered decision-making), yet the decision still remains with the teacher on allocating class time towards informal approaches. While teacher-participants in Knaster's (2016) study viewed informal teaching as an additional activity next to formal pedagogy, Green (2009) and other scholars, have also noted the importance of establishing and examining how both formal and

informal learning situations could (and should) coexist in music education (Byo, 2018; Knaster, 2016). On the other end of the spectrum, Cain (2013) voices concern for teachers who have replaced formal learning altogether and discusses the dangers of establishing a sudden and radical pedagogical shift which ignores all skills attributed with formal learning.

Understanding and defining, and therefore implementing informal and formal music learning, however, has become a difficult task. Lill (2014) believes that “informal learnings themselves are far more complex than the literature suggests, and that reifying them into a universal pedagogy (in education) may not be appropriate” (p. 242). Lill suggests that researchers and educators should “engage in a process of reflexively questioning our educator (and) researcher assumptions of what constitutes informal learning” (p. 242). Folkestad (2006) argues that formal and informal approaches in education are not dichotomies but “two poles of a continuum” (p. 143), in which both may be present and simultaneously interact to various degrees. Turino and Cain discuss ways in which this sort of continuum can exist: Turino (2008), borrowing from the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s social field, “conceptualize(s) music making in relation to different realms or *fields* of artistic practice” (p. 25) through defining the activity by its goals and purpose, while Cain (2013) suggests replacing formal and informal labels with an understanding of “pedagogies in relation to their overarching aims” (p. 74).

**Extracurricular.** Environments which deliberately focused on improvisation’s overarching aim, specifically as a process, were found in alternative settings such as extracurricular groups. Burnard’s (2002) ethnographic study of 12-year-olds in England through a club called the Music Creators’ Soundings Club explored how students came into improvisation when not led by assessment, curriculum or a teacher. Wall’s (2018) dissertation, comprised of grade 5 band students, explored an extracurricular environment implementing improvisation as a

core activity where students *only* improvised. Like Burnard, Wall did not focus on assessment (albeit the students did have an assessment which was a personal improvisation for the teacher to demonstrate what they learned) or performance practices, but rather on exploring improvisation. Another study within an extracurricular setting was Burnard and Dragovic's (2014) qualitative case study of a secondary-school instrumental group in Australia. This research explored the "nature of the elements that co-influence collaborative creativity" (p. 1), focusing on the well-being of students through the frameworks of Wenger's Community of Practice and Engestrom's Activity Theory. Rather than exploiting improvisation for assessment, curriculum and presentation, these three research articles focused on how the students were engaged and motivated to participate in improvisation exclusively as an activity.

One article that fully embodied this ethos was Willox, Heble, Jackson, Walker, and Waterman's (2011) study, conducted in a non-traditional school in Canada for at-risk youth aged 16-21 called Give Yourself Credit. Away from the "traditional hierarchical modes of teacher-centered pedagogy" (p. 124), this school demonstrated no emphasis on assessment and presentational skills. What was noticeably different in contrast to research focused on curricular outcomes was the authors' definition of improvisation. Willox et al. (2011) defined improvisation as "musical practices that accent and embody real-time creative decision-making, risk-taking, and collaboration" (p. 116). The authors further point out that definitions of improvisation "that emphasize only its spontaneous, intuitive nature — characterizing it as the 'making something out of nothing' — are astonishingly incomplete" (Berliner as cited in Willox et al., p. 119). Learning improvisation in a non-traditional environment in an extracurricular settings emphasized exploration rather than assessment and demonstrated a different experience for learning and teaching improvisation in music education.

## **Participatory Music-Making in Music Education Research**

While research based on participatory music making is found within summer camps (Blanton, Dillon, & Macleod, 2014; Waldron, 2016), in community choirs (Power, 2010), and a dissertation exploring the historical events of participatory music making (Lee, 2011), few have specifically approached Turino's participatory music making in secondary education. Thibeault (2015) uses three examples that have incorporated participatory music to demonstrate "how the participatory field can complement and enhance" music education programs (p. 54). The three different examples are a ukulele/sing-along group in a general music class in middle school/elementary, a secondary school in the United States, and the Homebrew Ukulele Union sing-along group for community members which was formed at a public university. While Monteiro's (2016) research did not focus on improvisation in this participatory setting, Thibeault (2015) does believe that the participatory field is a suitable environment to develop improvisational skills because of how it encourages beginners (dense textures to help mask errors and repetition of vamp). Randles, Griffis, and Ruiz's (2015) action research at the University of Southern Florida focused on incorporating Turino's four fields of music making, allowing students the opportunity to arrange, compose, record, perform and improvise in a course and lab called the Progressive Music Education Methods (PM) and the Creative Performance Chamber Ensemble (CPCE). Through the presentation of their personal experiences as a teacher, graduate assistant, and student, the authors also presented Sawyer's theory of improvisation, decidedly arguing that improvisation and participatory music-making are complementary entities (Randles et al., 2015). This article however did not focus on teaching improvisation but presented the reflection on the implementation of participatory methods into a



university classroom demonstrating a lack of literature which focuses on improvisation in secondary music education within either the participatory or and M-base environments.

### **Need for Study**

Educators, scholars, students, seniors, and community members display a certain desire and need to participate in music. Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez's (2013) study asked music education specialists from around the world "what are the educative principles that promote significant musical practices and enhancing of musical experiences" (p. 459) in hopes of defending a diverse music education which promotes "positive musical experiences" (p. 455). Participants responded that one of the teacher's roles was promoting space for collective practices and participatory music in their classrooms. While Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez argue for diverse spaces and approaches in music education, Yang, Li, and Zhao (2017) state that music participation is a right. This statement is realized by the formation of a group called "Crooners" (a subset of MIHNUET, which stands for music in hospitals and nursing homes using entertainment as therapy), who transformed their practice from presentational performances towards providing participatory performances *with* seniors.

This literature review first presented the two parameters found in improvisational research: the aims of improvisation in music education and the techniques used to teach improvisation in music education. While improvisation is taught in music education because of its inclusion in curricular standards, improvisation has also become a tool for teaching curricular outcomes such as creativity (Beegle, 2010; Knaster, 2016; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009). This connection has demonstrated that improvisation has, subconsciously or with intent, become attached to assessment (Coulson & Burke, 2013; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Rozman, 2009). However, scholars warn of the dangers when attempting to incorporate improvisation into

the curriculum, stating that “the urge to legitimate improvisation in the curricula leads to a compliance with prescribed knowledge criteria and instrumentally-oriented studies” (Larsson & Hemming-Georgii, p. 57). Other scholars would also argue that improvisation should not adhere to a checklist style of assessment (Higgins & Mantie, 2013), but rather value improvisation for its “collective decision-making; identity and relationship development; participation over competition; celebrating group risk-taking; and valuing musical collaboration and experimentation” (Varvarigou, 2017, p. 301).

The literature review presented the second parameter which consisted of four techniques for teaching improvisation: group interaction and collaboration (Burnard, 2002; Beegle, 2010; Rabinowitch, Cross & Burnard, 2013; Sawyer, 2008), learning by ear, (Gamso, 2011; Snell & Azzara, 2015; Varvarigou, 2017) shifting the teacher’s role to participant, facilitator, and mentor (Barron, 2007; Beegle, 2010; Burnard, 2002; Green, 2002, 2008b; Guilbault, 2009; Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Varvarigou, 2017; Whitcomb, 2013; Willox et al. 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), and the removal of obstacles (Coss, 2018; Gruenhagen & Whitcomb, 2014; Guilbault, 2009; Miksza, Watson, & Calhoun, 2018; Snell & Azzara, 2015; Whitcomb, 2013). These techniques and aims demonstrate similarities and differences to M-base and participatory music making. The most significant difference is that M-base values improvisation for itself while improvisation in music education is attached to curricular goals and expectations. The literature review concluded by presenting a recent shift in pedagogical learning through informal learning environments (Baker & Green, 2013; Davis, 2014; Green, 2002, 2008a 2008b; Knaster, 2016; Varvarigou, 2017). Further, learning improvisation in settings that are not limited to curricular outcomes were explored, such as extracurricular settings (Burnard, 2002; Burnard & Dragovic; 2014; Wall, 2018; Willox et al., 2011), non-traditional schools (Willox et al., 2011)

and participatory music making in education (Monteiro, 2016; Randles, Griffis, & Ruiz, 2015; Thibeault, 2015). While research that incorporates M-base in secondary music education was not found, these alternative environments promote a need for a study focused on teaching improvisation through participatory and M-base lenses.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **Reason for Research**

The motivation for this research came from a desire to improve my pedagogy of music education upon recognizing a lack of personal experience teaching improvisation. As stated in the previous chapters, the value that I have placed on large ensembles and the methods used to teach through this medium have largely shaped the aim for this research. That is, through this research I hope to challenge my current methods and habits of teaching (Myers, 2017). In pursuit of this challenge, I have committed myself to a process that is fundamentally both reflective and evolutionary: not ignoring what I already know, but reflecting and building upon my current pedagogy with an open mind and a focus towards innovation. In doing so, I will challenge my current predominant methods and pedagogy of improvisation by using the lenses of both participatory and M-base characteristics. The placement of these lenses at the forefront of my research will help guide my practice while also acknowledging the subjectivity found in my teaching, which, as Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) state, “need(s) to be critically examined rather than ignored” (p. 43). It is because of this desire to challenge my personal pedagogy that action research is the most effective methodology, as it will aid in identifying and confronting my teaching habits in real-time, prompting me to think about what is occurring around me while also taking action. The following chapter will explain what action research is, outline the particular cycle of action research used in the study, the setting and participants of the study, an explanation of the researcher’s role, my personal experiences with practicing and teaching improvisation, ethical standards, the validity of study, the data and coding process, and conclude with a brief description of the action research cycle that occurred during the study.

## About Action Research

Action research has been broadly defined as research which:

1. integrates research and action in a series of flexible cycles;
2. is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers;
3. involves the development of knowledge and understanding of ... change and development in a natural (as opposed to contrived) social situation;
4. starts from a vision of social transformation and aspirations of greater social justice for all;
5. involves a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity to the role of the self;
6. involves exploratory engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge;
7. engenders powerful learning for participants;
8. locates the enquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts. (Somekh, 2006 as cited in Cain, 2008, pp. 284-285)

In the context of this thesis, I understand action research as a qualitative research methodology used by educators who wish to “examine an aspect of their own work in order to improve it” (Cain, 2012, p. 410). It is also a research methodology that encourages cyclical self-interrogation, promotes analysis during the process (Conway & Borst, 2001), and most importantly, is *action* (Noffke, 1997). The process of action research influences subsequent cycles as the researcher plans, implements, observes, and reflects (Noffke, 1997). This methodology is effective for educators because it allows the researcher, through a hands-on approach, to experience the ebb and flow of teaching while improving on current ideas and methods.

Since action research builds upon past cycles, it is impossible to assume the specific path and outcomes of this methodology (Anderson, et al., 2007). Ultimately, no single correct method of approaching the issue of studying one's own teaching habits and environment exists (Anderson et al., 2007). However, researchers can approach action research with a clear intention of their specific aim and an understanding of the intent behind undertaking such research. As explained by Noffke (1997), the aim of action research may be personal, professional, or political. While Noffke (1997) states that these categories are different, they "all clearly deal with issues of power and control" (p. 306). Those who conduct action research based on professional aims highlights an "effort to redefine professional roles in education" (p. 323), and those with political aims work towards transformative issues of social justice. While this research study may have the capacity to reflect upon these categories, I decided to focus solely on the personal aim of action research (Noffke, 1997). Action research with a personal aim, which seeks to benefit "a deeper understanding of one's own practice" (Noffke, 1997, p. 306), should be focused on transforming oneself as an educator, rather than legitimizing specific approaches to education. As well, although personal action research is focused on the improvement of oneself, Noffke (1997) explains that personal action is also connected to the social context and therefore is not only research for oneself, but for those who are linked to the social contexts of the teacher-researcher. As a result, personal action research exists for the development of the researcher's practice, for those who will be taught by the teacher, and for the participants. Furthermore, action research is most often a local activity focused on people in the local community and their educational and social issues (Noffke, 2009; Stringer, 2014). By approaching research based on one's own practice, the teacher-researcher builds ownership of

the research through the problems they wish to solve and the methods they use and reflect upon (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014).

The research questions were therefore created to intervene upon my personal pedagogy (Anderson et al., 2007) through the process of reflections and actions. The first question explored the methods used for teaching improvisation away from the normalized presentational ensembles values:

1. How can I teach improvisation to high school students with participatory and M-base lenses to develop my personal pedagogy of improvisation?

The second question was to help me understand and reflect on how high school students experienced making music away from a traditional presentational method of making music:

2. How do students respond to improvisation taught in non-traditional environments, specifically with regard to non-presentational expectations and the absence of assessment?

The third and final question focused on the ongoing reflective process of the action research cycle and how changes were implemented and experienced, specifically in regards to this new pedagogy:

3. What strategies are used to adapt or change my improvisational pedagogy in response to students' experiences with the participatory and M-base lenses?

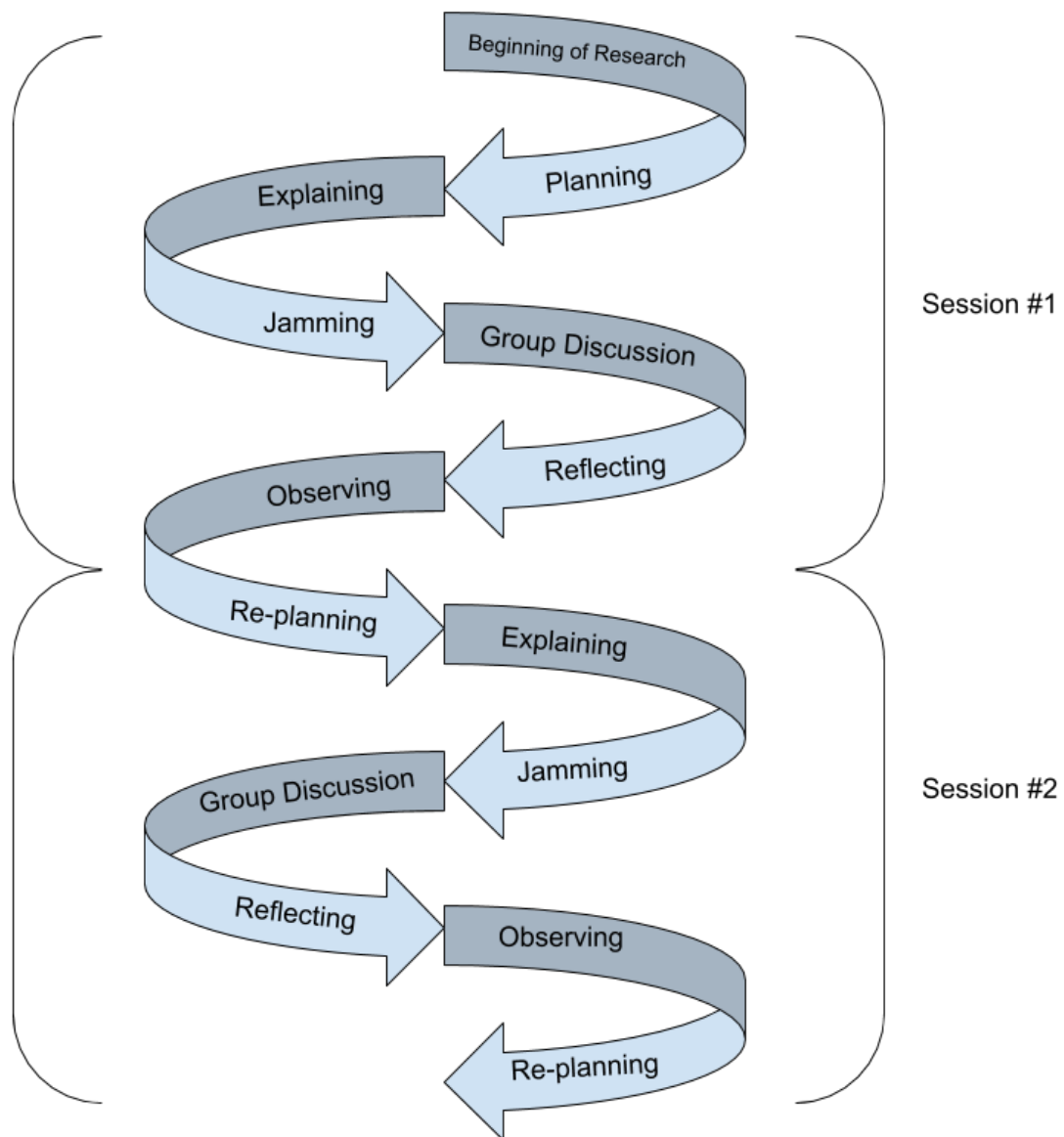
By using an action research cycle to address my three research questions and the problems facing music education, such as the lack of my personal pedagogical experience teaching improvisation and the dominance of the large ensemble, the reflective and collaborative processes of an action research cycle was used. Although sharing some similarities with the teaching process, this

cyclical process differs in depth found within the questions placed upon a teacher's everyday methods and the desire to challenge current methods of teaching.

The following action research cycle – a possible order, but not limited to – was used: planning, explaining, jamming, group discussing, reflecting, observing, and re-planning.

**Figure 3.1**

*Action Research Cycle*





The first step of this action research cycle was **planning** the first session with a focus on participatory and M-base lenses. Planning was reflective and strove towards understanding the expected goal of each session and anticipating problems and outcomes. Once the first session was planned, I met with the group and **explained** the purpose of the research, the goals of the sessions, and taught the ostinatos and grooves. Following the explanation was the group **jam** where we played music together and improvised. Immediately following the jam, a **group discussion** occurred between the participants and the researcher to hear the participants' first reactions and thoughts from the jam. Following the group discussion, the participants were invited to write their **reflections** in a journal. This was to facilitate the participants who may have initially found the group discussion a daunting place to express themselves. The journals also presented another opportunity for the participants to state or restate their feelings and thoughts (Anderson, et al., 2007).<sup>3</sup> Once the session concluded, I collected the journals, wrote my own personal reflections, **observed** all of the video footage (which will be explained later in more detail) of the jam and the group discussion, and read the participants' journals in a timely manner. From these observations, I began to **re-plan** the following session.

### **Setting and Participants**

An open invitation was presented to a large jazz ensemble located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (Appendix F). This process began by communicating with the director of the ensemble and setting up initial information sessions to present to the group, explaining the study. After two initial information sessions, I returned with consent forms for those interested in participating. The requirements to participate in this study were high school students between the ages of 14 to 19 who were members of a large ensemble. However, after the initial invitation to

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<sup>3</sup> For journal headlines, see Appendix B.

participate, none of the high school rhythm section members were available. Consequently, I invited two rhythm section post-high school graduates to participate. The participants and their pseudonyms were: Quinn and Julius (high school graduates), and four high school participants: Kelly, Avery, Jordan, and Rowan. The instruments that the participants played are those typically found in a large jazz ensemble: saxophones, trumpets, piano and bass. The following shorthand will be used when presenting the data: Kelly=K, Avery=A, Jordan=J, Rowan=R, Julius=Ju, Quinn=Q, Interview=I, Session=S, Journal=J, and Discussion=D (Example: JI would be Jordan's Interview, JJ, would be Jordan's Journal, while S#1/D#2 would be Session #1, Discussion #2). As well, I will refer to the participants using gender-neutral pronouns throughout the study (their, them, they).

Four two-hour sessions were conducted in Saskatoon at the Bassment, a public jazz venue, in March of 2020. In order to conduct the research at the Bassment, I sent a formal proposal on February 17 2020 to the President of the Saskatoon Jazz Society and to the Artistic Director (AD) of the Bassment who offered the space for the study at no charge (Appendix J). Once the location was set, I sent proposed dates first to the AD who accepted the dates. I then notified the participants of the proposed times. Originally, the research was scheduled for eight sessions throughout March and April, however on March 16 2020 the provincial government announced that all Saskatchewan pre K-12 schools would be closed effective March 20 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After discussing with the participants and my committee advisor, it was decided to align the end of my research with school closure both for the safety of the participants and myself, meaning only four of the eight sessions were completed.

**Table 3.1***Timeline of Sessions and Attendance*

Session	Date and Time	Absence	Changes
Session #1	March 1st 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	Kelly	
Session #2	March 8th 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	Julius	
Session #3	March 16th 2020 7:00pm-9:00pm	Jordan	Changed time to 7:30pm-9:30pm
Session #4	March 18th 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	Avery and Kelly	Changed from March 22nd to accommodate school closure from COVID-19
Session #5	April 6th 2020 7:00pm-9:00pm	N/A	Cancelled (COVID-19)
Session #6	April 12th 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	N/A	Cancelled (COVID-19)
Session #7	April 16th 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	N/A	Cancelled (COVID-19)
Session #8	April 19th 2020 10:00am-12:00pm	N/A	Cancelled (COVID-19)

**Researcher Roles**

First and foremost, the role of the teacher-researcher is to “investigate their own practice, plan and carry out interventions to improve it” (Cain, 2008, p. 284). As explained in the previous chapters, I acknowledged a problem with my current practice and suggested a possible solution. I drew upon past experiences of teaching, and with my new understanding of M-base and participatory methods, I can also begin to understand my role as a teacher-researcher for the

study. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the researcher’s role in accordance with each step of the action research cycle.

**Table 3.2**

*Researcher’s Role During Action Research*

<b>Cycle</b>	<b>Details of Cycle</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Task of Researcher Role</b>
Planning	Plan the session through the following headings: methods, dedicated time to tasks, possible outcomes, possible difficulties, materials needed, set up.	Teacher-Researcher	Investigate, plan and take action in order to improve my practice. Draw upon my past experiences of teaching and my new understanding of M-base and participatory methods to plan and explain the sessions.
Explaining	Explain to the participants the plan of what they will be attempting to accomplish that day. A dialogue of learning can be used which explains what and why certain approaches may work.	Teacher-Researcher	Set the atmosphere of the session, explain the researcher’s role for the session, avoid researcher jargon, and be clear and prepared when explaining the planned session.
Jamming	Before the jam begins, decide the order and length of the improvisation. While the core roles remain a foundation for the grooves, improvisers will alternate, taking turns either alone, together or in various combinations. The group will play together in a circle or semicircle (depending on space)	Facilitator and Participant	The facilitator guides the jam and ensures each participant is given an equal opportunity to improvise while the improvisation remains as uninterrupted as possible. As a participant, the researcher jams along with the other participants taking an equal amount of time improvising, and becomes a learner alongside the students.
Reflecting	Participants provide immediate reactions and thoughts from the session in a group discussion (circle or semicircle), followed by the participants and researcher writing in their journal.	Facilitator and Participant	Facilitator guides the group discussion by a) asking open-ended questions, asking for students to elaborate or explain in detail their answers. b) establishing the ground rules such as respect towards each other and their opinions. c) keeping track of time, ensure that every participant who wants to, has the opportunity to talk d) summarizing the groups’ thoughts As a participant, the researcher reflects on the jam session in a journal.
Observing	The teacher-researcher observes the video-data of the explanation, jam session and group discussion. May do selective transcriptions of video data. The teacher-researcher reads and reflects on the participant and researcher journals, making connections with the journals and the videos.	Teacher-Researcher	The researcher will observe the video data of the explanation, jam, and reflections. Observations will be recorded in a separate journal, following Anderson and Stringer’s guide for observation of data.
Re-planning	The teacher-researcher, after reflecting on each step of the cycle, plans the following cycle.	Teacher-Researcher	The researcher, based on the observations, will then plan the next cycle of action. Questions to guide this will be: What worked? What did not work? What or how is that proven? The first session may be repeated or not depending on

			many factors (i.e. the improvisation was too easy or too difficult for the students).
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As the teacher-researcher, I switched between various roles during the action research cycle, but the use of a video camera helped me capture my teaching in the context where I was not only “the primary research instrument” but also the “primary data-gathering tool” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 160). During the jam, my objective was to de-emphasize the traditional role of the teacher. This different conceptualization is what Friesen (2009) refers to as the “teacher pedestal,” which is based upon the concept that the teacher is not the sole keeper of knowledge. In regards to the concept of knowledge, Stringer (2014) explains that “Knowledge acquisition or production proceeds as a collective process, engaging people who have previously been the ‘subjects’ of research in the process of defining and redefining the corpus of understanding in which their community or organizational life is based” (p. 15). During the research, creating knowledge as a group was supported by me stepping into the role of facilitator, acting as a guide for the jam, ensuring equal opportunities for each participant, and maintaining a continuous flow during the session. By assuming the role of participant, I also became an insider, desiring to learn how to improvise and demonstrating vulnerability by taking risks and making mistakes alongside the students. This vulnerability can lead to “distributing power more equally...(and) giving students more confidence to explore their own creativity in front of others” (Friesen, 2009, p. 255). During the group discussions, I again assumed the role of facilitator in order to establish the ground rules of the discussion, keep track of time, ensure that every participant who wished to talk was given the opportunity to do so, guide the discussion so that it is related to the topic, and assist in summarizing the groups’ thoughts (Stringer, 2014). As the teacher-researcher, my final role was observation of data and re-planning stage which was carried out after the sessions.

This step “reflect(s) on each stage in order to generate new plans, thus starting the cycle again” by “evaluat(ing) the intended and unintended consequences of these interventions, interrogating data in order to ground their evaluations in evidence” (Cain, 2008, p. 161).

### **Personal Experience Learning and Teaching Improvisation**

As action research is predicated on the personal development of the teacher-researcher, this following section will explain my past methods of learning and teaching improvisation in order to provide further understanding of my positionality with learning and teaching improvisation.

As a high school student, my experiences improvisation was very similar to how students experience learning how to improvise today. I played in my high school jazz band, and on one or two occasions in a semester, I was given the opportunity to improvise over the chord changes in one of the tunes. Normally this meant that either I was given a scale that would work over the chord changes, or I attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to follow the chord changes. As an undergraduate student, my big band experience was very similar, especially when playing an instrument that is not always given the chord changes (baritone saxophone). However, during my time as an undergraduate, I was able to participate in a student-led small group ensemble where I was given more opportunity to improvise. Although I had more confidence in my playing abilities, I still felt that I was lacking in the ability to properly improvise over chord changes. After graduating from university, I taught for four years at a francophone school (grades 7-12) where improvisation was incorporated, by choice, into my classes. The two main approaches that I used were either based upon my past experience of learning how to improvise and through mentorship and personal research on how to teach improvisation.

The two approaches used were notation-focused and ear-focused approaches. The first approach, which relied heavily on the use of notation, was based around a lead sheet. I would give the lead sheet to the students either immediately or after the students had learned the melody by rote. Regardless of which method the students learned, I eventually provided the lead sheet. After teaching the students the melody, the students would learn the form of the piece by playing the root of every chord in the chord progression followed by one student at a time improvising on the root pitches of the chords. Following this step, I would teach the students the pitches of the chords and the chord qualities (example: Cmaj<sup>7</sup> has the following notes: C-E-G-B while C<sup>7</sup> has C-E-G-Bb). I would then have the students write all of the chords out and ask the students to arpeggiate through the chords in various patterns on their instruments (C-E-G-B to B-G-E-C). During this process, my role was that of a teacher who instructed, listened, and assessed. Upon completing these steps, students would improvise over the form of the piece numerous times. Overall, while this approach was used in a high school setting during a two-hour class occurring once every five-day cycle, this step-by-step approach was mostly focused on reading notation.

The second approach (by ear) was applied in an extracurricular junior jazz setting which met once a week for an hour. During this time, the students were first taught the scale of a particular tune, followed by designating a number to each of the scale steps (for example, C major would be 1-C, 2-D, 3-E ...). I would play the melody on the piano at a slow tempo and the students would learn the melody by ear, working as a group through the numbers that correspond to the melody. At times, this meant playing and listening or dictating the numbers and playing at the same time. While beginning with a scale took considerably more time to teach (sometimes over the course of two to three classes for a single melody), this method provided the opportunity to improvise immediately on the tune using a single scale. Following this step, I would write out

the form with the chord changes, while reminding the students to focus on the primary scale throughout the entire piece (this was possible because I chose tunes that did not modulate keys or were primarily modal in harmony). Overall, this approach required sensitive listening skills and pattern recognition (relating the numbers to the scale), as opposed to reading charts and chord changes. Comments such as “oh that’s easy!” were voiced by the students once they realized they could improvise with the scale provided.

This method further allowed students to understand the connection between the melody and the notes of the scale used for improvising. It also brought an awareness to notes not found in the scale that could be used to create tension. On the other hand, some students were very adamant about receiving sheet music and found the scale-to-number method difficult to conceptualize. In addition, if the lesson moved too quickly for students or if a student was absent, they quickly felt lost and fell behind. As this method focused on a linear melodic approach, the other method focused on the vertical harmonic aspect of music - neither of which I felt truly encompassed a holistic way of learning improvisation. Furthermore, the focus of both these teaching scenarios remained largely on presentational outcomes, which took away time for improvisation in the pursuit of learning and perfecting the melody, harmony, and style of the piece. Improvisation remained a byproduct of learning the music rather than becoming the primary focus of the learning goal. From these experiences and through reflection, I decided that I wanted to provide a method of teaching improvisation that gave each student the proper tools and time to improvise – something I felt neither of these methods adequately fostered. Not only do I want my students to feel comfortable learning how to improvise, but I also want to provide them with a chance to develop a sense of ownership and confidence in their improvisations.



Since my experience in teaching improvisation and improvising itself was very limited, I knew that dedicating time to practicing and studying improvisation would be beneficial. Therefore, I decided to pursue graduate studies with an emphasis on improvisation to ameliorate my practice. This initial desire stemmed from an interest in jazz: its history, its music, its political statements, and its influence on the genres of today. I also wanted to gain practical experience in improvising so that I might in turn help guide my senior students toward a higher level of understanding of improvisation. My brief experience as a graduate student at Brandon University allowed me to learn more about this topic that I enjoy and offered an environment in which I was able to learn how to improvise from experienced improvisers, building upon my very limited experience of improvisation within the short span of a year.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The three core principles found in the Tri-Council's policy statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018) are based on respect for human dignity, that is: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. Regardless of whether or not the research poses a minimal ethical risk, these principles are in place to "ensure (that) adequate protection of participants is maintained while reducing unnecessary impediments to, and facilitating the progress of, ethical research" (TCPS 2, 2014, p. 9). This research was conducted in partial fulfilment of a degree and as the researcher, I received approval from Brandon University's Research Ethics Committee (BUREC).

While this research posed minimal risk to its participants, ethical considerations in action research are what Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) believe to be "an ongoing process of the research" (p. 134). The reason the risk is minimal is because of the setting and type of study (music, education, improvisation), however, Anderson et al. (2007) is mindful that researchers be

consciously aware of any changes during the research process. During the study, the COVID-19 pandemic, an unexpected outside factor, changed the parameters surrounding the study. It was an ethical decision to stop the research early in consideration of the well-being of the participants. Although the research did not take place within an educational setting, some of the participants were former students of mine. I was mindful of this dynamic and reminded the students that the researcher's role encompasses many aspects: a researcher, a teacher, a facilitator, and a participant. In addition to explaining these roles, I also made clear that this educational setting was not meant to be compared to typical secondary school experiences and its expectations – specifically, no assessment or performance. The benefits of participating in this study included the opportunity to help shape the way secondary students learn improvisation in an alternative approach through discussion and reflections by exploring, playing, and learning about improvisation, thus outweighing the minimal risks.

To protect the privacy of the participants in the dissemination of the results, I used an alphanumeric code assigned to each participant's data, which was stored securely after each session. As well, each participant was given a pseudonym and the journals were stored in a secure location as well as the video SD card. To further protect the privacy of the participants during, only the researcher had access to the raw data.

The voluntary informed consent (Appendix F), as suggested by Stringer (2014) and Baumfield, Hall, and Wall (2013), “clearly inform(ed) (the participants) of the purpose, aims, use of results, and the likely consequences of the study” (Stringer, 2014, p. 89). In addition, because this action research did not take place in a classroom setting, which can make the students “feel pressure(d) to be part of their teacher's research or fear some kind of reprisal or falling out of favor” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 140), the participant's consent was freely given. The

participants expressed an interest in learning to improvise and freely volunteered to participate in the study in response to an invitation presented by the researcher to their large ensemble.

### **Validity of Study**

Validity, also known as the transparency of trustworthiness, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), “can be established through procedures that assess the following attributes of a study:

- **Credibility:** the plausibility and integrity of the study.
- **Transferability:** the possibility of applying the outcomes of the study to other contexts.
- **Dependability:** researcher procedures that are clearly defined and open to scrutiny.
- **Confirmability:** evidence that the procedures described actually took place. (as cited in Stringer, 2014, p. 92)

Credibility during the action research process was addressed through triangulation, where multiple sources of data were compared in order to establish the validity or trustworthiness in the research data. In addition, involving the participant’s perspectives in the research process through the use of journals, group discussion, and interviews heightened the validity of the research by involving the stakeholders (Anderson et al., 2007). Therefore, the analyzed data was an amalgamation of the researcher’s and the participants’ points of view when creating and analyzing each cycle (Anderson, et. al., 2007).

Transferability, which is the notion of sending the findings to another (Anderson, et. al., 2007), was done by providing transparency and detailed descriptions of the process, such as the setting, positionalities, researcher roles, activities, events, and outcomes (Pine, 2009; Stringer

2014). As Lomax (1994 as cited in Pine, 2009) explains, “The action research process needs to be made transparent so that a knowledgeable outsider has sufficient information to judge whether the research is relevant to their situation” (p. 89). This does not suggest that this study can be copied-and-pasted, but rather is a recommendation that “other teachers try implementing the innovation (outcomes of research) if they are faced with similar situations of instruction and curriculum” (p. 90). In doing so, a library of action research begins to build, contributing to the formation of instructional techniques and curriculum, consequently elevating teacher practice.

Dependability is verified by what McNiff and Whitehead (2005) refer to as a validation group: “those who will judge the quality of (my) evidence and address whether or not (my) claims to knowledge are justified” (p. 95). The validation group includes my thesis advisory panel and dependability was established through the committee defense process at Brandon University. Following this validation, the action research is to be shared with the public, making a contribution to the music education profession.

Confirmability, the evidence that the procedures described actually took place, will not be followed in this study in order to protect the privacy of the participants. Only the researcher will view the raw data, however the researcher will be truthful when describing the process that took place, referring to all sources (video-data, interview data, the researcher’s journals, and the participant’s journal) when analyzing the data.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection procedures that I used during the study included audio and video recordings of each session, participant and researcher journals written by hand, and semi-structured interviews after the sessions ended. Since this study specifically focused on teaching high school students, Quinn and Julius were given the option to participate in the interview and

journal process. Julius participated in the discussions, journaling, and the interview, while Quinn did not participate in the journaling or interview processes but contributed to the discussion

The researcher brought the journals to each session and were collected afterward by the researcher. The participants would write in their journal at the end of each session to provide the researcher with thoughts and feelings, as well as any “changing thoughts and new ideas”

(Anderson et al., 2007, p. 208). To prompt a reflective process of the participants, Table 3.3 was provided to the participants when completing their journal entries at each session (Table 3.4).

These headings allowed for each participant to explain both the positive and negative experiences of each session. Immediately following each session, I reviewed the journals and used them to change or alter the following session as part of the action research cycle.

**Table 3.3**

*Journal Headings*

Date	Detailed Event/Approach Used	Thoughts on the improvisation/ improvisation technique (expected/unexpected)	Personal Feelings and Reactions
		I liked... I wish... I wonder...	

**Table 3.4**

*Participant Journals*

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Participant	Session #1	Session #2	Session #3	Session #4
Avery	X	X	X	<i>absent</i>
Kelly	<i>absent</i>	X	X	<i>absent</i>
Jordan	X	X	<i>absent</i>	X
Julius	X	<i>absent</i>	X	X
Rowan	X	X	X	X

---

While the journals provided written data in the form of the participants' initial reactions and feedback, the video footage provided an opportunity for me to develop a comprehensive record and discover any missed events or actions, acting as a memory aid as there were multiple events occurring at the same time (Anderson, et al. 2007). I video-taped the sessions by placing the video camera in a location where the faces of the participants were visible and audio-taped the sessions by placing a Zoom H4NPro recording device in between the participants. The observations of the video were done by watching the video in full (from start to finish) the first time, followed by writing down observations in a separate journal. The audio data was only used when I was unable to hear the participants in the video data. Observations "build a picture of the lifeworld of those being observed and contribute to the development and understanding of the way they ordinarily go about their everyday activities" (Stringer, 2014, p. 113). In order to build a picture of the sessions, I used Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen's (2007) checklist of eighteen questions (Appendix C) for observing video data, which focus on mannerisms, verbal communication, involvement, goals of the lesson, and any specific features or important events that occurred during the sessions. The video observation again provided an additional opportunity to analyze specific teaching techniques, witness the researcher shifting among different roles, and identify methods that might have been misunderstood during the jam, allowing for a systematic method of record keeping and research, while also allowing the data to be interrogated in a more detailed manner (Anderson et al., 2007).

The participants were also invited to partake in semi-structured interviews at the end of the sessions in April 2020 at a time that was convenient for them and the researcher. While the journal entries allowed the participants to voice and write original thoughts and initial ideas, the semi-structured interview asked open-ended questions that provided feedback on their overall

thoughts and clarification on past events. The interviews were conducted over Skype and phone and were audio-recorded. Originally, the interviews were meant to be conducted in person, however because of COVID-19 restrictions, all of the interviews were done via distance.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3.5**

*Timeline of Semi-Conducted Interviews with Participants*

Subject	Date	Medium	Duration
Jordan	April 8th 2020	Skype	72 minutes
Julius	April 10th 2020	Phone	91 minutes
Kelly	April 11th 2020	Zoom	77 minutes
Rowan	April 13th 2020	Phone	70 minutes
Avery	April 14th 2020	Phone	90 minutes

## Coding

Coding is the process used to organize the data found in the study (Anderson, et al., 2007). To begin, the video and audio data from the group discussions and semi-conducted interviews were organized and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Following this step, I read through all of the data, including the participant journals and my own journal reflections and observations multiple times to construct any overall meaning (Creswell, 2014). From this overview, I began to color code topics that were frequently found in the data. After this preliminary process, I observed the relationships between the topics that emerged and the characteristics of the M-base and participatory lenses (Table 3.6). Following this, I began looking at the (a) process (b) purpose, and (c) setting of teaching improvisation linked to the

<sup>4</sup> For interview questions, see Appendix F.

experiences of the participants. The difficulty that occurred while coding was that all of these subjects formed some type of connection to one another, affecting each other in some type of way, making the coding process at times frustrating and difficult. In likeness to an action research cycle, it was not until during and after writing my Chapter 4 (which will present the experiences of the sessions overall) and reflecting upon what happened in more detail that the themes began to emerge. These themes will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Action Research Cycle and Sessions #1 to #4**

Session #1 was created from reflecting on my past experiences of teaching improvisation, combined with a new understanding of M-base and participatory concepts and a desire to change my pedagogy. I gathered the concepts below, from Turino’s participatory field of music making and M-base, and I then combined them into a hybrid method to teach improvisation.

**Table 3.6**

*M-base and Participatory Concepts*

	<b>M-Base</b>	<b>Participatory</b>
<b>Process</b>	Ideas are communicated within the group and decisions are made together.	Mentorship approach to learning and playing music with both peers and mentors.
<b>Purpose</b>	To discover self, creativity and work on personal development.	To have as many participants as possible. The group and personal energy during the activity itself is more important than its presentation.
<b>Improvisation</b>	Improvisation is one of the foundational pillars.	Room for improvisation but soloistic improvisation is not encouraged.
<b>Notation</b>	Sometimes used. The bassline and drum pattern might be written out	Not used
<b>Compositions</b>	Compositions created by group members: may work on a bass line	Pieces are a collection of resources refashioned anew in each performance.



	or ostinato that is then worked on together as a group.	Uses the same musical material repeated at certain ceremonies (standards in a sense)
<b>Individual Development</b>	Emphasizing individual virtuosity	Downplaying individual virtuosity
<b>Roles</b>	A variety of roles available	A variety of roles available

From these approaches, I created the following outcomes and goals for Session #1. Throughout the four sessions, I did not change these goals and outcomes (for a complete detailed version of the lesson plans, see Appendix G).

**Table 3.7**

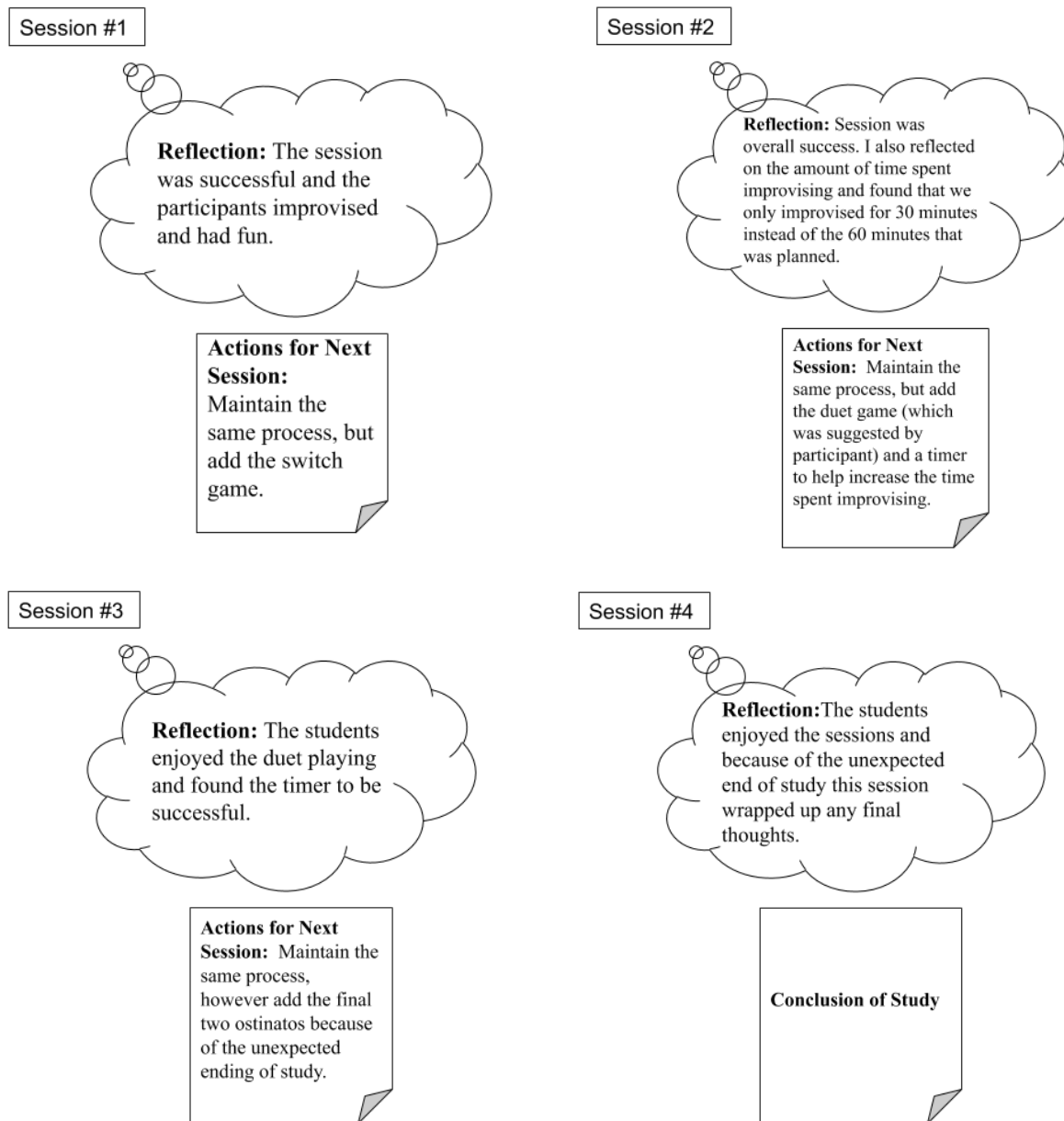
*Session #1 Planned Outcomes and Goals*

Date and Session	M-Base and Participatory Methods	Accomplished Through	Outcomes	Possible Difficulties and Solutions
Session #1 March 1 <sup>st</sup> 2020	<p>1. Density from having everyone play during the improvisation.</p> <p>2. Key Center by using only one scale or mode with different chord progressions.</p> <p>3. Repetition from repetition the same form, ostinato, and groove.</p>	<p>1. Having the participants learn the ostinato and groove on percussion instruments.</p> <p>2. Bring a scale or mode that students know: D Dorian/Pentatonic Scale.</p> <p>3. Dedicate an amount of time into learning one singular form, groove and ostinato. Use this ostinato and groove for the improvisation.</p>	<p>1. Comfortable improvising without pressure of being singled out.</p> <p>2. Easier to improvise allowing them to think about more complex ideas: rhythms, styles, and communication with others.</p> <p>3. Not getting lost as often.</p>	<p>1. Can't hear the improvisation: reminder of balance.</p> <p>2. Range is not developed: make sure the scale or mode allows for at least an octave in an easy range of each instrument.</p> <p>3. The groove is too hard: always need someone to keep the pulse/quarter note beat - can learn this and when they feel comfortable move to a different groove.</p>

The following figure below presents an overview of the major actions that were taken during the action research cycle and when they were implemented. These actions will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4. Overall, the pedagogical approaches I used did not change entirely but were altered during the sessions through the addition of difficulties and time management.

**Figure 3.2**

*Reflection to Action*



## Chapter Summary

Based on a desire to improve how I teach improvisation, Chapter 3 explored how I employed the use of action research, a research methodology which encourages cyclical self-interrogation (Conway & Borst, 2001) and improvement of one's own practice (Cain, 2012). As I challenged my personal practice and the status-quo of my teaching through action and reflection, I also invited the participants to become producers of knowledge who contribute towards building a better understanding between theory and practice (Noffke, 2009).

Through an action research cycle of planning, explaining, jamming, group discussion, reflecting, observing, re-planning I assumed various roles: teacher-researcher, facilitator and participant (Table 3.2 and Figure 3.1). From each session, I gathered and analyzed data from video-recording, audio-recording and journals, and demonstrated validity through credibility (triangulation), transferability (transparent information), and dependability (reviewed by a board). I followed ethical standards for the participants throughout the entirety of the research process. I conducted semi-structured interviews after the four sessions which were complete to provide clarity and summary of thoughts. I concluded Chapter 3 by presenting the goals and purpose of each session and the action research cycle that took place during the study. From these data, I coded and grouped topics together, forming a link between the overall experience to the process, purpose and setting, which will be further explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

## **CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS**

The organization and presentation of the findings from this study are shaped by two important considerations: the pursuit of answers to the research questions based on the events of the study and the development of my personal pedagogy of improvisation structured by the action research methodology. In Chapter 4, I will address the first of these considerations, responding to the research questions leaving the action research cycle – specifically the reflection and re-planning steps – to Chapter 5.

### **Research Questions and Findings**

I began the research with the following three questions:

1. How can I teach improvisation to high school students with a participatory and M-base lens to develop my personal pedagogy of improvisation?
2. How do students respond to improvisation taught in non-traditional environments?
  - a) Specifically in regards to non-presentational expectations.
  - b) Specifically in regards to the absence of assessment.
3. What strategies are used to adapt or change my improvisational pedagogy in response to students' experiences with the participatory and M-base lenses?

After the 4 sessions concluded, I realized that these questions were more closely related than I had initially thought. Question #1, which reflects on how I taught improvisation using participatory and M-base lenses, prompted the actions that were taken based on the participants' and facilitator's experiences during the study (Question #3). The second question, then, is contemplated by combining the explanations from all of the questions. Since I believe that all of the questions are closely related, I decided to present the findings for all three questions in the following combined manner: I will explain how I implemented the pedagogical approaches of

both M-base and participatory lenses (Table 3.6), present the participants’ experiences with these specific approaches, followed by sharing how actions were taken or not taken to change these approaches based on their experiences, providing the participants’ experiences based on these specific actions that were taken. At the end of the chapter, I will also present a summarized reflection, specifically outlining the non-traditional aspects of the study specifically the lack of assessment and presentational expectations based on the participants’ interview questions. While these findings are important in answering the research questions, it is also important to acknowledge the action research methodology which was used during the sessions: planning, explaining, jamming, group discussion, reflecting, observing, and re-planning. The findings of this chapter will not present the step-by-step process of this cycle, but rather highlight the moments of importance that occurred during the sessions, such as when changes were implemented (reflection to action headings).

**Variety of Musical Roles: Ostinato, Groove, and Improvisation**

One of the main goals of participatory music making is to have no distinction between those making music and a passive or receptive audience. Turino (2008) describes the goal of such music making as having “only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role” (p.26). To support this same purpose as well as M-base values in the table below (which is a section of Table 3.6 in Chapter 3), I provided the participants with a variety of musical roles, each with a variety of challenges.

*Portion of Table 3.6*

	<b>M-base</b>	<b>Participatory</b>
<b>Musical Roles</b>	A variety of roles	A variety of roles

<b>Purpose of Group</b>	(Will be explained later under <i>Role of Improvisation</i> )	To have as many participants as possible. The energy during the activity itself is more important than its presentation.
<b>Composition</b>	Uses musicians' or players' own compositions. May create a bass line or ostinato that is then worked on together as a group.	Pieces are a collection of resources refashioned anew in each time they are played. Uses the same songs repeated at certain ceremonies.
<b>Notation</b>	Sometimes used. The bassline and drum pattern might be written out	Not used

During our sessions, the participants were constantly taking on one of the following roles: a) playing the ostinatos on an instrument, b) playing a rhythmic groove on percussion, or c) improvising on their instrument or a percussion instrument. While the participants were not improvising, they had the choice to play either the ostinato or the groove.

The following section will highlight how I created the ostinatos, how they were implemented in the sessions, and the participants' experiences playing the ostinatos. After this section, I will then outline how I created the grooves, how they were implemented, and the participants' experiences, concluding with the actions that were taken based on the participants' experiences of both the ostinatos and grooves during the study.

### **Variety of Musical Roles: Ostinatos**

**Creation of the ostinatos.** This section will outline how the ostinatos were implemented in the sessions, the participants' experiences, followed by presenting the actions that were taken during or after the sessions based on their experiences. The use of ostinatos and short forms was a musical characteristic of both the participatory and M-base lenses. The five ostinatos that were used were: *Misirlou* (Dick Dale & The Del Tones), *Come & See* (Pat Metheny), *Chameleon* (Herbie Hancock), *Softly with Grace* (from *Fire Emblem* by Saki Haruyama), and *Hide & Seek*

(Joshua Redman).<sup>5</sup> The reason why I chose to use these ostinatos, which were either gathered from my own experiences or were suggestions from colleagues, is because they encompass the musical characteristics of both M-base and participatory music making: short and open forms, highly repetitive bass lines, and a consistency of rhythm, meter, and groove. While I had planned to teach five ostinatos over the course of eight sessions, I implemented the five ostinatos over the course of four sessions because of the unexpected early end to the project. I had also planned to allow the participants to create and bring their own ostinatos and grooves, but because the sessions ended abruptly, there was no chance to explore this possibility.

I prepared these ostinatos in advance and practiced playing through all five ostinatos with the help of three professional musicians with varying degrees of improvisational experience. After this, I notated, altered and practiced the ostinatos by myself before introducing them to the participants. This preparation and peer discussion gave me the opportunity to play all of the ostinatos on both the saxophone and the piano, ensuring that the key signatures, tempi, forms, grooves, and time signatures were of a varied nature and offered a wide range of difficulties. This pre-jam session, which only took 15 minutes, allowed me to discuss with my colleagues possible roadblocks by analyzing each ostinato and comparing them to what is typical of grade 11 and 12 jazz band repertoire. The ostinatos were introduced into the sessions in the following order (beginning with what I believed to be the easiest ostinato): *Misirlou*, *Come & See*, *Chameleon*, *Fire Emblem*, and *Hide & Seek*. Two of the ostinatos, *Hide & Seek* and *Fire Emblem*, were introduced earlier than anticipated because of COVID-19. The following table displays which ostinatos were played at each session.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix E for notated ostinatos.

**Table 4.1***Timeline for Introduction and Repetition of Ostinatos*

Session	Date	Ostinato
Session #1	March 1st 2020	<i>Misirlou</i> and <i>Come &amp; See</i>
Session #2	March 8th 2020	<i>Misirlou</i> , <i>Come &amp; See</i> and <i>Chameleon</i>
Session #3	March 16th 2020	<i>Chameleon</i> and <i>Fire Emblem</i>
Session #4	March 18th 2020	<i>Fire Emblem</i> and <i>Hide &amp; Seek</i>

As a teacher, I understood that beginning with familiar key signatures and time signatures would create a foundation of confidence for the participants who were unfamiliar with both the setting and the approaches being used. Once the foundation was established, I also wanted to create the chance for the musicians to explore difficult key signatures and time signatures for variety, and because M-base emphasizes the use of uncommon meters (Coleman, 2015). Therefore, I chose tunes which varied in key and time signatures, while also altering some of the ostinatos to facilitate these goals. Table 4.2 displays the musical attributes of each ostinato and the changes that were made.

**Table 4.2***Musical Attributes of the Ostinatos*

Ostinato	Original Key	Key Signature Used	Time Signature	Form/Length
<i>Misirlou</i>	E Minor	D Minor	2/4	16 bars
<i>Come &amp; See</i>	Db Dorian	D Dorian	4/4	2 measures
<i>Chameleon</i>	B-flat Blues	B-flat Blues	4/4	2 measures
<i>Hide &amp; Seek</i>	B Blues	B Blues	4/4	16 bars
<i>Fire Emblem</i>	G Minor	G Minor	7/8	2 measures



*Come & See*'s two-measure ostinato was created from the A section of the composition, while *Fire Emblem*'s two-measure ostinato was pulled from the repetitive bass line from the first two measures of the composition. I used Finale, a notation software program, to input all of the ostinatos and forms. Aside from Quinn, who knew *Chameleon*, none of the participants recognized any of the ostinatos. This may be due to the fact that I never played the tunes or the corresponding melodies of any of the ostinatos during the sessions to facilitate more time for improvisation. In addition, some ostinatos were simplified beforehand, possibly rendering the tunes unfamiliar to the participants. Therefore, it is assumed, based on this observation, that all of the ostinatos were new for the participants at the beginning of the study, meaning no singular participant had an advantage of experience when improvising over these ostinatos. While using new musical material was not purposeful, the lack of pre-existing knowledge of the ostinatos allowed each participant the chance to begin at the same level.

Embedded within the planning stage of my action research cycle was an additional action research cycle in the form of a pre-study rehearsal with the rhythm section (piano and bass) where we played through all of the ostinatos. I wanted to adopt the participatory idea of core musicians to help guide and stabilize the group while allowing those who do not know the tunes to build upon their foundation. In addition, I wanted to test the level of difficulty of each ostinato for this age group while also providing the rhythm section with a foundation to feel comfortable at the first session. The rhythm section members were successful in playing the ostinatos at the pre-study rehearsal, which did not warrant any changes to the ostinatos before the first session. As a result of this action research cycle within the planning stage, the process of learning the ostinatos was likely expedited when we met together as a group for the first time.

**Implementation of the ostinatos.** At each session, the ostinatos were introduced as follows: I would tell the participants the key of the ostinato, then, with the rhythm section, I would play the ostinato, and the participants would be invited to join in playing ostinato at the same time. This process was done entirely by ear. After the participants played the ostinato repeatedly and I believed that they were comfortable enough to play most of the ostinato, the participants would play the ostinato with the YouTube groove. After learning the ostinato, the participants would learn the groove, which will be explained in the following section. After learning the groove, I would then have the participants play the scale assigned to the ostinato, which was provided as a stepping stone to the improvisation. Although I provided this scale, I also encouraged the participants to explore other scales during their improvisations. I did not, however, have the chance to see what would have happened if I did not give the participants the scale.

In keeping with the values of participatory music making – the absence of written notation – I spent no time presenting information on how to play the ostinato. I knew that the participants would have ample opportunity to become familiar with the ostinato during the jam itself from its repetitiveness. Dedicating less time to learning the ostinatos and grooves allowed for more time improvising. The following graph displays the amount of time it took to learn the ostinato, scale, and groove during each session as taken from the video data observations after each session. In sum, the amount of time to learn and to review the ostinatos, grooves, forms and scales decreased as each session progressed, leaving more room for improvisation.

**Table 4.3***Time Spent Learning Ostinatos, Scales, and Grooves*

Sessions	Ostinatos	Time	Total
Session #1	<i>Misirlou</i>	10 minutes	21 minutes
	<i>Come &amp; See</i>	11 minutes	
Session #2	<i>Misirlou/Come &amp; See</i>	16 minutes	21 minutes
	<i>Chameleon</i>	5 minutes	
Session #3	<i>Chameleon</i>	2 minutes	6 minutes
	<i>Fire Emblem</i>	4 minutes	
Session #4	<i>Fire Emblem</i>	3 minutes	10 minutes
	<i>Hide &amp; Seek</i>	7 minutes	

**Participants’ experiences with the ostinatos.** In each session, I asked the participants to comment on what went well and what did not go well. As action research is aimed at changing my practice, these comments helped point towards the changes needed during the sessions. Through both the group discussions and writing in their journals over the course of the four sessions, I noticed that the most prevalent themes, in terms of what did not go well during the sessions, were: form, endurance, key signature, time signature, and melodic ostinato density. After I have presented these findings, I will introduce how I prepared and implemented the grooves and the participants’ experiences with the grooves. I will conclude by explaining how these two roles, together, resulted in the actions of implementing the switch game and the duet playing.

**Form.** During the sessions, some of the participants commented on how they did not know where they were in the form. For example, at the first session, the group decided that we would play the form of *Misirlou* four times. While Quinn (the bass player) felt that everyone generally knew where they were in the form, Jordan stated that they felt lost while improvising.

One attempt to guide the participants to a solution during this session was my verbal suggestion of having those playing the groove emphasize the top of the form to help fix this difficulty.

Facilitator: What might actually help with the form is if we all collectively do a big down beat... that's what makes it a little harder without a percussionist...so if we just do what a percussionist or drummer would do, not in the sense that we lead up, but hitting big on the downbeat. (S#1D#1)

To see if the other participants also experienced difficulty with the form, during *Misirlou*, I reviewed the video data from the first session. Although I had told the participants that it was okay to play more than four times over the form (and some participants did), participants displayed their uncertainty with the form when they attempted to pass the improvisation during the middle of the form and at times displayed verbal communication during their improvisation that they were uncertain when the ending of the form was. Despite having difficulties with becoming lost in the form, Jordan said that they were able to easily recover and carry on with their improvisation.

*Hide & Seek*, which employed a 16-measure form, however, seemed to be slightly easier to follow. According to Julius, the measure of rest in the final measure helped them and other participants hear the turnaround into the top of the form.

Julius: It was pretty easy to follow (*Jordan agreeing*). Like even if I mucked up the chords or missed that rest at the end and I kind of tripped, I was like wait, I was supposed to stop there. Like it was really easy to get back into. (S#4D#1)

In addition, *Hide & Seek* has clear signpost chords (the V chord only appears once) in its form compared to *Misirlou*, perhaps making it easier to hear the form in general. However, because

we did not have the chance to play both of these forms back to back and discuss these differences, no participant reflection on this comparison was acquired during the study.

The participants did find, however, a noticeable difference between improvising over the 16-measure forms (*Misirlou* and *Hide & Seek*) compared to the two-measure ostinatos (*Come & See*, *Chameleon*, and *Fire Emblem*). Julius and Rowan both found the two-measure ostinato to be easier to follow and improvise over because of the ‘melodic’ aspect of the ostinato (Julius) and because of the freedom created by removing a form, which needs to be followed.

Rowan: I thought that this (*Come & See*) was actually easier for me. I’m not sure why maybe because the bass line was repetitive and more static, I don’t know.

Facilitator: Yeah less worried maybe about the form?

Rowan: Yeah. (S#1D#3)

Quinn, however, commented that short ostinatos actually “made it much harder for [them] to decide when to stop” (S#1D#3). While the two-measure ostinatos did not create difficulty in form, their brevity also challenged the participants to create their own arcs within their improvisations. Quinn believed that this was because the 16-measure form, in comparison to the two-measure ostinatos, supplied more structure in helping them create an arc while also facilitating a specific time to end.

**Endurance.** Another challenge that occurred during the sessions was endurance. The participants, both the wind instrumentalists and the rhythm section, found that playing the ostinatos for an extended period of time was physically challenging. The endurance required to play the ostinato was especially evident at the third session during *Chameleon*, which lasted 27 minutes. As Quinn and Julius explain from the point of view of the rhythm section, attempting to play the ostinato for that long physically hurt. While all of the other participants had the option to

switch between playing the groove and the ostinato, Quinn was the only participant who did not have this option, stating that there were moments when they needed to stop playing.

Those who did choose to play the ostinato instead of the grooves, also stated in their interview that it was not possible to maintain the ostinato for the entirety of the jam as a wind instrumentalist (RJ/AJ). Sometimes, the ostinato was even removed completely during Quinn's improvisation. However, despite not having the endurance to continue playing, the participants felt that having no ostinato was also a nice change of texture to the improvisation. The following is an excerpt of when Julius stopped playing the ostinato because of a lack of endurance during Quinn's improvisation.

Facilitator: Actually, that was another thing. How did that go for you with the no ostinato because it was just rhythms?

Quinn: I was expecting a bass line, I was surprised. Yeah, I liked it. Was something different, switching it up yeah. (S#1D#3)

The absence of the ostinato during Quinn's improvisation introduced a different texture, yet still allowed everyone to continue to participate by playing the drums.

**Key signature.** Based on the general feedback from the participants, the key signatures that I chose or left unchanged for the ostinatos during the study posed few difficulties. However, as anticipated, *Hide & Seek* - a B-minor Blues - proved to be the most challenging key during the study. As Rowan explains:

Rowan: I'd say some of the more challenging moments was when we had the last session with the different key...because you had to play with all the different sharps and rather than your regular B flat blues. It was like a half step up right so that was difficult. (RI)

Despite their unfamiliarity with this key, some of the participants still found it easy enough to improvise over the ostinato.

Jordan: I thought that was really fun honestly. I thought it was cool, it was easier. It was a tough blues scale but all blues are blues scales right. I know enough what to do with one of those that it seemed a little bit easier.

Julius: It's pretty hard to mess up on the blues scale.

Jordan: Yeah. (S#4D#1)

Even Rowan, despite acknowledging the difficulty of the B minor blues, later stated that they would eventually become comfortable with this key signature (RI).

**Time signature.** During the study, no comments were made about time signatures other than in regards to *Fire Emblem* which used a compound mixed meter of 7/8 time. This ostinato generated the most feedback and was the most challenging ostinato for all of the participants. As Jordan stated: “*Hide & Seek* was easier to play I think overall just [be]cause you don't hear a lot of 7/8 like so when you have a nice 4/4 and a blues scale its like ‘ahhh’(sigh)” (S#4D#3). The unfamiliarity of improvising over 7/8 was again compared to *Hide & Seek* but also compared to food:

Julius: Like in comparison, *Hide & Seek* is very bland.

Facilitator: Yeah right. Even though the scale (in *Hide & Seek*) was a little difficult for some?

Jordan: Yeah. It's like a warm bowl of oatmeal. It's just like it's just there and we know what that is.

Facilitator: So what is the food equivalent of *Fire Emblem*?

Jordan: It's like kimchi, something wild.

Quinn: Something strange and still for breakfast.

Julius: Like you took four pounds of curry and just put it in the whole bowl. (S#4/Final Discussion)

***Melodic ostinato density.*** The participants noted that the melodic density (number of notes per measure) of certain ostinatos challenged their improvisations in a different way. For example, *Fire Emblem* challenged the participants to think differently about their improvisations in how they could “speak” their ideas amidst a dense melodic texture.

Jordan: Yeah, I sort of always default to pick notes from the scale and throw them out there and if you play them fast enough people will be like “ah cool.” Like it's kind of tough when you know it's something like this, not as easy to [as] just throwing notes out there...

Julius: Like in this one, it felt like there was no room to breathe. (S#4D#3)

While *Fire Emblem* demonstrated the densest ostinato, *Chameleon*, challenged Quinn in deciding which notes worked best over its melodic density.

Quinn: I feel like there are so many notes in this riff that it's kind of hard to avoid them and play over top of them in a way.

Facilitator: Like almost more limiting?

Quinn: Limiting in a way. Like the notes... playing certain notes like the 3rd and 6th or 7th they did not come out as colorfully I guess as they did in the other ones (*Misirlou and Come & See*). (S#2D#3)

While *Hide & Seek* was the sparsest of the ostinatos, according to the participants, *Fire Emblem* and *Chameleon* had more parameters around the melodic density creating limitations on their improvisation. Both of these examples demonstrate that these densities forced the participants to



think about their improvisations differently. Despite this, Quinn regards the variety of melodic density allowing them to create different types of improvisations based on the melodic density of the ostinato.

Quinn: I think throughout the like different speeds, different time signatures umm even like the amount of notes in the ostinato and the form that some had umm had I really noticed a varying degree of openness and space and because yeah some felt more almost limiting with our improvisation and some yeah just almost like empty like *Misirlou* so we could really think of anything of it...

Facilitator: That's good so yeah there was a variety of openness and closure so that your improvisations had to kind of follow that groove and the rhythms and the space.

Quinn: Yeah.

Facilitator: So it wasn't like you were always doing the same kind of solo or improvisation?

Quinn: Or at least I didn't want to. Yeah I thought about different ideas umm and things I want to do... not that I could always pull off. Yeah definitely kind of honed in or opened up possibilities. (S#4D#3)

The reflection and the actions that were taken based on these comments will be discussed in combination with the grooves after I have introduced how I created and implemented the grooves and the participants' experiences with the grooves.

### **Variety of Roles: Grooves**

The second role that was implemented in the sessions to promote constant participation was the groove. The following section will describe how I created the grooves, how they were implemented in the sessions, and the participants' experiences playing the groove. Following this

I will explain how both the role of the groove and ostinato together, resulted in actions based on the participants' experiences. I will then outline the role of improvisation, and the participants' experiences, concluding with the actions that were taken from the participants' experiences improvising.

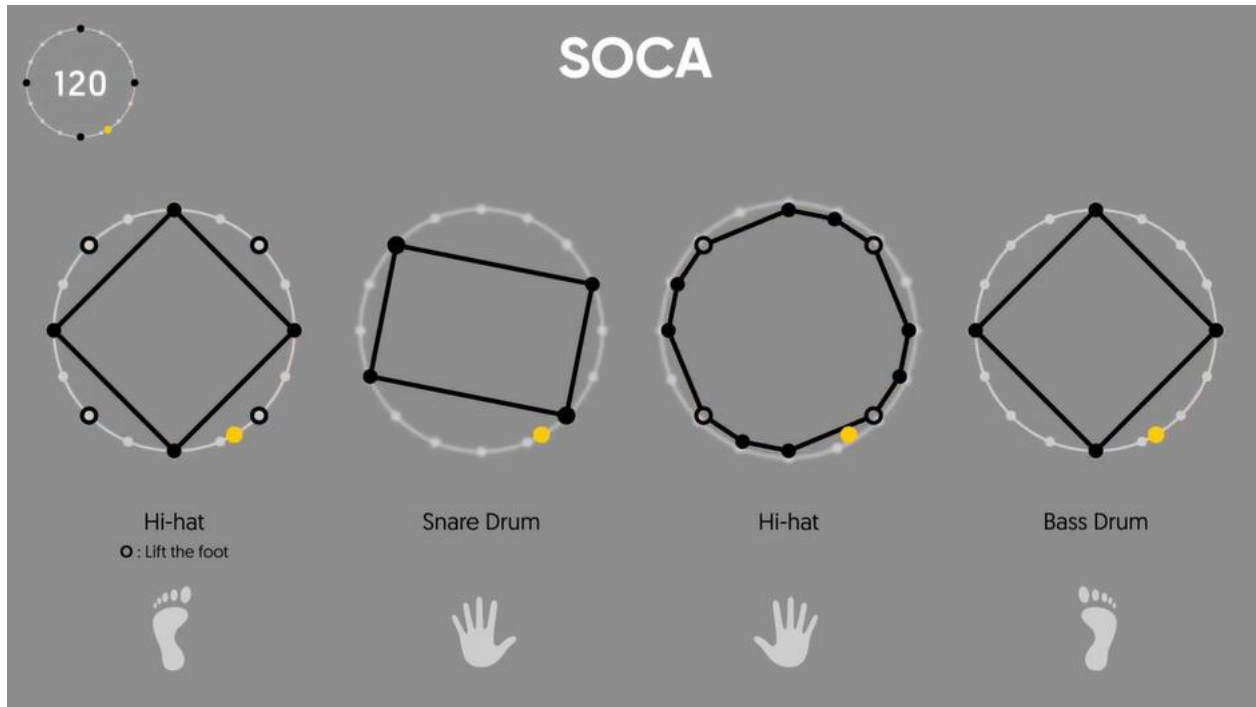
**Creation of the grooves.** The second role that I created and implemented in each session was the role of the groove. In the context of participatory and M-base music making, grooves are understood as constant meter and repetitive rhythms. Since no percussionist was available to participate in the study, I used free audio files from a YouTube channel called Drumset Fundamentals (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzEkyKD5vboccdMipNQWY4w>) which I found while browsing YouTube in search of grooves. These videos provided rhythmic stability, ideas for non-percussionist players, and constant momentum (tempo and meter) over a long period of time. Each video loops the same rhythmic pattern for 10 minutes at a constant tempo. I felt that these YouTube grooves would be inspiring for the participants to use and build upon while also removing any potential stress from having to create a groove from scratch. In addition, the YouTube videos provided a visual rhythm wheel that allowed the participants to see the breakdown of each part. Again, in keeping with the values of M-base and participatory, I did not use notation when presenting the grooves to the participants.

The figure below is an example of the Soca drum groove that I used with *Misirlou*, visually demonstrating how every part and limb was separately played. The circle at the top left represents the beats and the tempo is written in white (120), while the yellow dot, which is moving, indicates where the player is within the beat. The black dots on each part indicate when to hit the specific instrument. Prior to the sessions, I was able to borrow drums (a mix of percussion instruments) from a school and a drumming group, both located in Saskatoon. After

procuring these instruments, I practiced by myself and with my peers combining the ostinatos with each of the grooves (Table 4.4).

**Figure 4.1**

*Screenshot of Soca Rhythm Wheel*



**Implementation of the grooves.** I introduced the grooves the same way in each session: after the participants could play the ostinato, I would play the YouTube groove through a speaker system attached to my phone and invite the rhythm section to demonstrate the ostinato with the groove. Once the musicians were playing the groove and ostinato comfortably, I would invite the rest of the participants to play the ostinato with the groove. Following these steps, the participants would then put their instruments down and choose a percussion instrument to play. Again, with the audio track playing, the rhythm section would play the ostinato but this time the participants played along with the groove on their percussion instruments. Once the “percussionists” felt comfortable creating the groove, I would turn off the audio track. During

Session #3, I asked the participants if they were comfortable creating their own grooves, to which they responded yes. As a result, we removed the backing tracks altogether for the last two sessions and created our own grooves. The table below (Table 4.4) displays the grooves and resources used during each session. Learning the grooves did not take much time, with the exception of Session #2, where we spent more time learning the grooves because of an added game of switching between grooves.

**Table 4.4**

*Style and Resource of Grooves*

Session	Ostinato	Resource	Style
Session #1	<i>Misirlou</i> <i>Come &amp; See</i>	YouTube file YouTube file	Soca 6/8 Bembé
Session #2	<i>Misirlou</i> <i>Come &amp; See</i> <i>Chameleon</i>	YouTube file YouTube file YouTube file	Soca 6/8 Bembé Plena
Session #3	<i>Chameleon</i> <i>Fire Emblem</i>	Our own Our own	No specific direction Eighth-note pulse
Session #4	<i>Hide &amp; Seek</i> <i>Fire Emblem</i>	Our own Our own	Rock beat Eighth-note pulse

**Participants’ experiences with the grooves.** I asked the participants to comment in their journals and during the group discussion on what went well and what did not go well during the session. The following section will highlight the participants’ experiences with the grooves during all four sessions. Then I will describe how, regardless of the challenges created from both the ostinatos and the grooves, it was not the difficulties that created my facilitator actions between sessions, but the simplicities. I will explain the two actions that were taken between sessions and I will conclude by explain how data showed the participants’ enjoyment of the

variety of roles which they felt promoted an engaging and encouraging environment for improvisation.

*Superimposing rhythms.* Overall, creating our own grooves and playing the YouTube grooves seemed to pose no immediate difficulties during all four sessions based on the journal feedback and group discussions. However, some participants did state that the process of superimposing the 6/8 Bembé groove with *Come & See* was challenging.

Jordan: I feel like with *Come & See* the hard part wasn't necessarily the ostinato itself but the rhythms we were playing behind it (*demonstrates struggling to play a pattern on drum*). Like I could never count it very well so I think that was interesting [be]cause sometimes it's the notes which are hard but that time it was keeping in rhythm with the 8 different rhythms that (were) going on. (S#4/Final Discussion)

Despite this challenge, some participants were able to quickly adapt. Quinn found playing over the 6/8 interesting while Julius stated “I was really thrown by the 6/8 at first but I kind of found my place in it (S#1D#3). Upon removing the structure of the YouTube grooves, I noticed that the participants were capable of maintaining the grooves on their own. Therefore, during Session #3, I asked the participants if they were comfortable to create their own grooves, to which they replied yes. Avery felt that while the YouTube grooves provided a solid foundation, the process of creating drumming patterns was more engaging and more enjoyable overall.

Avery: I think (the YouTube files) helped just kind of understanding what kind of grooves we were dealing with but then when we were making our own we were kind of like... we are making it, this is what it sounds like then getting into the groove more...while the YouTube ones...I was following it I wasn't really making it and so then I

would follow that when I was improvising but then we just made them...or making them up as we were going I was getting more into it. (AI)

In addition to being enjoyable, Avery and the other participants also found that creating our own rhythms demonstrated a different type of engagement with the groove, encouraging participants to think about their contribution and how it fits together as a group.

**Reflection to action.** Overall, only minor changes were made during the sessions as a group when we were faced with challenges (endurance, form, key, time, melodic density, and superimposing rhythms). I did not implement any action based on these challenges between any of the sessions for three reasons: (1) the participants commented both verbally or in their journals that the difficulties they faced were not impossible to overcome, (2) the improvisation sessions continued to be successful, displaying risk taking and goal setting, and (3) the evidence suggested that the challenges arose from an unfamiliarity with characteristic approaches of M-base and participatory methods, which are rarely encountered in high school ensembles (endurance, improvising in 7/8). However, because of the unexpected brevity of the study, I was not able to see if these difficulties would have persisted and created real problems for our improvisations.

The actions that I did make between sessions arose because the grooves and ostinatos proved to be relatively simple for every participant to play based on data from my own observations, the group discussions, and journal comments. The simplicities arose from elements of the music that were not frequent topics of discussion: simple chordal forms, singular scales per ostinato, and common time signatures, which are central to participatory music making. These simplicities provided the opportunity for the participants to make their own changes and alterations to the material. Julius, for example, stated that the simple nature of the ostinatos and

their repetitiveness made it easy to add to or subtract from the ostinato, thus personalizing them and enriching the experience.

Julius: The repetitive nature (of the ostinato) sort of encouraged doing your own thing without straying too off. Switching up the chords or timing or whatever umm which is like something that happens in jazz and you should try to do [be]cause it's more enjoyable and adds a flavor to whatever you're playing. (JI)

Not only did participants alter the ostinatos, but they also experimented with the grooves:

Kelly: ...every once in a while, I try something new and then realize I won't be able to keep this for the next bit or keep it consistent.

Facilitator: But that's good at least what I'm hearing is that you're comfortable enough to go away from what you're doing and then comfortable enough to go back to it and that's good. What I really like about the drums though was we were leading into one for your solo (*Kelly*) and Julius was doing a little hit before the big beat.

Avery: Yeah.

Julius: Yeah, I was throwing basically shots.

Facilitator: Yeah but only on the turnaround. That was great, yeah a lead into the one.

Julius: Oh yeah. That was conscious. (S#3D#1)

As well as experimenting with different notes while playing the ostinato, Quinn also made sure that what they were doing was okay with the rest of the group.

Facilitator: Did anyone notice what Quinn was doing?

Quinn: I don't want to overplay that and make other people lost too.

Facilitator: No it was great.

Avery: Yeah it wasn't messing me up, but when I was doing the (*plays example of the*

*rhythm that Quinn was doing*) parts. And sometimes when (Quinn) wasn't doing that I was like 'oh.'

Facilitator: Did anyone notice it when they were improvising?

Julius: No not me, I didn't notice it. (S#3D#1)

The ostinatos and grooves allowed the participants to take risks within the boundaries given by the facilitator, fostering experimentation, which is a technique that Quinn stated is something that they would like to improve on: "During fills and stuff like that, it's definitely different piece to piece and style to style. It's definitely something I'd like to work on more" (QS#4).

These small alterations to the ostinato and grooves also demonstrated another kind of improvisation. The following is an excerpt from Julius' interview in which they outline the experience in being able to add their own voice into these roles, while admitting they felt that this process was more improvisational than the improvisation itself.

Julius: How like outside of the solo I'm thinking more how I can improvise than inside the solo you know. Like when I'm in the solo oh it's just like I'm just running along the scale and doing whatever but while I'm comping there's more to think about I guess. [Be]cause there's still sort of the concern of like fitting into like what everyone else is playing umm without like throwing off the soloist or the bassist or whatever but umm it's still sort of like 'how can I spice this up, how sort of can I voice myself while everything is going'. (Jul)

Not only did participants take risks because of the simplicities and express personal goals, but some began to see this as another type of improvisation. Since the participants demonstrated pushing themselves to try new things, through the action research methodology I prepared two additional improvisational games – the switch game and the duet game – to ensure all of the participants remained engaged and challenged.



*Switching grooves.* Since Session #1 was an overall success based on participants' journals and group discussion feedback, I decided to introduce the switch game to create additional challenges and avoid the roadblock of the jam becoming too easy.<sup>6</sup> This was influenced by the participatory lens, which supports an environment that caters to all levels and abilities. The purpose of the switch game was also done to create a longer, collective improvisation as a group, encourage active listening skills and decision making, introduce two scales (although there was only one note difference between the two) and encourage participants to recall the differences between grooves and switch seamlessly between them. Although sudden changes in participatory music can destabilize the jam session, changing grooves is a musical characteristic of M-base.

The game involved switching from *Misirlou* to *Come & See* without stopping by having the improviser signal the moment to switch by playing the scale of the piece up and down during their improvisation. Although we established guidelines before attempting the groove switch, the first attempt resulted in failure. Everyone struggled with how to execute the transition between the two tunes. After this failed attempt and another discussion, we decided that the surdo would play four quarter notes alone following the scale from the improviser to make it easier to transition between the two grooves. Once this rule was established, the switch was manageable. Aside from the initial shared difficulty, everyone voiced different challenges during the game. Kelly found that it was difficult to “think about the new style” (the feel of the groove) (S#2) when improvising, Jordan and Rowan both found that it was difficult “switching between the two scales” (RJ#2), and Avery missed the switch because they were completely immersed in the groove (S#2). Quinn, the only rhythm section member present at this session, found it difficult to

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<sup>6</sup> See Lesson Plan, Appendix G.

switch from *Misirlou* to *Come & See* because the scale would sometimes be played before the end of the form (S#2). This challenge, although difficult both as a percussionist and improviser, was not impossible and the participants agreed that it was a “fun and cool” experience. Rowan felt that “As a group it went surprisingly well”, and it made “you have to think a lot as a performer” (RJ#2).

While the intention of the game was to contribute an additional challenge, the switch game was also implemented to facilitate longer improvisations. At first, the participants were given the choice to switch during their improvisation, and only Jordan chose to initiate the switch during the first time. Because only one participant chose to initiate the switch, for the second time, I obligated every participant to initiate the switch. The length of time went from 10 minutes and 31 seconds (1st time) to 12 minutes and 17 seconds (2nd time). For another point of reference, the improvisations during the first session ranged between 6, 8, and 9 minutes, demonstrating a slight increase in time. Although this increase in improvisation time could be attributed to the implementation of the switch game, it may have also occurred from dedicating less time to general discussion (introducing the session) during the second session.

***Duet playing.*** The duet game, which was a suggestion from Rowan’s journal (which will be explained in more detail under the Journal heading), was used with *Chameleon* during Session #3. The duet game involved two participants improvising at the same time. Overall, the participants found this to be an exciting game.

Kelly: Yeah Avery high five! (*gives high five to Avery and then to Julius*)

Avery: That was good

Facilitator: So what did you guys think?

Kelly and Avery: That was a lot of fun

Kelly: Yeah I was like, how is this going to work with trumpets, but then oh! One of us can just play long notes and the other can do stuff. (S#3D#2)

In this excerpt, Kelly first demonstrated their uncertainty of what to play during their improvisation, but found a solution by listening and playing the opposite of what the other player was doing. The following example also demonstrates how the participants were listening to each other during the duet playing.

Avery: It was cool to just kind of transition into, like if I heard you (*talking to Rowan*) play lower I would go higher and then we could just switch.

Rowan: Yeah the range yeah that like totally works.

Avery: [Be]cause when I started playing with Kelly, I was playing F-sharp while he was playing F-natural so we just stopped and were like this is not right.

Kelly: You know I was just like I am just going to listen to what you are doing, [be]cause I was thinking of chords there then I'm going to do E flat there. (S#3D#2)

While Avery, Rowan, and Kelly discussed their personal thought process during their improvisations, demonstrating how they were listening to each other and attempting to compliment the other participant, those who improvised with instruments that were different than their own had different comments. Julius, who chose to improvise on the djembe this session, found that playing percussion during this game forced them to take “the backburner by default” (JuI). Yet, Julius was still able to communicate with and respond to the other improviser. For myself as a participant, I found that the duet was different when playing with a trumpet compared to the upright bass because of the significant volume difference between the two:

Facilitator: I gave more space (with the bass and) I was giving more time first then responding, whereas with Rowan, I was just playing over [them] a lot of the time because I know [their] instrument is much louder than mine” (S#3D#2).

The duet game also generated a discussion on developing personal goals. For example, Quinn stated that they “want to get better at mimicking” (being able to play what the other person played). Overall, while the game fostered listening skills and discovery of the development of personal goals, the participants displayed enjoyment and pride about their improvisations.

Avery: Then after that I really liked how even with Rowan we were melding together really nicely. It just sounded really good I thought.

Kelly: But you know it's fun to play good music.

Later, in their interviews, Rowan and Avery both commented that they would have liked to return to these games if there had been more time because it was a challenging and fun experience.

### **Summarized Experiences with Ostinatos and Grooves**

Overall, the participants seemed to value having a variety of musical roles occurring simultaneously. The players stated that the roles served a range of purposes, such as: (1) created a textural density which created a non-judgemental environment for improvisation (Turino’s “cloaking”), (2) playing the grooves made it easier to improvise by being constantly involved with making the music, and (3) was fun and engaging. Rowan stated that the participatory approach was one of the most influential approaches during the entire study and explains how the density and participation made it a more comfortable experience to improvise:

Rowan: I guess the one that sticks out the most is probably the density and I guess participatory like everyone was participating. That was probably most important mainly

or sticks out to me mainly because when everyone is participating it made it more comfortable because you didn't feel like, like in a regular school setting there's just the rhythm section playing and then there's the soloist right? So everyone else in the band is just watching you and listening to you and it feels very uncomfortable like you're being judged constantly. Where with the density and participating you didn't feel like people were focused on you they were more focused on just adding to the energy of the groove and the beat so it made it more comfortable. (RI)

While Rowan noticed how much more comfortable they were improvising because of this pedagogical approach, Julius appreciated the chance to continue playing once the improviser role concluded: "I prefer to play than to not play" (JI). Julius further explained that as a member of the rhythm section in their jazz ensemble, they often have to sit out and wait to play when band directors are working on sections of a piece. The participatory approach, according to Julius, was "a nice change of pace (where) there was sort of no one sitting around like 'oh geez, let me at it again!' " (JI). Jordan also enjoyed playing the drums and felt that constantly participating "was more engaging than just sitting there" (S#1D#1). Further to creating a comfortable and engaging experience, Avery also discovered that playing the groove potentially contributed to a stronger improvisation. Avery's comment highlights this outcome in the following excerpt from their interview.

Avery: I think that was cool because then you're not waiting for your turn really, you're kind of... you had to be a part of it. I feel like doing that (playing the groove) I was more comfortable with the groove when I started improvising. I'd done the groove on the djembe for a solid two minutes before. That was good. I think that helped.

Facilitator: So you're saying that being able to be involved rhythmically helped with your

improvisation because you just spent all of this time being in the rhythm and contributing to it that when you go to improvise you are kind of already in with the tune?

Avery: Yes.

Facilitator: Yeah I never thought about that. (AI)

Although I had only thought of participatory music making as a means for encouraging engagement and comfort, this comment was an unexpected, yet positive outcome. Being involved, specifically with the rhythms, made it easier for some participants to improvise because of their continuous involvement in making music. Regardless of the difficulties within each ostinato, the participants enjoyed the variety of ostinatos, grooves, and forms that I presented during the four sessions and expressed many times that they had fun.

### **Variety of Roles: Improvisation**

This section will outline how the third role, improvisation, was implemented in the planning and explaining sections of the sessions, how the participants experienced this role, followed by presenting the actions that were taken during and after the sessions based on participants' experiences. I will then describe how I provided support for this role by also not teaching a melody and spending less time on learning the ostinato and grooves, concluding with the participants' thoughts on these actions and time management methods used to support the goal of improvising.

*Portion of Table 3.6*

	<b>M-base</b>	<b>Participatory</b>
Improvisation	Improvisation is one of the foundational pillars	Room for improvisation but soloistic improvisation is not encouraged.

**Creation of improvisation.** Throughout the study, the role of improvisation was seen as a foundational pillar of each session based on the M-base lens (Coleman, 2015). To support this

value, each two-hour session was planned around facilitating this role through the following plan: 1) teach the ostinato, scale, form and groove; 2) improvise; 3) discuss what happened, what can change and 4) improvise again. More specifically, in my lesson plan for Session #1, I allocated 60 minutes for improvisation. As well, I purposely dedicated less time to perfecting the ostinato and grooves and did not spend time teaching a melody. I assumed that spending less time on the ostinatos and grooves would pose no problems because the participants would repeat the ostinatos and grooves for a long period of time during the jams – a practice of the participatory ways of learning through partaking. These decisions, which were made before the study began, focused on providing ample time to the role of improvisation for each student.

**Implementation of improvisation.** At each session, each participant was given three opportunities to improvise. During these opportunities, I participated alongside the participants. Following each improvisation, the participants were asked to comment on what went well and what did not go well during the session. This ‘mini’ action research cycle that occurred during the sessions allowed for immediate actions to be taken based on the group discussions, while the action research cycle after the sessions allowed me to reflect and take action between sessions. The following section will highlight the participants’ experiences with the improvisations during all four sessions, the action that was taken between sessions, concluding with the participants’ experiences with both this action and time management.

**Participants’ experiences with improvisation.** At each session, the participants were given the opportunity to improvise three times: twice over the same ostinato and once over a different ostinato. The participants commented on how much easier it was improvising the second time:

Rowan: It was really fun and definitely beneficial to spend lots of time on a bass line and key. It was really cool to feel how much easier it was to play through the second time because you already had ideas and experience. (RJ #1)

Julius also found that the second time improvising was easier, and therefore found themselves problem-solving:

Julius: I found it was easier and I think I was also helping myself out. I was giving myself stuff in the left hand and mostly trying to do melody stuff in the right hand. It let me sort of keep track of the form a lot better and I also had some time to play around with the scale so I kind of knew what I was doing. (S#4D#2)

While there was an obvious change of comfort level between the first and second repetitions, Jordan, however, stated that the second time was harder because they were “thinking of more stuff other than [their] blues scale” (S#4D#2). This meant that Jordan felt comfortable taking risks during the second improvisation by stepping out of their normal approach and exploring different ideas.

**Reflection to action.** While all of the participants demonstrated improvisational growth (demonstrated by making choices on what to fix and risk taking) between the first and second time improvising on the same ostinato, I still wondered if I had successfully facilitated the goal of improvisation as a foundational pillar (M-base lens). I felt that the amount of time spent improvising during the first two sessions was not reflective of the importance of this role. I also needed to verify the time spent on the improvisations and its alignment with my lesson plan because as a participant and facilitator, I was not able to keep track of how much time was spent improvising during the activity. In order to address what was a significant tension between value and process and after observing the video data, I decided to use a timer in Session #3. Based on



the positive feedback from the participants in the group discussions and journals, the timer was used again during Session #4. The following graph displays the change in time spent improvising between the sessions. The time that is not recorded in the graph below is the time the facilitator spent introducing the lesson, breaks, and journaling.

**Table 4.5**

*Observation of Time Spent Improvising (Rounded from Video-Data)*

<b>Sessions</b>	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Discussions</b>	<b>Improv.</b>	<b>Extra Information</b>
Session #1	21 minutes	29 minutes	25 minutes	Introduction of Session
Session #2	21 minutes	28 minutes	31 minutes	Switch Game
Session #3	6 minutes	37 minutes	48 minutes	Timer & COVID19 Discussion
Session #4	12 minutes	42 minutes	42 minutes	Timer & Final Discussion

The following section will therefore highlight the participants' experiences in regards to the timed improvisation, how spending time improvising has influenced their current and future practice and highlighting the participants experiences with time management.

**Adding a timer.** After observing that Session #1 allocated more time for introductions, I decided to analyze Session #2, finding that the total amount of time spent on improvisation was 31 minutes. In my lesson plan, I had allocated 60 minutes of the session to improvising and although I understand that I overestimate time in general, I was not convinced that this number truly encompassed improvisation as the foundational pillar of the sessions. I also wanted to know approximately how much time each participant spent improvising during the session. I took the total time improvised (31 minutes) and divided by the number of participants present at the session (6), equalling 6.2 minutes per participant (among three improvisations). By recognizing

that each participant was taking only six minutes per session, I decided to implement the use of a timer on my cell phone to allocate four minutes to each participant per improvisation.

**Participants' experiences with a timer.** This following section will highlight the participants' feedback and experiences with the implementation of a timer during Session #3 and #4. While it was a shock to some of the participants to hear that they were going to improvise for four minutes over *Chameleon*, Kelly and Avery found that four minutes was not as long as they had anticipated. In fact, the group found that the timer created a space where they could explore, develop, and create new ideas. The participants felt that this amount of planned time also allowed them to work on building and creating improvisational arcs (forming a cohesive beginning, middle and ending).

In fact, Rowan felt that spending a large amount of time improvising was one of the most beneficial aspects of the entire study.

Rowan: I'd say probably one of the most beneficial things that kind of stuck out for me was the length wise, when we were forced to go for four minutes. Yeah like forcing you to just get creative because you go through your regular ideas and then "oh I still got to go!" and so you force your creativity and you realize that you actually can do more and so rather than stopping and saying "yeah that's good enough, that's what I can do" you were actually forced to go deeper and develop, so that was really beneficial. (RI)

Rowan's journal entry also explained how the four minutes pushed them to break free of normal ideas, stating that after a certain amount of time, they began to explore different note choices and rhythms that they normally would not consider.

Rowan: I guess the four minute like length part of it, [be]cause you usually solo for a short bit, so... I would say for the first half I was like in this one zone of my brain where

I was just not creative and then after that I just got more creative and like I just hit another level. I don't know, I felt more comfortable going for things that I don't normally do. It felt really cool.

Facilitator: Yeah I definitely heard that. You were doing different things that you don't normally do.

Julius: Like when you held that note for just four measures that was great. (S#3D#2)

The timer also created the opportunity for new ideas to occur because players exhausted their familiar or 'token' ideas during an improvisation. The use of a timer also helped create freedom to explore within a structure. Avery and Kelly felt that dedicating a specific amount of time alleviated feelings of fear or guilt for improvising for too long.

Avery: I did like the freedom, [be]cause there was a time like a bracket...but it wasn't like short, I could explore I don't know. I think I explored a few different ideas and I had time for more (*laughs*).

Facilitator: Yeah, when you say freedom it's interesting, does anyone feel when they are soloing, and this could be anywhere, you feel obligated to end because you felt that you've taken too long. You're too Canadian about it. Like 'ok, everyone needs a turn, here you go, I feel bad cause I took a minute.' Kind of obligated to say, 'ok I've taken my time, I don't want to be rude and take more time so that other people don't have a chance.'

Avery: Yeah I felt that last week.

*Kelly and Quinn nod their heads in agreement.*

Kelly: Yeah one thing, last week I didn't want it to be really short and be like alright I'm done, I was kind of scared of that, and no one is going to call me out on that right. I was sort of like uhh (*unsure*). (S#3D#1)

The length of available time (as marked by the timer) also gave some of the participants the opportunity to think about creating arcs (beginning, middle and end) in their improvisations.

Quinn: I want to say with the length of solos right now, it's not just about coming up with more ideas, it's kind of knowing how long you will take and hopefully still, throughout that expansion and time having bit of a mark, or at least having your ideas connecting well enough to make it cohesive, you know instead of it being detached and filling the minutes you need to. (S#3D#1)

Quinn recognized that spending time allowed them to understand where they stood with their improvisational skills and what they wanted to work on.

Quinn: I think that having that time to solo really helped develop kind of umm almost a stronger thought process that I go through in a particular solo. Umm going from idea to idea and those transitions but umm yeah just getting the chance to solo that much in a shorter period of time umm yeah I think helped me kind of know where I am with my improvisation skills and know where I want to go umm yeah. (S#4D#3)

While Quinn found the timer helped with building between transitional parts of their improvisations, Julius commented in their interview how they have adopted this technique outside of the sessions, explaining that they now set up a backbeat with a short form, “seeing where you can take (the improvisation) for a period of time” (Jul).

**Participants’ experiences with time management.** Creating time for improvisation was also facilitated by spending less time on the ostinatos and grooves and not spending time

learning melodies. More specifically, I was not expecting the ostinato and grooves to be played perfectly before we began improvising. While the group spent approximately 21 minutes towards learning the ostinatos, scales, and grooves in Sessions #1 and #2, the participants were able to learn new ostinatos and grooves in Sessions #3 and #4 in 6 and 10 minutes respectively (Table 4.5). Since none of the participants commented on the limited time spent on learning the ostinatos and grooves and the absence of a melody during the session discussions or their journals, I asked about this during their interviews.

From the participants who commented on how time was managed (Kelly, Avery and Jordan), I learned that the participants enjoyed not spending time learning the ostinatos, grooves, as well as the absence of the melodies, as these structures allowed them to improvise immediately and enter a creative and generative space for a longer period of time. For example, Kelly, who was absent from the first session, stated that they did not mind spending less time on the ostinatos, explaining that this alleviated pressure and made it easier to jump into the improvisation.

Kelly: We sort of played around with the ostinato for a minute and then went right into the improvisation and just like “oh wait am I supposed to know that? but like “oh no it’s ok.”

Facilitator: So it kind of allowed you to jump in quicker even though you missed the first session?

Kelly: Yeah [be]cause like I feel like that was my old mentality before thinking about it like ‘oh this is the melody I’m supposed to know’ right? Like whenever you’re playing any song you have to know the melody and you have to play it but like this is more about building upon what’s there you know and there usually was someone like the piano

playing it and all the drums go along with it so you ... it's less about playing that and more about building on it. (KI)

Kelly's comment reflects the habitual systematic approach of their musical career, demonstrating what a difference the sessions created by de-emphasizing the melody and focused on building upon what was already there as a group. Avery also enjoyed being able to improvise immediately, stating that having less time on learning the ostinato "forced" them to learn the ostinato more quickly. While Jordan also valued less time spent on learning the ostinato, they noted that if "we had spent any more time on them...we would have gotten into caring too much about the ostinato" (JI), which would mean caring less about the improvisation. Thus, spending less time on the ostinato allowed improvisation to be the main priority of the session.

**Absence of melody.** It is interesting to note that all of the participants perceived their improvisations to be more creative with the absence of a melody.

Jordan: Having no melody made it harder to, you know, come up with ideas to improvise on [be]cause there's nothing there for you to latch on to which sort of added to the chaos, but out of that came out of something better.

Facilitator: So just to clarify...what you said is that if you had the melody you wouldn't have come up with a more original type of idea?

Jordan: Yeah. If I had a melody I would have come up with something extensively lamer I would say (*laughs*). (JI)

This finding was unexpected, since the original reason for removing the melody was to make improvisation the foundational pillar (M-base) by creating more time for improvising. In the absence of melody, the participants felt more creative with their improvisations, as it "forced"

them to explore outside of their comfort zones with no guidelines of melodic content aside from the scales and ostinatos assigned.

The participants recognized that spending time improvising (even between the first and second time) allowed them to feel settled, focus on their ideas, play around, develop different ideas, run out of ideas, and build new ideas. As well, by managing the amount of time spent learning the ostinatos, grooves and the lack of melodies, the participants were able to improvise immediately, creating a comfortable environment to develop confidence and take risks with their improvisation.

**Collaboration: Discussion and Journals**

*Portion of Table 3.6*

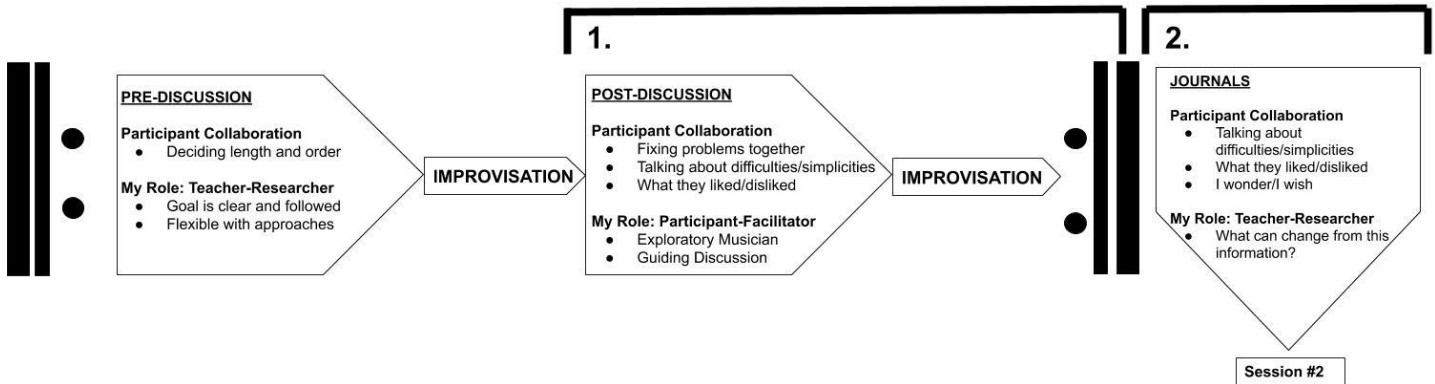
	<b>M-Base</b>
Approach to Making Music	Ideas of collaboration are communicated within the group and decisions are made together.

The following section will highlight the pedagogical approach of making music collaboratively. This approach is also supported by the action research methodology which promotes reflection through the actions taken based on the participants’ experiences during and after a session (Conway & Borst, 2001; Noffke, 1997). The following image (4.2) demonstrates how the participants and I undertook these collaborative approaches each session.

The group discussions, which consisted of a pre-discussion and post-discussion, brought collaborative action immediately to the sessions, while the participant journals, which were completed at the end of each session, influenced the direction of the following session.

**Figure 4.2**

*Collaborative Road Map*



This section will highlight examples of each type of collaboration, the teacher’s role in supporting the collaboration of the facilitator and participant (Table 3.2), followed by the participants' opinions and reactions to these approaches from their interviews. There was no action taken to change the methods of the journals and group discussions, as everyone contributed to the group discussions, and all but one of the participants contributed towards the journals. I could see that the participants enjoyed discussing the improvisations together and that the discussion process contributed to the overall positive environment of the sessions.

**Pre-Discussion**

During each session, there were a total of three pre-discussions and three post-discussions (see diagram above). The objectives of the pre-discussions, which occurred after learning the ostinato and groove, were to decide the length and order of the improvisations. I was open to suggestions during the pre-discussion as long as they aligned with supporting the goal of the lessons. For example, during Session #1, I wanted to support the goal of the session (to improvise) and provide the participants with guidelines so they felt confident during their improvisations (structure), while also allowing them to make decisions about the improvisation



together (collaboration). The following excerpt demonstrates the balance of being purposeful but also flexible.

Facilitator: I kind of hummed and hawed about this but decided since it's the first session, let us just decide the order and the length. Later on we can have it more free, but the danger is that someone will improvise for a long time and somebody won't and that is fine, but I want it to be as equal as possible...any order that we want to do? We could just go around the circle?

Quinn: Yeah.

Jordan: Just go down the line.

Facilitator: Yeah just down the line? And then we will end with me...Let's see... and how long do we want to go for?...We want to improvise for a long time.

Quinn: Four times?

Facilitator: Yeah let's do four times. (S#1/Pre-Discussion #1)

The purpose is demonstrated by my comment "we want to improvise for a long time" while collaboration is demonstrated by facilitating Quinn's suggested length. This excerpt also displayed freedom of structure by saying that we do not have to always decide beforehand. This freedom was exemplified during our 10th improvisation together in *Hide & Seek*, where I removed the pre-discussion because the participants had demonstrated more comfort in the sessions.

**Participants' experiences with pre-discussion.** Rowan, Jordan, and Kelly all found that the pre-discussions provided a structure and prepared the participants for the improvisation:

Rowan: The before discussions are probably really necessary, especially in an improvisation setting because you always got to figure out your form or how it's going to work or else it's going to crash and burn. (RI)

The benefit of the group pre-discussions was also becoming apparent during the video data analysis as I could see that participants asked many questions during the pre-discussion: "So leave a bar of space then?" (QS#2) "Which one are we starting with?" (KS#2) "Just go right into it?" (JuS#4). While these questions were mostly re-affirmation, Avery believed the pre-discussions improved focus before improvising.

Avery: I think before, discussing before, that actually helped me calm down the first few times doing the improvisation because it's kind of just setting ground rules, like this is what we are going to be doing, this is how it's going to go, it's just kind of reassuring in a sense. I don't know reassuring from what but it's kind of just, it felt more comfortable knowing that there was some sort of shape. (AI)

Julius also liked the transparency of the pre-discussion for setting boundaries, but stated that they would have been fine without this structure.

Julius: I thought the discussion before and after was really good. It sort of set us all on the same page. I thought discussing the lengths of the solos was obviously a big one for us and I'm glad that we sort of like set a line there but it could've also just been like umm 'alright let's go...see where it takes us.' Like either one would have been good. (JuI)

As the participants found that the pre-discussions created a foundation during each session, the participants also demonstrated more comfort improvising and discussing as the sessions continued. Although none of the participants commented specifically on the collaborative aspect of guiding the sessions, the participants were nonetheless grateful for these moments.

## Post-Discussion

During the post-discussion, I asked the following questions: What went well? What did not go well? Did anything surprise you? What did you enjoy? This group discussion reflected upon the immediate and personal responses to the improvisations. By voicing out loud their successes and problems, the participants were able to immediately, both individually and collaboratively, create solutions, while simultaneously providing the teacher-researcher with an understanding of their capabilities. The following excerpt highlights Julius and Quinn's duet improvisation, demonstrating a discussion with a problem and solution.

Quinn: Um, yeah it was interesting with the drums [be]cause I want to acknowledge the rhythms you're doing at least but not step all over it right. So that was kind of, it was weird. I wasn't sure if I should play at the same time as you.

Julius: Or in between.

Quinn: It was like that was interesting, yeah.

Julius: How was keeping up? [Be]cause at first I felt a little more sporadic in what I was doing then I kind of fell into rhythms and repeating ideas kind of.

Quinn: Yeah, I would like to readjust myself so I can see your hands, but that's ok.

Julius: Oh yeah, I could also read just myself too. (S#3D#2)

Within this discussion, Julius and Quinn were able to talk about the challenges they faced improvising with each other, but also came to an understanding that seeing each other possibly helped them improvise better together.

In addition to creating solutions together, the participants were able to voice their personal difficulties and goals for improvising. In the following excerpt, Jordan recognizes a habit they have that they wish to change.

Jordan: I think I do this all the time and especially in improvisation. I always get like so caught up in the notes that I forget about rhythm. Like rhythm is way more important in improvisation honestly, but once you get there, you're just thinking a scale and eight notes and quarter notes but you forget to add something else to it. (S#1/D#1)

Jordan shared a problem with the group and demonstrated the ability to tackle this problem during the second improvisation, stating that they felt that their improvisation had “more rhythm and a groove to it” (S#1/D#2). While participants acknowledged their problems and deliberated together, solutions were found and applied during their second improvisations. These conversations also allowed us to acknowledge individual obstacles.

**Participants' experiences with post-discussion.** Jordan felt that the post-discussions allowed them to reflect and discuss new ideas and solutions with the other participants for the next improvisation.

Jordan: I think that discussing afterwards is always valuable just like talking about hey these were some cool things oh, these are some things that didn't go so well maybe I'll fix them in the future. Like there's a sort of idea I want to explore and everyone's like, “no that's fine!” Um and just sort of like bouncing off of each other was really really good. (JI)

Avery found that the post-discussion opened up different points of view, and found it helpful to hear from another participant an outcome that they agreed with.

Avery: That was neat seeing everyone else's take on it and it helped me see it a little differently.

Facilitator: So you're saying that sometimes what they had to say was maybe not what you were thinking of?

Avery: Yeah or actually most of the time they would say something and then I hadn't realized I was thinking that, but I was, and I would completely agree with it but I then I hadn't actually thought of that... but like 'oh yeah that is true.' (AI).

Rowan enjoyed being able to both agree and disagree with the different opinions.

Rowan: I always thought those were more fun because you shared your experiences which were always really interesting to hear different experiences because sometimes you would really agree and like 'yeah I agree with that so much, that happened to me' kind of thing or you'd be like 'no I totally didn't feel like that' but yeah it's interesting to see how people's experiences vary and what not. (RI)

While Rowan and Avery viewed the discussions as an opportunity to understand others' experiences, Kelly mentioned that the post-discussions allowed the participants to voice their immediate reactions and thoughts about the improvisation. Jordan also felt that the post-discussion helped create a relaxed environment for the participants: "More than anything, from like the student perspective, it just helped relax everybody and it felt every time we did it, it felt a little more casual" (JI). Every time we got together, the participants were able to relax more and more, allowing for the participants to guide the discussion more on their own with less guidance from me, expressing confidence in talking about their different experiences in front of their peers and me.

### **Implementation of Journals**

Journal writing took place at the end of each session and took less than 10 minutes to complete, allowing the participants to express their personal thoughts, opinions, and suggestions.

I asked the participants to use the following format when writing in their journals:

**Table 4.5**

*Journal Headings*

Date	Detailed Event/Approach Used	Thoughts on the improvisation/ improvisation technique (expected/unexpected)	Personal Feelings and Reactions
		I liked... I wish... I wonder...	

I approached these journals as a teacher-researcher, looking for any positive feedback or concerns from the participants regarding the pedagogical approaches used in the sessions. While reading the journals I asked, “What can I change from this information?” and then I was able to do the following: a) see what was easy as well as difficult and adjust to find the middle ground; b) take suggestions and implement them into sessions; and c) find validation in a technique I had used and re-use it in following sessions.

Overall, the participants demonstrated a positive outlook towards each session and expressed only minor difficulties. For example, Julius commented that the first session “felt like an all-around fun and successful session” (JuJ#1). These types of comments from the journals worked as an indication to continue the overall format of the sessions. The journals also worked as feedback for different approaches that I used, such as the timer.

Avery: The four minutes were nice, they weren’t tight restraints that forced me to start and finish too quickly, and I think that I could easily go on longer if I had to. I thought at first that it might be too long, but it definitely felt shorter than I expected. (AJ#3)

This positive validation allowed me to feel confident that four minutes was not too long to improvise and that it would be beneficial to provide this same approach at Session #4.

While the participants wrote many comments about what was easy and what was hard, the “I wish” and “I wonder” sections of the journals truly allowed me to collaborate with the

participants as they facilitated the incorporation of their own ideas into the sessions. For example, Rowan made the following comment under the “I wonder” section in their first journal entry: “I’m not sure if I had any ‘I wishes’ or ‘I wonders’ but maybe I wonder what would happen if we do two soloists at once to experiment with communicating with other players” (RJ#1). Based on this suggestion from Rowan, I decided to incorporate the suggestion of having two soloists during Session #2. However, because I also incorporated the switch game based on their positive feedback, we ran out of time to incorporate the duet improvisation. From the journal reflections after the Session #2, participants commented on their eagerness to have the opportunity to experience Rowan’s suggestion by stating “I wish we had done some partner stuff this week” (JJ #2) and “I’m looking forward to the duet playing” (AJ#2), which further pushed the facilitator’s desire to incorporate it.

As well, as a researcher, I was also eager to facilitate this suggestion because it would further contribute to the participatory and M-base notion of density. Rowan’s idea was therefore incorporated during Session #3 with *Chameleon*. Once this duet playing was incorporated, both Rowan and Avery provided further suggestions in the third journal session. They wondered what it would be like to improvise with different instruments, such as bass or saxophone, stating that they believed that it would present more of a challenge than duet playing with like instruments (i.e. two saxophones improvising together vs. one saxophone and one trumpet). However, because the following session was our final session, I was unable to follow through with these suggestions. Despite the inability to continue this idea, the journals allowed the facilitator to collaborate with the participants in guiding the session in a direction that was not planned. While I did not write in a journal after the sessions, I did complete my own journals at home within an

hour of each session, writing down my own comments and feelings on what went well, what did not go well and any thing I would like to change or would wish to see happen.

**Participants' experiences with the journals.** Journaling served as a collaborative method to help the researcher use participant feedback to build subsequent sessions. During the interview process, Jordan and Rowan described the journals as a method that helped them organize their thoughts. Rowan further states that it allowed them to retain more of what happened during the session.

Rowan: I guess journaling...it made me think back to what we had gone through in the session and I guess I reflected on it and I thought about it more deeply during that. I guess if I hadn't done that, maybe I wouldn't have thought about what had happened as deeply and maybe not have retained as much of the information I learned through that, so I'm guessing that kind of helped in that way. (RI)

Avery also found that the journals allowed them to provide a more in-depth response to their ideas.

Avery:...it's a way for me to really explain and express what I'm trying to say. If I said something in the group but I know that I can add to it but then I don't know how to say it like that... then I can just not say it and write it down. (AI)

Avery, Jordan, and Julius even noted that the journals were a helpful resource for me, explaining that this method "help[ed] you because you're not going to remember everything we say in the session" (AI). The journals also allowed me to see the main priorities of each individual, whereas the discussions provided immediate and group ideas. As facilitator and researcher, the journals provided me with a method for collaboration in subsequent sessions while group discussion feedback provided immediate action upon the sessions.



## Post-Discussions Versus Journals

The journals and discussions were both used to facilitate collaboration based on the participants' feedback, however it was evident from viewing the video data that certain participants preferred one method over the other. Jordan and Kelly explained during their interviews that while they felt comfortable with both approaches, the journals and group discussions facilitated different kinds of reflection: "I feel like the combination of the two (group discussion and journals) allowed me to get everything out" (JI). In a similar manner to what Avery had previously stated, Kelly saw the journals as a useful method in providing more formulated thoughts:

Kelly: Um I think that in a group I'll definitely say something. It will definitely be something like some emotions or something, especially if it just happened. I'll just say whatever and it will be true and whatever. Like with journals I will think about it more and give more of a refined response I feel.

Facilitator: Both are different in a sense?

Kelly: Yeah and I can usually stream my thoughts together in a group discussion but both of them are good for different things I feel. (KI)

While Julius recognized the value of the journals for the researcher during the interview, they personally did not care for the journals but rather found the group discussions to be their preferred method of reflection. While Julius, Jordan, and Kelly felt comfortable expressing their thoughts during the group discussion, Avery and Rowan found it more difficult to participate.

Rowan: Oftentimes in discussions I just have a blank mind. I don't know why. It's just a me thing. Umm yeah I would say I kind of adequately voiced my thoughts I don't know. In situations, I sometimes don't know what to add.

Facilitator: Yeah would you say, that that's kind of your norm in any kind of group discussion or was it because of the specific situation that it was like that?

Rowan: I would say that probably be normal I guess yeah. (RI)

Avery also found that the journal allowed for a moment to think clearly, since during the discussions they felt that they were not able to adequately voice their opinions: "Sometimes whatever comes out of my mouth isn't always everything in my head and when I'm writing, it can all come out" (AI), further explaining the preference for journals over group discussions:

Avery: Yeah what I've found is that when I'm speaking, I can't filter anything or refine the information that I'm giving out but when I'm writing it down I can. It's like, 'Ok that's not really what I want to say' I change that. I can make it more of what I'm actually trying to say. (AI)

Although this divide of preferences was easy to see as a teacher during the group discussions, it was beneficial to understand the differences. While certain participants voiced a preferred method, Rowan and I agreed that having both the journals and the discussions created space for introverted and extroverted personalities:

Rowan: It was probably beneficial that you did both the discussions and the journals because it probably meets the needs of both those personalities and you probably got more out of certain people in group discussions than others. (RI)

While the group discussions and journals both seemed to serve a different purpose for the participants and catered to the different personalities of the participants, some preferred the journals while others preferred the group discussions. During the four sessions, there were no comments on these approaches (journals, group discussions) and therefore no actions were taken to alter or change these approaches.

## Participant Ostinatos

Although the participants enjoyed the ostinatos brought by the facilitator, the participants were also encouraged to bring or create ostinatos of their own to allow for collaboration. However, because of the unexpected end to the study, none of the participants were able to bring an ostinato. During the interview process, I asked the participants whether this was something they were interested in doing, to which they all responded yes. Some participants had already begun looking into resources, mentioning that they encountered some difficulties in finding what they felt like was the “right” ostinato. Others stated that they would have brought in something if there had been more time, and some even stated that they would have enjoyed bringing in their own or making something up together as a group. Overall, because of the limited time, the participants stated that they would have also enjoyed spending more time with the five ostinatos that I prepared.

## Teacher as Facilitator and Participant

*Portion of Table 3.6*

	<b>Participatory</b>
Approach to making music	Mentorship approach to learning and playing music with both peers and mentors.

The final pedagogical approach I used during the study was mentorship and peer learning. The following section will highlight specifically the role of mentorship through my inclusion as a participant and facilitator, the participants’ response to these roles and concluding with actions taken based on my personal reflection. I will not present any information specifically pertaining to peer learning because although the learning took place within a peer group, I did not focus on peer learning but rather my own learning.

**Implementation of the facilitator role.** During the sessions, the facilitator's role involved providing guidance:

- asking open-ended questions, asking for students to elaborate or explain in detail their answers;
- establishing the ground rules such as respect towards each other and those with differing ideas or opinions;
- keeping track of time, ensure that every participant who wants to, has the opportunity to talk;
- summarizing the groups' thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

In Session #1, I explained to the group that our discussions should come from the exploratory musician and not the critical musician. The critical musician may comment on musical aspects such as pitch, dynamics, or phrasing and could make comments such as, "You should tune that note", while the exploratory musician focuses on what changes can be made from the results, such as "I wonder how this scale would work over this chord?" To this effect, I avoided instructing the participants from a teacher perspective informed by presentational values and responded with positive feedback to encourage risk taking and avoid any criticism on individual improvisations. The following excerpt demonstrates some examples of encouragement as a facilitator rather than directing as a teacher might.

Jordan: I played a few notes that were in the major scale and was like, thought that will sound cool and I will go back to the minor scale and it didn't. So, I think it was definitely a challenge...cause usually you know if you play something weird from a scale and come

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<sup>7</sup> See Table 3.2 for more information on the facilitator role.

back it sounds 'ah nice' but this time it still sound[ed] wrong cause it wasn't like different enough I guess.

Facilitator: Yeah and I mean all you can do is just try it and if it doesn't work that's fine. Just keep trying.

As the facilitator, I used phrases such as “That’s okay...That’s alright... That’s fine...Don’t be sorry...” to be encouraging rather than critical. As well, it is important to note that in this excerpt, Jordan provides a possible reason as to why playing away from the scale might not have worked, saying that it “wasn’t different enough.” This recognition also occurred with Quinn, who commented on certain improvisational ideas that they were trying to do and stating why it might have been difficult to do.

Quinn: I guess it might have been just from the time signature again, but I tried some hemiolas umm I had some ideas for hemiolas that I couldn't quite play (*laughs*) umm and I found that interesting. Just with the shortness of the form and like the riff even wasn't hitting all the strong beats (*hits hands together*) all the time, with ties and what not so it kind of was a good ostinato to kind of practice that loose time feel so you can throw whatever in umm so yeah I'd like to try more of that. (S#4/Final Discussion)

These two examples demonstrate that the exploratory nature of the sessions allowed the participants to come to potential solutions on their own. As well, Julius appreciated the ‘non-teacher’ approach in their journal, stating that this approach “was nice in giving (the participants) independence on how to approach anything (they) felt (they) wanted to improv[ise] on” (JuJ#1). The role of the facilitator was conceived before the research began and while I implemented this role during all four sessions, only Julius commented on this “non-teacher” approach during the

sessions. Therefore, to better understand how participants felt about this approach, I asked each participant about this experience during their interviews.

**Participants' experiences with facilitator role.** In the concluding interviews, I asked each participant about how they felt about receiving feedback on their improvisations by teachers. While all of the participants agreed that teacher feedback could be beneficial, Rowan and I further discussed the difference between feedback given before an improvisation compared to after an improvisation.

Facilitator: Do you think it would be different if, say, the comments from both teachers and peers were given before you improvise, say “Oh hey Rowan, for your solo you should try to do this.” Would that maybe make it a little more different?

Rowan: Yeah, I think that would make it different as long as they don't give me too much. I do know sometimes teachers will give you so many ideas for a solo and then you're trying to cram them all in and it doesn't work... so I mean if they do give you like one little thing... it would probably help yeah if they gave ideas beforehand just not too many.

Facilitator: If I was a teacher for example, and we were doing the *Fire Emblem* ostinato, in my head I know it's difficult so I could say ‘you should probably try to make your solo with long notes.’ That would just be the main suggestion, whereas if I said after, ‘your solo should have been with long notes.’ It feels different right?

Rowan: Yeah. It feels like you're just getting judged and like everything you did was wrong.

Facilitator: Yeah exactly. It's just crazy that saying the same kind of thing can kind of have a different effect on the person.

Rowan: Yeah.

In this discussion, Rowan states that even if the teacher does provide feedback, it sometimes can be too much to take in. Overall, and regardless of the absence of a teacher role and the exploratory feedback, the participants demonstrated individual growth in their own ability to recognize obstacles in their improvisations and explore possible solutions on their own without detailed feedback from the facilitator.

**Reflection to action.** While it was easy to personally reflect on the experiences of being a participant, the overwhelming number of events occurring at each session made it challenging to reflect on my role as a facilitator. Therefore, I reviewed the video-data after each session, asking myself if my comments provided either direction or instruction. In my video analysis, when observing my facilitator role, I discovered that I was able to facilitate and provide exploratory feedback. Although I leaned towards exploration in my comments, I found myself talking too much overall. The following is a brief observation of each session and my attempt to change this habit, which remained unsuccessful.

During Session #1 I observed that I talked a lot more than the participants, not only in the introduction of the study, but also during the group discussions. This was a new environment for everyone, therefore I was not surprised that the participants did not talk as much as I did.

During Session #2 I observed that I was able to periodically step away from the facilitator role and step into the participant role by talking about my own experiences: “I think in my journal I might write that...” (S#2D#3). However, during this session I still found that I interjected much more frequently than the other participants, constantly responding to the participants’ overall comments.

During Session #3 I wanted to challenge myself because of this observation from Session #2. Before the discussions began I stated that “part of what I want to do from just reviewing the videos is that I want to talk less” (S#3D#1), telling the participants that they can talk about anything that comes to mind, always returning to those main reflective questions: What went well? What did not go well? What was exciting and new? What were your thoughts about the session? I was able to facilitate the discussions, but in my reflection and video observation, I still found myself responding to the comments without leaving room for group contemplation. As well I found that I was not expanding on many of their comments, but filling the space, despite my declaration at the beginning of the session. My thoughts about this behavior, led to a reflective finding which will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Because Session #4 was the final session and many outside factors demanded attention (cancellation of school from COVID-19), I reverted back into leading the discussion rather than allowing the participants to guide it themselves. This final session was an unexpected situation, and a challenging time where the students experienced the cancellation of numerous school events and after-school activities. Given the circumstances, the ethical decision I made was to provide stability in helping these students by resuming a more guided role than I would have preferred.

Overall, I found that facilitating proved to be a challenge, as I had never approached leading a group of musicians this way. However, I truly enjoyed stepping back into this role, allowing the participants the chance to figure out answers on their own. The difficulty of acknowledging and changing habits will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Participants’ experiences with teacher as participant.** Taking on the participant role meant that I would play the groove or ostinato during each session as well as improvise. When



asked during the interviews about the experience of improvising alongside me, the participants unanimously stated that they appreciated this non-teacher approach. Jordan, Rowan, and Avery expressed that it created a less intimidating space. Kelly and Julius both found that it allowed for them to explore at their own pace and explore their own ideas rather than a teacher managing the process for them. As Julius explains:

Julius: It gave us sort of more individuality in like trying to figure out what we were doing and like explore our own ideas rather than like “oh this is what we are trying to sound like, this is the end goal.” It was more of “we are going to make our own way there and have our own sort of bar set.” (JuI)

Even participants who had been students in my classroom in a previous setting stated that “it was very interesting because I can only see you as a teacher but then you weren't doing anything more or less so that was really interesting. I felt more comfortable soloing I think” (AI). Overall, the participants felt that this role contributed to a positive and welcoming environment: “we were all sort of meeting up to like jam” (KI).

**Personal reflection as a participant improviser.** From my own perspective, although the first three sessions were positive experiences as an improviser, I encountered difficulties during Session #4. The following is an excerpt from my journal written immediately after the session.

Facilitator: When I am embarrassed because of my playing ability, I feel like two paths are presented. The first is that I need to practice and be more prepared while the other path (that maybe most people take when something embarrassing happens to them in front of people they teach), is that they reject the thing itself. “I will never play in front of the students ever again” - a type of withdrawal - giving up completely because it is not

worth the effort and risk of being embarrassed again. Although it wasn't necessarily because of my lack of ability but a broken horn, it was still embarrassing nevertheless and these feelings crept into my thoughts during the improvisation, which ended up making it not fun at all. (FacilitatorJ#4)

While I demonstrated frustration and embarrassment, the participants did not notice because they were busy participating, or if they did notice, they did not care. Once the sessions had completed, I commented on the feeling of vulnerability in my journal.

Facilitator: I thought that this was a great opportunity as a teacher. I was able to make myself vulnerable in a controlled setting which allowed me to grow as a teacher and as a musician. By putting myself in a vulnerable, but not catastrophic situation, I created an authentic learning experience. If we expect a certain level of musicianship from our students, shouldn't we also expect the same from ourselves? (FacilitatorJ#5)

I recognized that even if it was a difficult session for me, it was still a safe environment to practice my own improvisation and put myself in the shoes of the participants by standing next to them and participate in the task at hand. My own reflections will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5.

### **Summary of Participants' Experiences**

I will conclude Chapter 4 by summarizing the participants' experiences within the non-traditional environment, which relates specifically to my second research question:

How do students respond to improvisation taught in non-traditional environments?

- a) Specifically in regards to non-presentational expectations.
- b) Specifically in regards to the absence of assessment.

The following section will highlight the participants' experiences with this environment and present how the participants contrasted this experience with their high school experiences of improvisation. Not only did the participants provide evidence of enjoyment and personal growth within this environment, but they also found that they were able to understand and set their own improvisational standards and goals while also taking risks.

**Participants' experiences with a non-traditional environment.** The non-traditional environment established in this study is comprised of three components: setting, purpose, and process. The setting consists of physical location, group size, and composition (peers and mentors). The purpose consists of improvisation as a foundational pillar used to discover creativity and personal development, and the process is guided by M-base and participatory approaches. Most importantly, all three components were designed to exclude typical school constraints, such as assessment and performances.

All of the participants commented on how the environment (the process, setting and purpose) of the study created a setting which was comfortable, casual, and enjoyable. Avery felt that the specific location (the Bassment) made a significant difference in their perception of the setting compared to their regular high school setting. As Jordan explains in comparison to their school: "I thought it felt a lot better and I mean the Bassment is such a cool place right to play. It's an actual jazz club...you're just hanging out and jamming" (JI). Rowan and Kelly both found that it was a comfortable environment, saying "it felt like you were with friends. It feels like a hangout" (RI). Playing in this relaxed environment with their peers, according to Kelly, also meant that "you (could) sort of melt away into your own thing. It felt like everyone was sort of doing their own thing rather than like expecting something from you" (KI). Rowan also

commented on how the participatory and non-teacher environment made the sessions feel less judgemental and free from expectations from instructors or peers.

Another indication of how the participants felt about their experience with the sessions can be seen through the change to the participants' definitions of improvisation. At Session #1, I had asked the participants to write their personal definition of improvisation. During Session #4, I asked them again to write out their definition of improvisation to see if their initial definition had changed. The most notable transformation was from Rowan and Jordan's journals. Rowan's first journal entry stated that "Improvisation is being able to express oneself musically. But just like learning to talk to others, it takes time to learn how. Improvisation can be very difficult, especially when one has very little experience (RJ#1). From finding improvisation difficult, within a short period of time, Rowan found improvisation to be an experience and fun while also recognizing the energy behind the activity.

Rowan: I think it stayed mostly the same. However, I now think improvisation is fun and a very good community-like experience. Improvisation is like talking to others. There can be many styles and emotions expressed and there is always so much energy.

Improvisation is almost alive, or, it makes one feel alive & energized. It is a thrilling experience. (RJ#4)

Jordan, who stated that improvisation is "making up music on the spot, using knowledge of the chords, scales, and form" (JJ#1) in their first journal, felt that their understanding of improvisation grew to also include the experience itself.

Jordan: I think my definition of improv has stayed the same, but my theory behind it has (changed). I think it's less about playing the best and more about playing what you want. It should be a fun experience, rather than being too focused on getting everything right. I

really liked this experience, and think the smaller group practice was genuinely very helpful. (JJ#4)

The participants were also content with the size of the group. Julius preferred the small group and felt that the group size was not overwhelming because “there was just less going on and more opportunity to sort of explore your own ideas” (JuI). The size of the group also provided a positive opportunity to be heard:

Julius “...it was definitely a breath of fresh air from playing in large groups all the time. It felt intimate I guess, like less competing voices. Like it's easier to all stay on the same page and sort of do your thing and co-ordinate and try stuff... not coordinate (*laughs*). (S#3D#3)

Jordan also felt that the size of the group allowed them to focus on specific techniques, rather than tricks:

Jordan: I feel like I wasn't fighting for attention. Because I think that's also why I was also more reserved like again in the bigger, this is probably the smallest group that I've played in, even in a slightly bigger group than this, that's where there's more soloists. That's when I do more of the odder things like I'm trying to...

Julius: Like you got to stand out (of a) sea of saxophones.

Jordan: Yeah, like trying to specifically stand out and there are 8 saxophones in the section. I'm trying to stand out. I think it was easier here to focus on the technique rather than doing tricks. (S#4D#3)

Jordan's comment about “fighting for attention” indicates that this environment can allow participants to feel that they are contributing, both as a participant and improviser, in their own ways. Julius also found that the environment of the study had less tension, comparing it to a

school setting, where “I need to sort of be achieving this standard” at school, further stating that this environment “was more of a ‘we are going to play music and were going to have a good time doing it’” (JuI). Another difference Jordan noted when compared to a school setting was that it was “a lot easier to play wrong notes in a setting like (this) than in a classroom” (JI). This was evident from Session #1 when Jordan demonstrated playing away from the provided scale. In comparison, this study varied quite drastically from their high school settings.

Jordan: ...it felt less like a class I would say.

Facilitator: What makes a classroom feel like a class?

Jordan: I don’t know. I mean there’s not a bar in my band room (Facilitator: yeah you guys weren’t allowed at the bar!) but it was there and it’s atmospheric! I don’t know. I’ve been taking classes in the band room, like you’ve said, I’ve been there 5 days a week for four years... but (the Bassment is) still a much more casual environment where it feels a lot easier to like, it’s not a class right. So, we were talking about the wrong notes earlier, I feel it’s a lot easier to play wrong notes in a setting like that than in a classroom. (JI)

While allowing them to feel relaxed and comfortable, Julius also noticed how this environment, again compared to their school, allowed them to set their own standards: “(In school), I’m trying to achieve this well (or) do like this numerically well on my report cards” whereas this study facilitated approaching improvisation from the mindset of “this is what I want to get to, this is what I want to achieve” (JuI). Rowan also felt that they were able to learn more about themselves and create direction for their improvisations in the future:

Rowan: I mean I really appreciated like the openness and how it wasn’t necessarily learning something from the teacher but mainly leaning from what you already kind of have and then being forced into different situations that you aren’t necessarily

comfortable with but eventually grow comfortable with and actually enjoy them quite a bit. (RI)

Avery also felt that this experience helped them learn about themselves and provide direction for further improvisation:

Avery: I think that was a real benefit to participate with other people and develop different ideas and try different things with the ostinatos and playing with multiple people so that was really beneficial. I definitely learned a lot about myself and how to improvise and where to go with soloing. (RI)

Most importantly, the participants felt that this environment focused on the music: “We’re all sort of just meeting up and it’s just about the music I guess” (KI). Some participants even found that the sessions allowed them to view improvisation differently than before:

Rowan: ...these sessions made me think more on how to approach improvisation through (techniques) like dynamics, rhythm and melody and I think I’m also able to listen more to what’s actually going on around me. I don’t think I did that before. I think I was much more focused on myself and afraid that I would screw something up but now I’m a lot more comfortable with it so I’m able to think more about my note choices and how to create an arc from the start [until] the end kind of deal. (RI)

Avery also felt that their perspective of improvisation changed, saying that these sessions allowed them to focus on the larger picture of their improvisations by not having to worry about every detail: “I was thinking about almost every little thing I would do...so yeah it has changed a lot cause now I’m not thinking as much as about what I’m playing which is good I guess...it feels better now” (AI). Overall, the environment was best described and encapsulated in one singular statement by Avery who said that the environment “felt more free” (AI).

**Absence of assessment and performances.** The following section, although still highlighting the overall experience of the participants in the non-traditional environment, does not follow the experiences of the sessions themselves but examines the responses to hypothetical questions that were asked in the interviews. During the interviews, I specifically asked the participants if they thought the implementation of assessment or a performance would have altered their experience with the sessions. According to the participants, having a performance would not have changed the sessions or the approaches that we used, however Rowan, Avery, and Jordan felt that the assessment would have changed their improvisations and the atmosphere of the sessions. Jordan felt that the environment would have been strange if there had been assessment:

Jordan: ...everyone would be like trying to figure out, you know, who's got the best grade and I, being the naturally competitive person that I am, would have definitely have changed my improvisation. Blues scales? That's all I need! I'm just going to play this up and down forever because I would want to be given the best assessment (JI).

Rowan also felt that the assessment would have completely changed the experience:

Rowan: I probably would have been a little more nervous and probably hard on myself as well. I mean I often came out of those (sessions) like really happy because it was such a great experience right. But if I was getting assessed, I probably would just think about all the wrong things I did or what I thought was wrong so I would probably come out with a different outlook on the sessions. (RI)

Avery, on the other hand, noted that if assessment was removed, they still feel "Like no matter what I do, I feel like I'm grading myself anyway in a sense," (AI) and although both Avery and



Kelly believe assessment helps them understand what they can work on to get a higher mark, Avery is quick to point out that getting a higher mark should not be the point of music:

Avery: It's like "ok I definitely can change that, that and that" to get a higher mark. But it's not the point. That shouldn't be the point. But even if I tell myself that, I'm not going to follow through with that; I'm still going to think with that point (*of getting a higher mark*). (AI)

Julius also felt that assessment in the sessions would have imposed constraints on their improvisations and remove the freedom of exploration:

Julius: I probably would have changed my improv[isation] [be]cause like once you know that you're being assessed on something naturally you're going to want to try and achieve that. Like in a solo (if) there's like a little challenge built into my improv and if it's something simple like that like "oh the root at the top of the form" like...that still gives you lots of room to do your own thing but like...if you're being very particular, like "I want you to stay on the scale or stay on this chord and if you go off of that you're going to lose marks and points" or whatever I think that's not great...Sort of locking you into a certain mindset of "these are the things I need to stay on, I don't want to stray from this" but what you do want to do is stray off of that! You want to be funky with it. (JuI)

Julius is also describing in this excerpt above the fine balance within assessment, stating that specific outcomes may affect the choices students make during their improvisations.

While many of the participants felt that assessment would have changed the sessions, some believed that a performance would not have changed anything. As Jordan explained, this is because they are not bothered by performing, saying that it would have been "a little more tense but nothing earth-shatteringly different" (JI). Avery on the other hand, found that because they

could tell that they were improving, they would not have changed their approach even if they had to perform.

Avery: I think I would not change anything because we were kind of... we were not preparing for anything but what we were doing, I could tell that I was improving and that was the point and so yeah I would view them differently but I don't think I would change anything to what I was doing. (AI)

Kelly, although feeling that nothing significant would change, did mention that they would have perhaps prepared more at home before the sessions. Overall, it is interesting to note that while the hypothetical idea of a performance would have not changed their improvisations, the concept of assessment would have changed the experience of sessions themselves and even the improvisations.

## **Conclusion**

The research questions set out at the beginning of the study were:

1. How can I teach improvisation to high school students with a participatory and M-base lens to develop my personal pedagogy of improvisation?
2. How do students respond to improvisation taught in non-traditional environments?
  - a) Specifically in regards to non-presentational expectations.
  - b) Specifically in regards to the absence of assessment.
3. What strategies are used to adapt or change my improvisational pedagogy in response to students' experiences with the participatory and M-base lenses?

Chapter 4 presented the findings for all three questions in a combined manner by explaining the creation and implementation of the pedagogical approaches of both M-base and participatory lenses (variety of roles of the ostinato, the groove, the improvisation, collaboration through the

use of journals, pre-discussions and post-discussions and mentorship in the form of a facilitator and participant). I also described the participants' experiences with these specific approaches and highlighted the actions I took based on the events of the sessions. I concluded this chapter with a summarized reflection of the participants' experience. Chapter 4 addressed the research questions, and in doing so, allowed me reflect on the culmination of what was done in Chapter 5 in order to build a stronger personal pedagogy for improvisation.

## CHAPTER 5 REFLECTION

Through action research, this study explored the implementation of participatory and M-base lenses to foster an environment for improvisation. In doing so, I promoted improvisation as a foundational pillar of each session, created a variety of roles (ostinatos, grooves, improvisation), and collaborated with participants through journals, group discussions, and exploratory feedback. In Chapter 4, I explained how I facilitated these approaches, how the students responded, and the actions that were taken in response to their experiences. In seeking answers to the research questions, I reflected on the second guiding aim of the study which was the development of my personal pedagogy of improvisation through the action research cycle. My action research methodology – a cyclical process of planning, explaining, jamming, reflecting, observing, and re-planning – used an inquisitive and continuous approach of self-interrogation on my personal practice of improvisation (Conway & Borst, 2001). While challenging my own beliefs and values of my past teaching experience, I also invited the participants to become contributors to the study as suggested by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) and Noffke (2009), employing a “bottom-up” up approach. By taking the participants' experiences and comments on the approaches and events occurring into account, I was able to implement changes that directly influenced the sessions. This approach allowed those most involved in the subject itself (i.e. students and teachers) to create our own knowledge of learning and teaching together.

This chapter will focus on how my pedagogy has changed based on this process. To begin this final step of the interpretative analysis of my qualitative research, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), I asked “what were the lessons learned” (p. 249) based on the emerging understandings and events that occurred? (as cited in Creswell, 2014). I came to the following

four conclusions, the first three of which are directly related to my personal pedagogy and the fourth which is specifically related to an environment for teaching improvisation:

1. A teacher needs to create attainable levels for successful improvisation.
2. The facilitator role requires time for reflection and practice.
3. Participating allowed me to recognize and challenge personal self-doubt around improvisation.
4. Improvisation can thrive in a non-traditional environment through a balance between structures and freedoms.

Although these reflections emerged from what occurred in this short research study, these reflections are not conclusive but are ongoing reminders which allow me to grow continuously as a teacher (Anderson et al., 2007). The following section will explain how I came to these conclusions and how my pedagogy of improvisation and music education has changed. I will then conclude by presenting my recommendations for myself, teachers, and researchers.

### **Create Attainable Levels for Improvisation**

The first conclusion drawn from this study was that my future pedagogy needs to encompass attainable levels for successful improvisations. This understanding was discovered through a chain reaction of reflections based upon not only the events of the study but also by reflecting upon my past experiences teaching improvisation. As explained in Chapter 3, my past methods of teaching improvisation focused on two contrasting approaches in two different settings: a notation-focused approach to improvisation in the classroom, and an ear-focused approach in an after-school extracurricular group. While I explained my initial concerns with my past methods such as the focus on presentational goals and the atomistic approaches of both methods, this study identified deeper problems with my past pedagogical methods. For instance,

while reflecting upon the challenges faced by participants in the sessions, both anticipated and unexpected, I was surprised by several challenges brought up by many of the participants. For example, while I had predicted that improvising over a 7/8 time signature, improvising in the key of concert B, and superimposing rhythms in *Come & See* would be challenging, other unexpected difficulties arose. These unexpected difficulties included: hearing the top of the form, playing wrong notes within a single scale, switching between two scales during the switch game, and coping with dense melodic textures.

Witnessing these difficulties prompted me to reflect on two additional matters: the participants' degree of musical knowledge, practice, and involvement may be regarded as higher than the average high school student (considering their history of private instruction, ability to play multiple instruments, and extra-curricular musical involvement), and my belief that the methods used during the study were designed as an introductory approach towards improvisation through the removal of obstacles (no difficult chord changes, singular scales, and consistent repetition of form and ostinato). The awareness of these conditions, in combination with the surprising challenges experienced by such musicians, led me to the realization that my past teaching methods, specifically the notation-based approach, were undoubtedly approaching the teaching of improvisation in an abstract way; there were no clear goals other than the expected performance-based goals. Because of this abstract approach, I was not providing a suitable environment for my students to make any progress towards their improvisational abilities. These initial thoughts led to further reflections concerning the extent of a high school students' experiences improvising and what my personal notion of "successful" improvisation encompasses. While students in grades 9-12 typically have a few years of experience on their instruments, they may enter high school with little to no experience with improvisation.

Furthermore, my past approaches spent more time preparing for performances than improvising, which diminished time to develop and explore improvisation.

Compounding the lack of improvisational experience both before and during high school was my concept of a “successful” improvisation. My pedagogy of improvisation promoted musicians recognized by historians and music critics as trailblazers in the field and, as a by-product, the standard of a “successful” improvisation was implied, based on what these musicians were doing (i.e. playing fast licks, fast chord changes, tone development). This is not to say that these musicians cannot be looked to as musical role models, but more importantly that a balance needs to be created between how we conceptualize goals for our students and their improvisational experience. For example, the dedication and time needed to attain a level of improvisational skill and ability even close to that of these well-known musicians would take many years. Although I do not expect my students to achieve this level, what is missing from my pedagogy are landmark achievements and goals in the progression from beginner to master, which can help students recognize paths of personal progress and success. Going forward, I believe that in order to change my past methods of teaching, I need to provide an environment which promotes attainable success and accessibility for all levels by adjusting the degree of difficulty of improvisation – a characteristic of participatory – to reflect the current level of improvisational skill of my students.

### **Changing from Teacher to Facilitator Takes Reflection and Practice**

The second conclusion drawn from reflection on Chapter 4 was that moving from a teacher role to a facilitator role was difficult to accomplish; a fluent change between these roles requires time for reflection and practice in order to challenge my past habits. In Chapter 3, I

outlined the roles that I would step into during each phase of the action research cycle.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, I found that it was easy to participate alongside the participants, slightly challenging to be a teacher-researcher (as it was my first time researching), and significantly challenging to maintain the role of the facilitator, specifically in the group discussions. My role as the facilitator comprised the following tasks:

- ensure each participant is given an equal opportunity to improvise;
- ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions;
- establish ground rules such as respect towards each person and their opinions;
- keep track of time, ensure that every participant who wants to has the opportunity to talk;
- summarize the groups' thoughts;

Through this preconceived understanding of my role as a facilitator, I was able to set up many parameters to successfully facilitate the sessions, such as avoiding critical feedback during group discussions, asking open-ended questions for the discussions, and reminding the participants and myself of our roles. In addition to these responsibilities, the concept of facilitating also meant stepping away from the “teacher pedestal” in order to allow the group to create their own knowledge collectively (Friesen, 2009). This approach was also premised upon Paulo Freire’s understanding that students are not ‘containers’ that are “to be filled by the teacher” (Freire, 2000, p. 72) and suggests that in opposition to the “banking model,” teachers and students learn together:

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grows. (Freire, 2000, p.80)

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<sup>8</sup> See Table 3.3 for role of teacher-researcher, participant and facilitator.



Equipped with a fully-realized understanding of my roles, the qualitative research methodology of action research allowed me to “examine an aspect of (my) own work in order to improve it” (Cain, 2012, p. 410) through cyclical self-interrogation and action (Conway & Borst, 2001; Noffke, 1997).

It is important to note that because this research did not take place in a classroom, I did not have the same responsibilities that a teacher might have in a regular class. Research that has however placed teachers in facilitating roles in classrooms discovered that all of the teachers “found it hard to stand back and watch” (Green, 2008b, p.31).<sup>9</sup> As Green (2008a) explains, this was because the informal approach of becoming a facilitator “differ(s) quite radically from most formal educational practices” (p.3). However, those who participated in Green’s informal research eventually found that they adapted to these roles over time.

As described in Chapter 4, I recognized that my frequent teacher commentary was overtaking the group discussions, which meant that the participants had less opportunity to talk. I therefore made a conscious decision to address this problem, but despite my acknowledgement and attempt to change, I was still unsuccessful in changing how I provided commentary. This is not to say that I did not facilitate the sessions, but that overall and more importantly, the attempted action to change was not successful. I was also curious nonetheless why I might have encountered this problem in the first place. I came to the conclusion that this is a habit arising from a classroom management technique; if I leave silence in a class while I am teaching, students will fill the silence with chatter. This would explain why I had a difficult time resisting immediately making commentary on the participants' feedback. However, this environment did not require classroom management, and if the sessions had continued, I would have continued to

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<sup>9</sup> For more information about teacher’s facilitating in research, see Chapter 2 of Lucy Green’s *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*.

challenge myself to fully commit to reflecting on this outcome. This finding, therefore, taught me two important concepts: (1) the action research cycle, specifically the reflection step, allowed me to become aware of the problem in the first place; and (2) the failure to change may have been the result of both an underdeveloped experience of facilitating and a lack of time to make any meaningful change.

### **The Environment Allows for Recognizing and Challenging Self-Doubt**

My third personal reflection was that the environment – the process, purpose, and setting – of the study allowed me to recognize and challenge my own self-doubt as an improviser through the process of becoming a participant. As explained previously, I became a participant during the sessions, and in doing so, I improvised and played the ostinatos and grooves at each session. While I do possess some past experience improvising in a jazz setting, I have never truly felt comfortable improvising. Improvising alongside students and taking equal amounts of time improvising during the sessions was an approach that I have never used in my past settings. Becoming a participant and co-learner allowed me to discover the personal challenge of separating the role of critical musician from one of an exploratory musician.

Throughout this study, I was able to gain more experience improvising by reconfiguring my role from that of a traditional teacher-as-leader to that of a participant (Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Whitcomb, 2013; Willox, Heble, Jackson, Walker, & Waterman, 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Although I did not experience the same challenges that the participants experienced (i.e. I was not getting lost in the form or having difficulty with note choices), I nonetheless experienced my own obstacles. My personal challenges arose from my own self-doubt. During Session #4, my inner critical musician – one who finds fault in any small mistake – overtook the exploratory musician, and I was left feeling embarrassed about my own

improvisational skills. This moment of apprehension is important because it allowed me to reflect on the reason for this underlying fear: as a teacher, I am expected to provide students with the correct answers, and because of this embedded expectation, I will choose to avoid improvising in front of my students. What helped me overcome this roadblock was reminding myself that my role in this setting was to participate and facilitate, not teach in the traditional sense of directing a lesson. These roles liberated me from the expectation of providing “answers” and in doing so, allowed the participants to become problem solvers themselves as described in Chapter 4.

This realization also helped me see my fear was unwarranted because the environment that I implemented purposely promoted an exploratory, participatory, and non-judgemental atmosphere. This meant that the participants were engaged through the act of participating, and because of this engagement, they did not have the time to judge or care to judge my improvisation as much as I did. As well, even though the environment was established to suppress these types of feelings, self-criticism is a habit that has been ingrained into my performance practice (i.e. always telling myself that I can play this better) and may never be undone or may take years to undo. However, understanding the environment and working to set the critic aside may be the necessary step when participating as an improviser.

As explained by Turino (2008), the participatory environment supports “a diminished self-consciousness, because (ideally) everyone present is similarly engaged” (p. 29), making it a safe space for beginning improvisation teachers such as myself to practice their improvisational skills. I believe that improvising in such spaces which de-emphasizes the “teacher,” promotes the facilitator and participant, and supports a communal effort of exploration, rather than working towards a polished performance, can begin to remedy my lack of improvisation experience and

build my confidence in my own improvisational skills, helping me move past self-doubt and criticism. While I understand that the focus of music education is not for the development of the teacher, a teacher such as myself who has received very little experience improvising through my music education experience, can create an environment that can both provide students with the opportunity to improvise but also help the teacher feel confident in bringing improvisation into their classrooms.

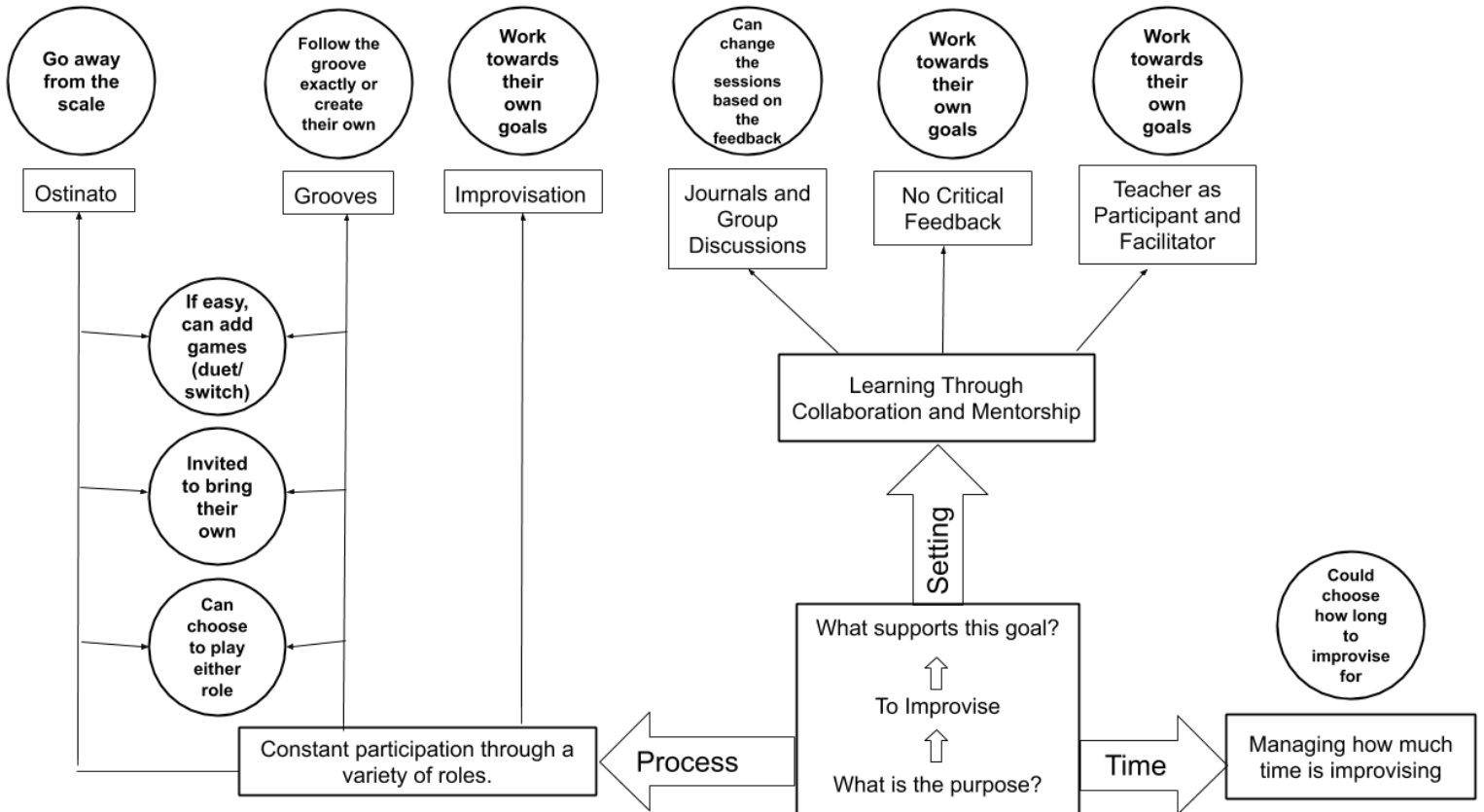
### **Improvisation Can Thrive Within Structure and Freedom**

The fourth and final conclusion that I drew from the findings was that the participants improvised successfully, meaning they demonstrated risk-taking, developed short-term and long-term goals and even met some of these goals, in an environment based on the balance between structure and freedom. I consciously developed an environment for improvisation away from presentational goals and assessment. Because this research was not conducted in a traditional classroom, there was no pressure from the curriculum, administration, parents, or peers in regards to my choices specifically towards the exclusion of assessment and performance. In order to de-emphasize these values, I implemented both a participatory and an M-base lens focused on one broad purpose: to improvise. In support of this purpose, the following supporting structures were created and implemented: process, setting, and time management. The image below (Figure 5.1) depicts the relationship between the three supporting structures (process, setting, and time), which are represented by squares, against the flexibilities given to participants, represented by the circles.

The third role, improvisation, although confined to the structure of each ostinato in terms of key signature, time, and groove, also provided an immense amount of freedom by allowing participants to make decisions about their own improvisations. Because I did not assign specific

**Figure 5.1**

*Road Map of Structure and Flexibility*



goals or outcomes for their improvisations, the participants were able to make their own choices, such as: (a) playing away from the scale provided or playing only the scale which was provided, (b) working on arc development, and (c) prioritizing a more rhythmic improvisation over a melodic improvisation. Such self-guided decisions created the flexibility for each participant to start where they were comfortable musically with respect to improvisation, rather than fulfilling a prescribed outcome.

The second supporting structure came from implementing a collaborative setting, rather than a teacher-directed or curricular focused setting. The structure was based on the researcher’s role of being both a facilitator and participant, using journals and group discussions in each

session in a repetitive manner, and by providing positive exploratory feedback. As researchers have suggested and, in accordance to M-base and participatory values, I placed myself in the roles of participant and facilitator during the sessions (Beegle, 2010; Burnard, 2002, Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Whitcomb, 2013; Willox et al., 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Moving among these roles allowed me to improvise, guide the sessions, and provide exploratory feedback. The participants found that my participation as an improviser and the absence of a dominant teacher role created a comfortable environment for them to improvise and also allowed them to make their own decisions regarding what they wanted to achieve. In addition, the collaborative process allowed the sessions to be flexible in meeting the needs of the group through the use of journals and group discussions. The participants found that both of these options provided the space for different types of feedback. Through this collaboration, I made changes to the sessions (i.e. duet game and switch game) based on participant feedback. The flexibility within this structured approach, gained by removing specific outcomes, also allowed each session to adapt to the needs of the participants. This process aligns with the idea that improvisation is better suited to exploration rather than conforming to a checklist style of assessment (Higgins & Mantie, 2013).

The final supporting structure for improvisation was time management. Although this supporting structure was initially created through the seemingly simple allocation of time for improvisation in each session, I soon discovered that the flexibility of the environment allowed me to further distribute more amounts of time in favour of improvisation. During the study, the amount of time spent improvising was determined in several ways: (a) deciding collectively during the group pre-discussion, (b) not deciding collectively but instead allowing the individual participants to choose, (c) the facilitator deciding the length by reviewing the video and adding a

timer, and (d) the facilitator purposely spending less time workshopping the ostinatos and grooves. The students also found that spending time improvising (as opposed to learning a melody or the ostinato) and specifically having a set amount of time (4-minute timer) was preferred, as it set clear boundaries, removed participants' guilt around either taking too much or too little time improvising, and allowed them to move beyond conventional ideas.

### **Summary**

As Chapter 4 demonstrated, not only were the participants given the opportunity to develop as musicians in this environment, but they also displayed enjoyment, engagement, and had fun improvising. While these outcomes may seem secondary from an educational standpoint, they serve to demonstrate that the social environment we created in this study nurtured the conditions for creativity to flourish (Amabile, 2017). This study was conducted away from a school environment, and while it was not conceived to develop improvisation assessment criteria, I can confidently say, based on my previous years of teaching experience, that the participants displayed many learning outcomes typical to those found in a classroom (Burnard & Dragovic, 2014; Burnard, 2002; Wall, 2018; Willox et al., 2011). Participants were able to improvise in various grooves, keys, and time signatures, demonstrated ear training by learning ostinatos and grooves by ear, and improved their musical communication skills during their duet playing (See Table 5.1). The participants also felt that the sessions were comfortable and liberating. As a result, they demonstrated risk-taking and short-term and long-term personal goal setting. These successes, in addition to the ones listed earlier, were not inspired by the goals of a performance, nor assessment outcomes, nor a teacher instructing them on what to do, but through the environment of structure and flexibility, guided by collaboration, time, and participation.

**Table 5.1***Saskatchewan Jazz 30 Curricular Outcomes (2012)*

Indicator	Outcome
CR30.1 (e)	Take personal and musical risks by trying new ways to express oneself in the jazz idiom, using new ideas, new concepts, and a variety of styles.
CR30.1 (b)	Respond to the rest of the ensemble (e.g., their tone, pitch, dynamics, style, rhythm, time, balance, and blend).
CP30.3 (e)	Students should be able to play two octaves: dorian, mixolydian, and blues in all 12 keys.

In addition to creating a space for students to improvise, the play between the structures and flexibilities of the environment enabled the participation and development of a wide spectrum of improvisational abilities, thereby supporting differentiated learning. The participants came into this study with varying degrees of improvisational experience, from almost none to regular improvisation practice. For example, while a specific scale was assigned for an ostinato, some participants chose to play only the scale during their entire improvisation, while others attempted to go away from the assigned scale. As well, some participants made the decision to alter the ostinatos and grooves, while others did not. While not a requirement of the study, participants also demonstrated short-term and long-term goal setting for themselves, as seen in their discussion and interview data such as: (a) prioritizing rhythm over the notes of the scale, (b) improving listening skills (mimicking and learning by ear), and (c) creating a cohesive beginning, middle, and end during their improvisation. While some participants were able to create these goals, a few participants were still adapting to the overall experience of improvising, further allowing a variety of musical abilities to come together while also demonstrating independent growth. Regardless of this spectrum of experience, those with little experience were able to participate and improvise alongside those with much more experience. This observation



aligns with Turino's (2008) explanation of the participatory field of music, saying that "participatory traditions differ fundamentally in that anyone and everyone is welcome to perform" (p. 30), further explaining that:

If there were only simple roles, people who are deeply engaged with music and dance would likely become bored and not want to participate. If everyone is to be attracted, a participatory tradition will have a variety of roles that differ in difficulty and degrees of specialization required. (p. 30)

The degrees of difficulty found in this environment are also the reason why I, a musician with many years of experience, was also able to improvise and learn alongside the participants.

### **Recommendations for Teachers and Teacher-Researchers**

During this study, participants improvised in an environment founded on participatory (Monteiro, 2016; Randles, Griffis, & Ruiz, 2015; Thibeault, 2015) and M-base lenses and non-traditional school expectations (Burnard, 2002; Burnard & Dragovic; 2014; Wall, 2018, Willox et al., 2011). The findings from this study contribute to the intersection of participatory and M-base improvisation and action research – until now, a virtually non-existent space. The action research methodology that I used was fundamentally both reflective and evolutionary; providing me the opportunity to build and reflect on prior knowledge and current pedagogy. This methodology allowed me to explore, understand, and build upon my current pedagogy of improvisation while questioning perhaps the most normalized structure used in music education: large presentational ensembles. While the reflective findings and conclusions drawn from the research are unique to my own practice and are not generalizations that can be transferred to all teaching situations, I am able to provide tentative recommendations for teachers and teacher-

researchers looking to improve their pedagogy of music education with which they might experiment in a similar manner (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Stringer, 2014).

The first recommendation, suggested by many scholars, is for teachers and teacher-researchers to ask powerful questions. As Myers (2017) suggests, “the truly powerful questions, if we are willing to confront them, have to do with rethinking and reinventing a predominant music educational structural culture” (p. 17). Based on this idea, I recommend the following: That teachers ask questions about the balance in their current pedagogy of music education between presentational and participatory outcomes, and ask specifically who is being served by such outcomes. While my study is not a method that can be copied and pasted to someone else's setting and practice, I also recommend that teachers who want their students to learn to improvise commit to the following:

1. Create an environment for improvisation whose purpose and main priority is indeed improvisation.

Being less focused on perfecting ostinatos and grooves in order to provide more time for improvisation allowed the participants to improvise immediately, even if they were absent from a previous session or could not fully play the ostinato. As well, dedicating significant time to improvisation allowed the participants to become more creative and comfortable.

I would also recommend that teachers experiment with the following pedagogical approaches that I found to be the most beneficial:

2. Become a facilitator for improvisation and a participant alongside the students.
3. Allow students to become collaborators through journals and group discussions.
4. Provide a variety of musical roles as they allow for constant participation and cloaking.
5. Use a timer; time how long students spend on improvising and then add to this.

I believe these are useful suggestions because each suggestion demonstrated, to me, methods that could be added in any educational setting. It is also interesting to note that these suggestions are approaches that I have never used as a teacher.

For those teachers interested in contributing to the research on music education, Myers (2017) also suggests that researchers “continually interrogate their own work around issues of value-added scrutiny as it pertains to *progress in understanding*, rather than mere information building” (p. 23). In this statement, Myers is encouraging researchers to not only critically question the value of our education programs, but expand available research and teacher-inquiry, instead of limiting it. I believe, therefore, that the next steps based on this research study would be to conduct similar studies in which the parameters are slightly altered. For example, taking more time for the research to unfold and develop, as well as moving this approach into a school where other challenges (such as administrative expectations) arise. Such adjustments or alterations would allow teachers to approach improvisation and action research within their own settings, while also expanding the literature on action research in music education, as well as beginning the conversation surrounding M-base and participatory music-making in school settings.

### **Personal Recommendations**

The action research methodology used in this study allowed me to analyze my personal practice of improvisation, both as a musician and a teacher. As well, I was able to create and implement a successful environment for improvisation that all the participants, myself included, found to be fun and engaging. Through this experience, I was able to discover that my past pedagogy had more problems than I initially thought, while also realizing the importance and challenges of becoming a facilitator and participant, and researcher. Based on the overall positive

findings set against the brevity of the study, I will be seeking out opportunities to continue using and developing this process, both in non-traditional settings and school settings, over a more substantial period of time, such as a term or an academic year. I recognize that some of the key aspects of this study would certainly create tensions as I seek to balance the roles of teacher, facilitator, and participant. Such balance would require care and diligence when approaching research in a school setting because of the expectations placed upon teachers, such as curriculum outcomes and assessment, which may alter the entire ethos of the study.

## **Conclusion**

Action research is a research methodology that strives to challenge the status-quo, while improvisation fosters a “willingness to forge one’s identity through actions that do not aim at demonstrating what one has already gained, but rather at surrendering to the openness of discovery” (Kanellopoulos, 2007, p. 112). As both Turino (2008) and music education specialist Thomas Regelski (2009) have acknowledged, the performance-based approaches to music in both North American society and education are singularly focused on the development of presentational skills. Consequently, music educators, myself included, have fallen into habitual teaching methods and techniques linked specifically to the performance of printed notation. The most unfortunate repercussion from continuing this predominant pedagogy is that opportunities for exploring and understanding music-making through different contexts such as composition, improvisation, and informal, community, and popular music-making are frequently pushed aside in schools (Green, 2008b; Regelski, 2009; Thibeault, 2015).

Having recognized this focus within my own past experiences of music education, I decided to confront this problem. This study focused on the development of my personal pedagogy of improvisation through the lenses of Turino’s (2008) participatory field of music and

of the characteristics of the M-base collective (Clayton, 2009; Coleman, 2015) and an action research methodology. In analyzing and interpreting the research data and explaining the findings, I came to understand that the structures and flexibilities of these approaches created a comfortable environment for the participants to improvise, take risks, set goals, communicate, and be creative. This study also allowed me to better understand my personal pedagogy of improvisation and has opened the door for continuous reflection which will now challenge me to take action in hopes of making a better music education program for all students.

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## **APPENDIX A: GROUP DISCUSSION SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

1. What went well? (give examples and explain why)
2. What did not go well? (give examples and explain why)
3. Through my/your eyes, what was exciting and new?
4. My thoughts about the session were ...

**APPENDIX B: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL HEADINGS**

Date	Event/Approach Used	Details of what happened	Thoughts on the session in general	Personal Feelings
			I liked.... I wish.... I wonder...	

## APPENDIX C: VIDEO CHECKLIST

1. What do you wish to observe?
2. What are the features of the event?
3. Are the goals of the lesson clear?
4. What is the role of the teacher?
5. Are students involved/interested?
6. Who is doing the talking?
7. What type of utterances are made?
8. What type of questions are asked (convergent/divergent)?
9. What type of pupil involvement is there?
10. What is the pace?
11. What style of classroom/pupil organization is used?
12. What negative features of this performance present themselves?
13. What nonverbal behavior is present?
14. Are the voices clear?
15. Is the language formal/informal?
16. What mannerisms are evident?
17. Do any distractions occur?
18. What things have you learned from this analysis?

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### General Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself as a musician and your past experiences with improvisation.
2. Tell me about your overall experience with the sessions:
  - a) Could you please describe the most memorable experience from the sessions.  
Why was this event memorable for you? Were there any other moments during the sessions that stuck out in particular? Please explain why.
  - b) Could you please describe a challenging or difficult moment from one of the sessions? Was there anything about the sessions that you disliked?
3. Why did you decide to participate in the sessions? Why do you want to learn how to improvise?
4. In your journal you have said that your definition of improvisation has/has not changed. Could you please further explain why your definition has/has not changed?
5. If you had to take one technique or idea away from the sessions and apply it to another musical or non-musical situation in your life, what would it be? Please feel free to elaborate.

### How Improvisation was Taught

#### Teacher as Participant and Facilitator

1. Can you please describe your previous experiences with improvisation.
2. Have you experienced a situation where any of your teachers improvised alongside you in an improvisational setting? If yes, could you explain this experience? If no, why do you think teachers do not participate in improvisational opportunities?
3. What was it like having me as a participant in the improvisation?



4. Who would you say is your improvisation mentor? Why?
5. As the facilitator, every week I had to prepare a lesson plan and an ostinato in order to build a jam session. Even though this was part of my responsibility, I suggested that anyone could bring in an ostinato. Was this something that you were interested in doing? If yes or no, please explain why you did not.

#### M-base and Participatory Teaching Techniques

1. What did you think of the approaches used towards learning how to improvise?  
(In terms of having no melody, learning the ostinato by ear, a short form, having one specific scale assigned, spending time in one ostinato and groove, grooves inspired by YouTube files, creating our grooves, density by having multiple people playing, everyone having a role).
2. Describe the experience of learning the ostinatos, forms, and scales by ear.
  - a) After the first session, I sent out the ostinatos, forms and scales in an email in notation. How did you approach using this resource?
3. Are the overall approaches to learning improvisation in this situation similar or different to how you have learned improvisation in your school or large ensemble setting? How? Describe how the approaches....
4. During the sessions you were given the choice to play percussion or the ostinatos. Please explain your choices to play either option in certain situations.
5. During the third session you improvised at the same time as someone else. Could you please describe this experience?

6. Is there anything that you would like to add or comment on in regards to the musical techniques that we used during the sessions that were based on M-base and participatory music?

### Journals and Discussion

1. What are your thoughts about the process of writing in journals after each session?
2. Could you please describe any experiences in a classroom in high school where you or other students had the opportunity to influence the learning process. What did that feel like? Is it something you would like to do more of? Why? Or why not? What changes do you think would take place if teachers adopted this process in the classroom?
3. What did you think about the process of discussing the improvisations before and the discussion after each improvisation?
4. During the jams and discussions, did you feel that you were able to adequately voice your ideas and thoughts?

### **Where Improvisation was Taught**

1. What did you think about the experience of learning improvisation away from the school setting? Would you change or keep anything in regards to the setting?
2. If you were to compare the experience of learning improvisation in school with this experience, what are the most significant differences or similarities?
3. Do you think that the methods we used to learn improvisation could work in your school?
4. How important do you think it is to include improvisation in school music programs?
5. How do you practice improvisation at home?

### **Why Improvisation was Taught**

1. Have you previously improvised in a performance setting? How does it compare to improvising at school during your large ensemble rehearsals?
2. Do you like receiving feedback or comments on your improvisations from teachers?
3. Do you like receiving feedback or comments on your improvisations from peers? Please explain why or why not.
4. How important is assessment in music to you? Please explain.
5. Do you think that teachers should assess students' improvisations? Please explain why or why not.
6. How would you assess or grade a class based on improvisation?
7. What are you assessed on during an improvisation in your school curriculum? Do you think that if I was assessing your improvisation based on this criteria, you would have changed your improvisation or that it would have changed the experience? Why or why not?

### **Group Relationship**

1. Was there anything about the group setting that was particularly challenging?
2. Was there anything about the group setting that was enjoyable?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the other participants before beginning the study? How would you describe your relationship with your peers after the study?
4. How would you describe the group's dynamic - energy, attentiveness, positivity, discussions, engagement - during the study?
5. Did you feel like your opinions were respected by others during the group discussions?

6. Did you feel at times that you were able to respond musically to what another participant was doing?

### **Imagine...**

1. Imagine that these sessions were intended to prepare for a performance for your parents and peers. Our performance would be at the Bassment and we would be performing the ostinatos and improvising on the ostinatos. How would you have approached these sessions?
2. Imagine that these sessions were a part of a class in your school, with the same teacher and students (Let's call it Improvisation 10/20/30). What would this look like? What do you think would change or remain the same? What would you like this class to look like?
3. Imagine we had a few more sessions. What would you like to see or do in these sessions?
4. Imagine you brought an ostinato to one of the jam sessions. How would you create this ostinato? How would you teach your peers the jam and what steps would you take to teach this?

### **Final Questions**

1. As a high school student, if you could give any advice to music teachers teaching improvisation, what would you suggest, say, or comment on? (positive or negative)
2. Have there been any changes to the way you think about your improvisation?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

# APPENDIX E: NOTATED OSTINATOS

## Research Bass Lines

Various  
S. Suchan

### Misirlou



### 17 D Minor Scale



### 19 Come and See

D Dorian Scale



### 23 Chameleon

B-flat Blues Scale



### 27 Fire Emblem



### 29 G Minor Scale



2

### Hide and Seek



34



38



42



46 B Blues Scale



## APPENDIX F: INVITATION AND LETTER OF CONSENT



Appendix B: Initial Meeting, Recruitment Instrument and Consent Form

### Exploring Improvisation Pedagogy Based on Participatory and M-base Characteristics

For the completion of Sarah Suchan's Master in Music Education from Brandon  
University

I am inviting you as an experienced high school jazz musician to participate in a research project that will explore my personal teaching methods of improvisation. This study will develop a process-oriented and student-centered practice while also questioning how, why, and where improvisation is taught for secondary students. This research aims not only to refine my pedagogy for improvisation but also create a space for students to engage with improvisation in an inclusive environment while fostering creativity and the lifelong skills to become active musicians within their community.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Band Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Email: \_\_\_\_\_ (only if under the age of 18)

Instrument: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex (M/F): \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been playing the instrument you play in ? \_\_\_\_\_



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270 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Brandon MB, Canada R7A 6A9 204.727.7388 Music@BrandonU.ca

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Appendix B: Initial Meeting, Recruitment Instrument and Consent Form

**Participant Consent Form**

January 2020

Dear [Name of Participant],

My name is Sarah Suchan and I am conducting research as part of my Master of Music Education degree at Brandon University. As a member of [REDACTED], you have demonstrated an interest in music, jazz, and improvisation. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project. The purpose of this research project is to better understand my personal methods of teaching improvisation to high school students through the formation of a group with musicians from [REDACTED]. My thesis committee consists of Dr. Sheelagh Chadwick (Chair), Michael Cain and Dean McNeill.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be invited to be a part of 8 weekly two-hour sessions over the course of a minimum of two months (February 8th 2020 - March 28th 2020) Depending on school breaks and individual availability, the 8 sessions may take up to three months to complete.

During the research, you will be asked to attend every session, play your instrument, improvise and discuss and provide feedback in a reflective journal and in a group setting. After 8 sessions, each participant will be invited to participate in an interview with the researcher at a time and location that is convenient for you. This interview is entirely voluntary and will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interview will be based on questions of clarification of reflective comments from journals and overall thoughts and comments of the sessions. The weekly sessions will be video recorded and the interviews will be audio recorded. Data from the journals, interviews, and group discussions will be used to inform me about my teaching approaches to improvisation which will allow me to reflect and plan the next session.

During the study, only the researcher will have access to this data which will be stored securely after every session at the researcher's home in a filing cabinet. While the journals will remain anonymous, the researcher will protect your privacy and confidentiality of the discussion data and interview data by the use of a different name (a code). After the thesis is completed, the expected date for all of the data (videos, journals, and interviews) to be deleted from my computer and recording device and the transcript to be shredded is August 31st 2020.

The benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to help shape the way secondary students learn improvisation through discussions and reflection by exploring, playing and learning about improvisation in an alternative approach (different from those you may have experienced in jazz band) over 8 weeks. This opportunity will also provide additional practice of improvisation on your instrument, as well as an opportunity to discuss the ideas of improvisation with the other members [REDACTED]. A possible risk of being a participant could be in regards to the time commitment involved and balancing your other school commitments. There are no costs involved in participating in the project, nor any payment offered.



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

270 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Brandon MB, Canada R7A 6A9 204.727.7388 Music@BrandonU.ca

BrandonU.ca





Appendix B: Initial Meeting, Recruitment Instrument and Consent Form

Your participation in this project is **entirely voluntary** and you have the right to withdraw and withdrawal your data from the research at anytime. There will be no negative consequences if you refuse to participate during the research or withdraw at anytime during the research. By consenting to participate in the research you have not waived your rights to any rights to legal recourse in the event of research related harm. Your consent to participate will expire when the research data collection ends, on April 30th 2020. Should you wish to withdraw from the research at any point, please contact me or Dr. Chadwick (contact information at the bottom) who will provide you, in a timely manner, the information needed to withdraw.

At the conclusion of this study, the information collected will be used to analyze and reflect on my personal pedagogy, which will be shared publicly as a thesis document. You may also request an electronic copy of the thesis. The researcher will ask the participants during the first session if they would like to be notified and sent a copy of the thesis once the research is completed.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research itself or the methods used, please contact myself, [redacted] or Dr. Sheelagh Chadwick, [redacted]. You can also contact the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee at [redacted] regarding any possible ethical issues or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sarah Suchan

I have read and understood the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name	Participant's signature	Parent's/Guardian's Consent (only if under the age of 18)
_____		
Date		





## APPENDIX G: SESSION #1 LESSON PLAN

**Method(s):** a groove and ostinato that is short and open form - repetition in one form - no melody. Dense textures - everyone playing something during the improvisation.

**Outcome(s):** By implementing this method, the students will be able to improvise.

**Expected Time:** Set up - 5 minutes, Explaining - 25 minutes, Jamming - 60 minutes (broken into two 25-minute improvisations with a 10 minute break), Reflection - 30 minutes (this is a lot of time, but won't know until the first time how long this actually takes), Take down - 5 minutes

**Materials:** student journals, researcher journals, pencils, video camera, audio-recorder, laptop, speakers, drum set, extra percussion instruments (djembes, jam block, toms), piano, bass amp and extension cords.

### Set up:

1. Video camera
2. Audio-recording
3. Sitting in a circle - making sure everyone can see the rhythm section.
4. Rhythm section
5. Laptop and speakers

### Welcome:

1. Who I am: brief background information/my interest in improvisation and in teaching.
2. Who they are: brief introduction of everyone.
3. What roles I will have: teacher-research/facilitator/participant.
4. What kind of atmosphere we should expect and uphold every session: Comments are not from the critical musician, but from the exploratory one - thinking not what was bad, but what can we do instead or change if we don't like something?

## 5. Definitions

- a) Form: road map of music
- b) Ostinato: a repeated pattern
- c) Groove: rhythm based
- d) Key Centers: even with chords changing, the ability to play within one key (scale)

Explain - the biggest difference is that we are going to remove fast chord changes.

This is not to say that they are not there, but that we will be thinking in terms of key centers. - one scale throughout. For example, Caravan A section only one scale can be used for this whole A section even though it is switching between three chords.

## 6. What we will be doing:

- a) Share the diagram of Participatory/Presentational/M-base and how these will be the foundation of the ideas that we use when improvising
- b) Reflective process of planning for the next session - your comments will help plan the next session (group discussion and the journals).
- c) Remember, this is a non-traditional setting: we are not here for assessment or to plan for a performance. The best thing we can do is be here in the moment (to play our instruments, learn about improvisation, play in a small group and practice).

## 7. M-base and Participatory Main Concepts:

- a) Everyone should have a job during the jam
- b) Everyone will be given equal time to improvise
- c) One major goal is to improvise for as long as possible without stopping.

First things first before we start - I want you to write in your journals:

How do you define improvisation?

Improvisation is...

Brief introduction of everyone\*

**Jam #1:**

1. Bring a groove and ostinato that is a short and open form (in an easy key): demonstrate to the participants the drum groove and form.
2. Have the participants all clap the drum patterns of the groove (bass line, the high-hat line, the tom line, the ride line)
3. Demonstrate the ostinato
4. Demonstrate the scale - have all the students play the scale together -have all the students play the ostinato together (do this by just repeating until everyone has it- no numbers)
5. Divide who wants to play what parts during others improvisations - variety of roles (everyone should be doing something - adding to the density of the sound)
6. Decide the order of improvisations once the groove and form is set.
7. Improvise and repeat - adding ideas or subtracting ideas if it is too difficult.

**Jam #2:**

1. Create a new short and open form (in the same key). Repeat 1-7 of Jam #1
2. Idea for more exploration : *switch between these two grooves*: Challenge ourselves to go back and forth between these two ostinatos while improvising. Start with 16 measures in each before switching, 8 measures in each before switching, 4 measures in each before switching, then allowing the rhythm section the choice to switch when they want - communicating this with eye and body contact.

**Reflection: Group Discussion**

*Reminder: keep track of time and ensure that every participant who wants to, has the opportunity to talk.*

Set up in a circle

1. Establish the ground rules:

a) respect towards each other and all opinions - for example not interrupting someone/letting others talk/not one person dominating the group discussion.

2. Ask open-ended questions

*Reminder: ask students to elaborate or explain in detail their answers*

a) What went well? (give examples and explain why) b) What did not go well? (give examples and explain why) c) Through my/your eyes, what was exciting and new? d) My thoughts about the session were ...

3. Summarizing the groups' thoughts

**Reflection: Journals**

*Reminder: anonymous journals - this means I do not want you to hand it to me and do not put your name in it either. Maybe put a symbol at the top that will remind you that this journal is yours for next week when you need to pick it up.*

1. Explain the headlines of their journal (optional to do, but would help cross reference anything you said during the discussion, or if there was anything you did not get to say during the discussion you can put it down here).

Date	Detailed Event/Approach Used	Thoughts on the improvisation/ improvisation technique (expected/unexpected)	Personal Feelings and Reactions
		I liked...	

		I wish...		
		I wonder...		

2. Once the participants are doing their journals, I will also reflect on the jam session in a journal with the following headlines:

Date	Event/Approach Used	Details of what happened	Thoughts on the session in general	Personal Feelings
			I liked.... I wish.... I wonder...	

**Possible Roadblocks:**

The jam is *too easy* - or students feel “bored” - suggestions how to make it more difficult with games (See below)

The jam is *too hard* - or students feel “overwhelmed” - suggestions to make it easier by limiting note choice for that participant.

**Time management** - I spend too much time talking or go over time - suggestions to follow time - set a timer (if not for the explaining/jam/reflection but for sure to signal the end of the session so that we do not go over time - or establish a timekeeper).

If you come up with an idea for an ostinato, send it to myself and I will pass it on to the rhythm section who can be prepared to play it. Or if you wish, we can send this ostinato out and we can create a melody. Bring in bass line

## Too Easy:

1. Diatonic vs. Non-diatonic: can you purposely go away from the key - away on purpose - then back to the key on an important downbeat.
2. Games:
  - a) Addition: Going up and down the scale as fast as possible/Add a rest for 5 beats (5x)/Play intervals only.
  - b) Subtraction: Taking away 2 notes/Take away the key center - 4 measures have to be played in a different key.
  - c) Melody Improv Pass

Version 1: Create a melody together - anytime you hear this melody in someone's improvisation, that means they are done and the improvisation passes on to the person to their right/left.

Version 2: Everyone has a short melody assigned to them - can be popular ones (i.e. Twinkle Twinkle is my melody, so if someone plays it during their improvisation, the improvisation gets passed to me).



**APPENDIX H: M-BASE, PARTICIPATORY, AND PRESENTATIONAL MUSICAL  
CHARACTERISTICS**

	<b>M-Base</b>	<b>Participatory</b>	<b>Presentational</b>	<b>Technique for Improvisation</b>
Forms	Short forms that are open, yet scripted to a certain degree	Short and open forms	Long and scripted forms	Technique # 4: Removal of obstacle
Groove, Meter and Harmony	Constant rhythm, meter, and groove. May change to another groove in the song. Cyclical harmonic pattern	Constant rhythm, meter and groove	Variability of rhythms/meter possible	Technique # 4: Removal of obstacle
Texture and Contrast	Dense textures	Dense textures and few dramatic contrasts	Transparent textures emphasized; varied textures and density for contrast	Technique # 4: Removal of obstacle
Beginnings and Endings	-	“Feathered” beginnings and endings	Organized beginnings and endings	-
Variation	-	Intensive variation	Extensive variation available	-

**APPENDIX I: M-BASE, PARTICIPATORY AND PRESENTATIONAL  
CHARACTERISTICS**

	<b>M-Base</b>	<b>Participatory</b>	<b>Presentational</b>	<b>Musical Futures</b>	<b>Technique for Improvisation</b>
<b>Process: How do these groups approach music-making</b>	Ideas of collaboration are communicated within the group and decisions are made together.	Mentorship approach to learning and playing music with both peers and mentors.	Director takes the approach towards values and ideas.	Through collaboration and peer learning. Teacher acts as facilitator.	Technique #1: Group Collaboration  Technique #2: Role of Teacher
<b>Purpose of group/goal</b>	To discover self, creativity and work on personal development.	To have as many participants as possible. The energy during the activity itself is more important than its presentation.	To perform for an audience. (Preparation of music for maximum interest for others)	To be engaged holistically in the music making.	Technique #2: Role of Teacher
<b>How much is improvisation valued</b>	Improvisation is one of the foundational pillars.	Room for improvisation but soloistic improvisation is not encouraged.	Values improvisation in certain genres and styles.	Improvisation is valued but not a focus.	
<b>Notation</b>	Sometimes used. The bassline and drum pattern might be written out	Not used	Used	Not used	Technique #3: Learning by ear
<b>Compositions</b>	Uses their own compositions: may work on a bass line or ostinato that is then worked on together as a group.	Pieces are a collection of resources refashioned anew in each performance. Uses the same songs repeated at certain ceremonies (standards in a sense)	Uses another composer's music which is picked by the director	Uses popular music that the students pick and know	
<b>Dancing</b>	Not for dancing	For dancing	Not for dancing	No for or against	
<b>Individual Development</b>	Individual virtuosity emphasized	Individual virtuosity downplayed	Individual virtuosity emphasized		

<b>Roles</b>	A variety of roles	A variety of roles	Specific set role within the written notation		Technique # 4: Removal of obstacles
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## APPENDIX J: FORMAL REQUEST TO BASSMENT

### Formal Request

February 2020

Dear Mr. Dave Knight,

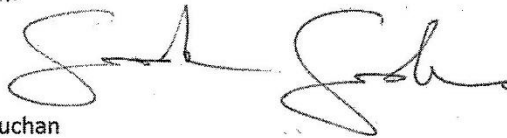
My name is Sarah Suchan and I am conducting research as part of my Master of Music Education degree at Brandon University. This letter is a request to use the Bassment as a location to conduct my research.

The purpose of this research project is to better understand my personal methods of teaching improvisation to high school students. One major benefit of this study is that both the researcher and the participants have the opportunity to shape the way secondary students are taught and learn improvisation through exploration, discussion, and reflection. The group will consist of no more than 8 students from Saskatoon and its surrounding communities and will meet for 8 two-hour sessions throughout March and April. Depending on school breaks and individual availability, the sessions may take up to three months to complete. My thesis committee consists of Dr. Sheelagh Chadwick (Chair), Michael Cain and Dean McNeill.

The Bassment would be an ideal location for this research because of its central location in Saskatoon, its acoustics, its welcoming atmosphere, and its heritage as a venue that embraces jazz and improvisatory music in general. The opportunity to play in this space is a unique experience that some students may never receive during their time as a high school musician. By allowing this partnership, the students will experience playing their instruments in a space which was designed with sound production and acoustics in mind. The size of the stage allows for a more intimate setting for a small group, quickly allowing the students to feel comfortable and at ease. Finally, as the Bassment is the leading venue for jazz in Saskatoon, the students will form a connection which may influence their attendance at future concerts and jams.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the research itself or the methods used. I can be reached at [REDACTED] or via e-mail at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



Sarah Suchan