

# **A Plea for an Experimental Approach to Teaching Improvisation: Enhancing Creativity and Student Ownership**

## **Introduction: Desire, Creativity and Improvisational Pedagogy**

I want to explore the possibility of an improvisational pedagogy that can engage more directly and explicitly with creativity. There are two reasons for my desire to focus on creativity. The first reason is that, in my experience, many jazz students are interested in higher music education precisely because they want to develop creatively as improvisers, within whatever idiomatic constraints they may ultimately feel most at home, and whether or not this interest is also circumscribed by more pragmatic concerns. Thus it seems important for me as a teacher to be able to demonstrate and validate the usefulness of teaching strategies that can in fact initiate creative development, in order to meet the needs of all my students. The second reason is that a pedagogy that focuses explicitly on creative processes, what I will call an experimental approach, seems to be a prolific strategy for improving students' metacognitive competence, thus making it more likely for them to own their learning. The way I use this approach engages, on the one hand, with practices of musical experimentation that can draw attention to dimensions of complexity, indeterminacy and interactivity in ways that differ from more formal or reductionist approaches. On the other hand, I also emphasize the development of reflective skills that can work to empower the student in his or her personal approach to creativity. In fact, these two aspects of *musical and reflective experimentation* should ideally be practiced together since they mutually enhance each other.

Some teachers and administrators will perhaps argue that musical creativity is primarily a matter of personal preference, and therefore it should be up to each student to explore on his or her own. Others may claim that programs in higher music education should above all accommodate for professionalism and career goals, and that personal creativity should be considered a more secondary aspect when compared to societal responsibilities and capabilities. It seems to me however that it is imperative to prepare for musical profession without relying on reifications of "tradition", "genre", "style" or "knowledge" because these will diminish the potential for personal creativity. And avoiding such reification seems to require that we approach both the concepts and skills improvisation more experimentally. Nor need pragmatic concerns have to be alienated from creative processes because the latter are closely linked to aspects of personal development, such as self-knowledge and awareness, which are certainly essential to skillfully living a life, including as a professional musician. Although some students may not initially recognize the benefits of experimental pedagogy it could very well be the responsibility of teachers, backed up by departments and curriculums, to demonstrate its usefulness and validity also to professionalism. Indeed, I will argue that experimental methods are highly effective for creating non-authoritarian learning environments and as such they empower the students to own their learning, surely an important reason in itself to take them into account. Finally, among musicians there is sometimes an unwillingness to acknowledge aspects of personal development as being beneficial for progressing as an instrumentalist (including the voice). Yet this should not restrain improvisational pedagogy from exploring how experimental methods might in fact, despite the resistance, prove advantageous not only to career goals but also to instrumental mastery.

Creativity is often associated with the idea of "valuable innovation", a concept which sometimes is useful also in a musical setting. However, I would not want to

restrict potential uses of the word creativity when teaching improvisation. In fact, personally I do not find definitional attempts necessary in order to get things done, at least not pedagogically speaking. Rather, what seems more productive when teaching is to be able to suggest various ways of *thinking about* creativity (and of course about improvisation and other things too), but doing so in ways which allow each student to connect to his or her own interests and capabilities. For many musicians creativity in music has to do with that which is perceived as somehow rewarding, interesting, challenging, exciting, intensive, and so on, whether or not the music would also be regarded as innovative by a larger community of practitioners or within the historicized framework of musicologists and journalists. The musician's approach to creativity implies precisely an "experience of creativity" that is highly dependent on personal interests and skills, relying on expectations and habits, as it were, rather than on objective judgement. Ignoring this experiential approach in favour of more theoretical or academic arguments is perhaps to miss the point when dealing with pedagogical challenges.

In my view, the experimental approach emphasizes above all the experiment itself, in its specificity, in contrast to those forms of theoretization and objectification that tend towards generalizing representations. As such, the experimental approach is based on a respect for the particular, for example in the form every student's own interests and tastes. I prefer to think that my role as a teacher involves a responsibility to avoid passing objective judgements on music, for example whether or not it should be considered "creative". Yet I also try to communicate to my students that we do not always have to be satisfied with, or even identify with, particular opinions and judgements. Discovering whether or not something attracts us can be a stepping stone to another deeper process that involves seeing *how* and *to what extent* our desires or needs are in fact being fulfilled by this or that piece of music or way of playing. I try to teach that we can always ask more questions about what we desire and feel; how we perceive; how we think; and so on. This process also entails that we can in fact *change* our ways of desiring, feeling, perceiving and thinking, not least through the very process of mindfully exploring our own experiences.<sup>1</sup> In other words, if the teacher should first and foremost respect every student's autonomy and integrity, in terms of needs, feelings

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<sup>1</sup> I see *desire* as the driving force of creativity, and indeed of evolution. This view is inspired on the one hand by Marshall Rosenberg's (xxx) concept of *Non-Violent Communication*, and on the other hand by Gilles Deleuze's readings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson (Deleuze XXX). It is desire – the force of affect, of attraction – that impels us to be creative. It is the force or "want" itself that is fundamental, whereas particular needs (and of course any specific strategies to meet those needs) always arise "with" or "after" desire, like its shadow. A particular need is how desire will present itself to a living being. But needs can be changed, varied and created, whereas desire (qua force) is always there, even if in a state of suppression or stillness. "Needs" and "interests" are therefore not expressions of lack but expressions of desire, and this means that desire can never be reduced to "a particular desire" (qua need). Moreover, if desire is endless - which could be seen as a fundamentally positive thing because it impels us to always find new ways of intensifying life – then desire is about fulfilling as many needs as could possibly be imagined, certainly beyond the needs for survival, security and procreation. Desire is always in the process of creating new needs, as well as new strategies to fulfill those needs, if we allow it to, rather than "sticking to" a particular need and its solution. Creation thus comes from someone "wanting" something. It is precisely to the extent that we want something *more* or *differently* that there is an incentive to create. If we deny desire we restrict creativity. I believe a discussion of desire is fundamental to improvisational pedagogy simply because the ways in which we philosophically affirm the workings of desire – in and through needs and strategies – directly affects how we meet our students, and indirectly how we understand creative learning. In the experimental approach it is desire itself - the motivation to be engaged in a process of discovering how various strategies may or may not be relevant to one's own needs - that is fundamental to the learning environment.

and perceptions, this does not mean we have to stop there. If that were the case, the teacher could never do more than simply listen to everyone's opinions; which moreover very often are construed in objective terms of "right" and "wrong", or "good" and "bad", thus becoming authoritarian judgements that block creativity. Indeed, opinions do not take us very far, certainly not in the direction of creativity! But attempting to avoid this by resorting to a strategy of objectification is, it might be argued, similarly based on opinions, although now presented in the form of a teacher's or a community's authority. This means that neither the strategy of simply accepting my students' judgements nor the strategy of attempting a more "authentic" judgement can in fact create the kind of self-empowerment that would be the most efficient means for student ownership of learning. It is rather the *experimental process* of reflection itself, of pursuing feelings, perceptions and concepts in a way that connects them with desires and needs that allows for a more personal and empowered creativity to emerge.

This entails that even if there is no objective way of assessing what is creative or not, it can nevertheless be a highly valuable process to attempt a deeper understanding of what we in fact *perceive* as creative. We can always be engaged in a dialogue about music, about our experiences, and this dialogue is at its most powerful when it is connected with personal needs and desires rather than taking form as judgements that have an objective tendency (i.e., disconnecting from personal needs, skills, circumstances, and so on). If we can accomplish a truly non-judgemental dialogue about creativity this may invite for a transformational process that proves highly beneficial to a variety of goals, including any professional and pragmatic concerns. Indeed, when I invite students to reflect on what creative improvisation might entail *for them* this increased awareness often results in receiving access to a wider range of possibilities and choices than they initially believed was available. For example, a student may acknowledge that there are alternative ways to practice improvisation in order to attain that particular form of creativity which they desire. Indeed, experimental pedagogy attempts to initiate a creative process at every step of the way. As teachers of creativity we should be inviting for autonomy and self-knowledge already from the very start, recognizing that any creative process will probably be hampered by authoritarian attitudes, including the attempt to define creativity.

It seems to me, then, that any inquiry of creativity is highly dependent on non-authoritarian learning environments. When a teacher utilizes a non-authoritarian leadership this helps the students to find out what they desire, what is important to them, even if this means that the students will deviate from the teacher's own skills or experiences. In my view, creative pedagogy should never be about transmitting a "general understanding" (whether of a tradition, a genre, a concept of creativity or improvisation) but allowing for the students themselves to reflect upon various possibilities. Even if there are some experiences of "creative improvisation", say, that are more common than others, this need not mean that I as a teacher should authorize the discussion in terms of some such view (or set of views). Indeed, we should perhaps avoid the temptation to establish a "general picture" of creativity or improvisation, on the basis of that which is deemed more "common" or "authentic", simply because such a strategy will so easily become authoritarian, exclusive and imitative. When some preferred idea or "generalized" view turns into an abstract message, transmitted by the teacher, this is usually accomplished precisely by disconnecting that view from personal needs and interests. That is to say, abstracting a general "idea", "understanding" or "representation" will most often mean that a particular goal or strategy for musical or personal development is no longer explicitly connected to a particular person's needs in

a particular place and time. This abstraction or theoretization typically entails that the experiment too is bypassed. When it is taken for granted that the teacher can teach the “answer” or the “result”, doing without the experiment, the learning effectively becomes a disempowering culture of repetition.

In contrast to methods that depend on generalization and abstraction teachers may instead be committed to always using personal decisions and needs as points of departure for exploring various possibilities of development, so that each learning environment is guided by a process of self-empowerment rather than a receiving of the “common” or the “authentic”. This challenges the teacher to be explicit with how that which is perceived as creative is always “creative to someone in particular” (and thus related to needs, interests, skills, habits, and so on). This also challenges the student to act in similar ways. In order to avoid obstructing creative processes any inclination towards authoritarian judgement, whether by a teacher or a student, or even when self-directed, can and should be problematized by connecting it to personal needs and interests.

This “open teaching” is nevertheless accomplished by supplying with suggestions, practices, methods and concepts that derive from my own personal experiences and interests. As a teacher I attempt to discuss these while simultaneously pointing out how they relate to my own personal needs and circumstances rather than to some objective situation. There is, then, a subtle but important difference between on the one hand simply presenting “answers” (i.e., those strategies, goals and solutions which I have found to be valuable and helpful to my needs and circumstances), and on the other hand inviting my students to a self-empowering process that involves reflecting upon and evaluating my suggestions in terms of a deeper process of discovering their own needs and interests. And the concept of “creativity” is surely central to this process. If we define it in advance (circumscribing rather than suggesting) that would only mean that there are less opportunities for independent choices.

In my own teaching I try to show how improvisation fulfills my needs and interests in various ways. This offers me a way to connect with the students and simultaneously help them to connect with their own desires. I try to guide, inspire and challenge my students in thinking about various possibilities with improvisation by setting an example of what it means to become aware of one’s own interests, and what it means to align goals and strategies with these interests. I try to communicate that no-one can know what is someone else’s needs, nor what might be the best strategies and goals for fulfilling particular needs. I want my students to find their own ways of doing things, their own ways of asking questions about improvisation and about what ways to practice.

I attempt to demonstrate to students that improvisation interests me because of the opportunities it gives for fulfilling my needs for play, change and surprise. These are the very events that I tend to experience as particularly fulfilling and intensive aspects of musical improvisation; they are that which for me constitute particularly successful or creative improvisation. **Play** has to do with probing and exploring various forms of intensities. It is about trying new links and connections within already explored musical territories, thus in the process de-territorializing and re-territorializing them (Deleuze & Guattari XXX)). Playful improvisation is, then, a form of ongoing re-contextualizing. It entails putting melodies, sounds, rhythms or chords in new settings, thereby changing their very significance. As such, play is about asking questions: What happens with the world if I do this? What happens with me? How might I feel differently when doing this, or that? This means that play can also become serious, even if unintendedly, so that

music sometimes becomes a process of mourning, contemplation or celebration. **Change** is also important to me. It is primarily about finding ways to not repeat myself, to stay alert and attentive to new challenges. It is about using variation and contrast in some interesting and relevant way. Finally, **surprise** too is essential, although it can only arise non-deliberately. Surprise happens when we achieve some degree of change or playful complexity that makes the music become sufficiently unpredictable, without however losing its force of attraction. In order for surprise to occur I try to find ways of achieving spontaneity in a musical situation. This includes avoiding to become too much of an authority so that something beyond my deliberate control can enter into the music, whether the playing of other musicians in an ensemble, or perhaps my own musical intuition. I attempt to achieve such non-deliberation, moreover, without losing awareness. It is about deepening sensitivity and heightening responsibility rather than losing myself in an introvert experience of flow or rapture.

I try to challenge students to think about the ways that my views and concepts may be relevant to their own experiences and interests, and whether or not my strategies and goals may or may not be helpful to them. If not, then how can they develop their own alternative concepts? What is important to them? How can they achieve what they want? Perhaps my concepts and strategies can prove a valuable point of reference for finding their own alternatives?

In the next section I will further discuss some of the challenges that I believe are relevant to an improvisational pedagogy that wants to deal explicitly with creativity. Then I turn to a discussion of the difference between formal and experimental approaches. I will argue that the formal approach is an incomplete resource for improvisational pedagogy because one of its consequences is that the students themselves are relatively disempowered as agents of learning. By contrast, the experimental approach, especially when combined with non-authoritarian strategies for reflection, can offer learning environments that will increase the potential for students to take responsibility for their own learning, not least by improving metacognitive competence. The last section deals with selected statements from questionnaires and interviews with students that participated in my courses. These statements seem to lend some credence to the ideas put forward in this article.

### **Improvisational pedagogy and personal development**

There are several issues that are relevant to the development of an improvisational pedagogy that emphasizes creativity. What I would call romantic views overly emphasize the importance of innate personality and talent (cf. Peters XXX). This is connected to the belief that a primary source for creativity is really “within” the individual. Although it is surely right to claim that for example emotional and imaginative skills are important, romantic approaches tend to underestimate the extent to which these and other skills are never simply pre-given personal qualities and thus can be consciously developed. To work more directly with such skills however is to recognize the significance of physical and social relationalities. Teachers thus need to adopt more of an ecological perspective instead of the individualist framework that is typically implied by romantic views.

If creativity is also about personal development, in a way that goes beyond working solely with musico-technical skills, then this need not imply that we have to use quasi-therapeutic techniques, nor does it mean we have to turn to social experiments. In fact, I believe it is perfectly possible, and preferable, to work with a variety of emotional, perceptual and imaginative skills within a predominantly musical context, even if this

would require us to design our teaching strategies a little bit differently. In other words, personal development does not necessarily entail that students have to introspect in terms of their personal histories or traumas, but it does seem to indicate the importance of a learning environment within which they can connect the development of musical skills with their own desires, needs and reflections, and within which they can also be given the opportunity to practice what will be referred to below as “intermusician dynamics”.

It is important to reiterate that skills that are often associated with creativity are not necessarily individualistic, as romantic views might have it, but more often *interpersonal, ecologically situated* and *cognitively distributed*. That is to say, it is not primarily a matter of the individual turning to his or her own mind or interior but more about becoming able to *receive the outside* in multifarious ways: socially, musically, physically, cognitively, perceptually, emotionally, and so on. For example, concentration or presence is not always or exclusively about focusing on one’s own playing, nor on one’s own emotions and thoughts, thus placing all other events somewhat in the background. On the contrary, awareness will often benefit from learning to receive contributions from other ensemble members in more direct ways. Perceptual skills are often enhanced precisely by learning to go beyond inner-directed forms of musical emotion and instead perceive a multitude of different things going on synchronously within the ensemble, which in turn deepens one’s sensitivity to the interactions that constitute the improvisation and that cannot be reduced to individual contributions. Most importantly, these kinds of listening and interacting can be accelerated by the use of methods that temporarily set aside standard musical constraints -- such as melodic control, chord progressions or time-keeping -- instead focusing on the very act of receiving and perceiving musical gestures while playing. Other methods can work to foreground aspects of our experience of playing, aspects that we are not normally aware. Becoming aware of self-judgements, for example, will typically facilitate the achievement of less conflictual modes of awareness, also referred to as “mindfulness” (XXX). Methods that deal directly with the way one concentrates, listens, observes and feels while playing enhance the potential for metacognition especially if the teacher also chooses to invite for further reflection on issues like anxiety, fear, self-esteem, and motivation in ways that connect precisely with the *differences* in needs and interests among students. These reflections too can be focused primarily on musical issues even if occasionally touching upon matters that extend beyond music.

Creativity is very often eluded by pedagogical presuppositions within higher music education. Many musicians that teach jazz and improvisation, for example, are guided by models of learning that emphasize direct imitation rather than as something that arises within an ecological environment. Similarly, concepts such as progress, self-assessment, and metacognition need to be understood in a way that more emphatically and explicitly works with the students’ creativity and autonomy rather than relying predominantly on theoretical compliance and instrumental mastery. However, many pedagogical methods that could prove useful for instigating creative processes, and to enable metacognition and self-empowering motivation, are often associated with a certain genre or style of music-making, and as such they can too easily be disregarded with reference to aesthetic criteria. As Scott Thomson (2008: 11, n. 3) points out, this ignores the difference between improvisation as a *process* (pedagogy) and as a *product* (history, idiom, genre). In other words, certain methods of improvisation may prove pedagogically useful for a variety of idiomatic contexts, even beyond improvised music, but are unfortunately dismissed without having been tested. Ken Prouty (2008) argues that many jazz

educators frequently employ strategies for teaching improvisation that borrow from methods common to higher musical education in order to frame their teaching in ways that make it more accessible to classically-trained faculty and administrators. This means that they will emphasize elements of the improvisational process that appeal to formal and structural sensibilities.<sup>2</sup> In other words, there is too often an emphasis within jazz studies upon an easily classified and teachable improvisational tradition. But this can be criticized for an increasing diminution of creative vitality, for having a stultifying effect on performance, and for profoundly influencing the relative power relations between students and teachers. Indeed, says Prouty, jazz improvisation “tends to be too codified, too easily constructed and replicated by student performers whose improvisations show little creativity” (Prouty 2008: 8-9). We should be wary of using pedagogical power to reinforce a particular organization of knowledge, resulting in a disempowerment of the students.

It is rather unfortunate that improvisational pedagogies rarely deal with issues of creativity more explicitly, too often being assigned to more informal or non-formal aspects of teaching. But how will students of improvisation own their learning if the teachers have no explicit strategies for approaching the concept of creativity? From a romantic point of view there is really not so much we can say about creativity since its mysteries too often are buried within the individual. This means that we have to rely on the teacher’s understanding of genre or tradition. But the consequence of an unproblematized view of concepts like genre or tradition is that metacognition will very often be reduced to a “being aware” of the information one is receiving from the teacher. This means that metacognition is restricted to being a tool for the student to be aware of what he or she has learnt, how to reconstruct that learning in his or her “own words”, and possibly something about how “the information” was transmitted and received. Similarly, self-assessment is then reduced to a tool for assessing whether one has progressed or not according to a more or less predefined framework of formal criteria. The problem with this is that creativity is not dealt with directly, except perhaps by occasional hints and implicit suggestions. Also, the possibility of connecting specific learning strategies with personal needs and interests is hindered when the teaching is focused on re-constructing and imitating a particular version of a genre. That is to say, when metacognition and self-assessment is restricted to occur only within the boundaries set by the teacher’s authoritative perspective on a particular form of music then this will probably not contribute positively to the creativity of the students.

Teachers of improvisation should not be avoiding the issue of creativity by falling back on that which can be standardized, imitated and represented. Rather, it is our responsibility to create learning environments that are conducive for musical experimentation and self-empowering reflection. In the experimental approach, metacognition has more to do with the ability to understand how to set up an experiment, and how to connect particular experiments with those skills that one has a desire to develop. Self-assessment is about being able to evaluate one’s development in terms of those skills, and to continuously review if one’s development is (still) in accord with one’s desires. One benefit of these forms of metacognition and self-assessment is that will be particularly empowering and motivating. This is so because they are

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<sup>2</sup> This has resulted in pedagogical and curricular systems that “emphasize harmonic and melodic materials, the application of chords to scales, the use and development of improvisational language through the use of patterns and transcriptions, and the performance of standard repertoire based primarily on bebop, hard bop, and to a lesser extent, Dixieland, swing, fusion and jazz-rock...” (Prouty 2008: 5).

developed in an experimental milieu that explicitly relies on self-awareness and independent reflection, as well as on dialogical interaction and communication. The result of this is that the learning is really owned by the students themselves, while also encouraging their sense of responsibility.

### **Formal and experimental pedagogies**

I propose that we distinguish between formal and experimental pedagogies. Although we want to avoid dichotomizing between formal and informal aspects of learning environments there are nevertheless important differences in pedagogical approaches that should be taken heed of. Very often, it seems to me, formal approaches will embrace only that which is “formalized”, which is also believed to be the most appropriate basis for assessment. Unfortunately, formalization is typically achieved by emphasizing reductive and objectified knowledge; by constructing a variety of more or less general representations of a “tradition”, “idiom”, “style” or “genre”; and by being based predominantly on the idea of sequential learning (thus for example distinguishing between “basic” and “advanced” skills in many situations for learning). A major problem with this, besides the normativity that such formalization will often imply, is that the “non-formalized” is thus thought to reside outside the curriculum, outside the access of explicit pedagogical strategies, and as such more intuitive or tacit in nature. This also entails that the non-formalized is typically seen as lying beyond the reach of assessment (when it is believed that assessment has to be more or less “objective”, and that it is only formalization that can supply for this objectivity). However, this ignores the ways in which experimental methods too can be explicitly discussed, assessed and validated, even if in ways that differ from formalization. The experimental approach too can be included within curriculums and assessments, but only if we rethink our stance towards using objectivity and formalization when teaching improvisation.

Perhaps, then, the experimental approach can point our attention to the fact that there are aspects of improvisation that are less about generalization and formalization, and more about exploring, experimenting, inquiring and probing. The experimental approach recognizes that many aspects of learning to improvise cannot be accomplished by imitating, objectifying or representing a model performance. We have to engage instead with the complexity that resulted in a particular performance, and which inevitably will result in a *different* performance, if ever so slightly different, because true complexity cannot be imitated (due to its high degree of relational and interactive functionality). Yet the learning that takes place with experimental methods can be assessed, even if not in quite the same way as with formalization. Experimental learning is certainly less predictable, rigid and normatively constrained, but it can nevertheless be self-assessed (with regard to personal decisions, goals and strategies) and teacher-assessed (with regard to ).

Formalization, it might be argued, is based on an attempt to reduce a particular performance of improvised music to a more simplified version that is thought to convey the most important or “basic” elements of that music. This is a pedagogical method that will very often rely on an inscription that does not (indeed cannot) represent all that actually happened but which nevertheless claims to have extracted the more basic “parts” or “aspects” of that music. It is also a method that implies that one should learn the basic elements first and then add other more intricate aspects or higher forms of complexity in due course.<sup>3</sup> The more complex aspects, however, are rarely dealt with

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<sup>3</sup> This way of thinking is based on a belief that higher-stage complexity can only be reached by first mastering more “basic” constituents. But such a view seems to depend on a perhaps outdated



more explicitly, if introduced at all. The student is expected to reproduce the music as represented by the teacher's authoritative inscription, or by way of an exercise that is designed in accordance with an inscriptional model, and is then free to experiment when the "basic model" has been mastered. At best this process is guided by the teacher's intuitive understanding of complexity. In other words, the complexity is considered more or less "tacit" and thus can only be intuited, not explicitly discussed or assessed. At worst, the student is simply left to "add" the complexity on his or her own. Formalization can thus be said to imply the use of reductively controlling methods and to transmit theoretical constraint by way of a notation system that excludes a host of musical detail because these are deemed supplementary or "non-formal" aspects when compared to the more "formal/basic" aspects that are believed to constitute the idiomatic deep structure.<sup>4</sup> In effect, this reduces complexity and relational-interactive aspects that often are foundational to creativity.

By contrast, an experimental approach proceeds from the pedagogical presupposition that higher levels of complexity can in fact be perceived, practiced and "understood" on their own terms, without necessarily having mastered all the purportedly more "basic" components.<sup>5</sup> The experimental approach thus acknowledges that we need explicit practices and concepts for going beyond formal constraints if we are to deal with creativity more directly. If it is that some aspects of music cannot in fact be comprehensibly notated or analyzed -- and these are the aspects that are typically unattended to by formalizing constraints that "reduce" complexity to its proposed "basic components" -- then they can only be learnt through an experiment that is set up to deal more directly with complexity and interactivity. Although complexity cannot be grasped or objectified by formalization it can nevertheless be more explicitly pointed at, not least by setting up the experiment and guided by concepts adequate to complexity and interactivity. This is very important because true complexity and interactivity cannot in fact be reduced to their supposed "components" without fundamentally altering their meaning or significance. That is to say, we cannot reduce higher-levels to lower-levels

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information-processing model of learning, in stark contrast to contemporary approaches that range from so-called sociocultural perspectives (inspired by, among others, Vygotskij and Bakhtin), to ecological and systems oriented perspectives, especially as informed by embodied or enactive cognition approaches (Borgo 2007).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Borgo argues that notation systems commonly used for conveying aspects of jazz and improvised music tend to "place undue emphasis on notes, chords, and harmonic progressions since these are most easily represented. The rhythmic, timbral, expressive, and interactive nuances of the music do not translate as easily to paper. Notation has remained central to many programs that teach improvised music not only for its perceived convenience – it translates well to blackboards and textbooks [...] – but also because it allows instructors to believe that they have an 'objective' means with which to evaluate the progress and understanding of students" (2007: 67). It is of course not the case that we need to evade notation, it is just that we perhaps need to be aware of what notation can or cannot accomplish, and how we might have to complement notation with experimental practice in order to avoid too much restriction, imitation, and repetition.

<sup>5</sup> I purposely use the word "complexity" here, and elsewhere, implying a difference between "complicated" and "complex" systems: Whereas complicated systems can be said to involve "a top-down model of organization that requires a strict hierarchy and the unerring execution of many sequential operations", complex systems tend to involve "bottom-up or 'self-organizing' dynamics that rely on extensive communication throughout a network of highly interconnected parts" (Borgo 2007: 85-6). The experimental approach to improvisation acknowledges the need to work directly also with complexity whereas the formal approach typically aims only for complicated systems. As Borgo puts it, "The dynamics of complex systems are extremely hard to predict, but not entirely random. They can exhibit regularities, but these regularities are difficult to describe briefly and impossible to describe over time with absolute precision" (Borgo 2007: 86).

without altering their very nature. We cannot objectify the non-formalizable. What this means, however, is that the teacher has to be able to create experimental constraints and concepts that can enable the student to practice *complexity skills* rather than relying on an attempt to imitate by way of a reductive representation, as well as to resist the retreating into “tacit intuition”. The teacher may want to use musical examples that can demonstrate complexity, whether by playing himself/herself or by having the students listen to exemplary performances, but when using such musical examples it is primarily the instructions that can aid the student in an attentive listening. It is the *explicit* instructions that makes it possible for the student to visually, aurally or kinesthetically detect a particular form of complexity or interactivity that otherwise may go unnoticed. In other words, ear training and experimental practice are highly complementary to each other. It is a form of “experimental ear training”, as it were, because it has to include a wealth of musical detail that go beyond those reductionist representations that over-emphasize standardized intonations, as well as over-determining intervals in terms of harmonic functions, or rhythms in terms of metric regularities. Experimental ear training challenges the student to actively listen to complexity itself, to that which cannot be captured by a reduced version, to hear the ways in which several aspects of the music precisely *interact* to create a particular form of intensity or intensification. Even if the amount of detail, and their interactive relations, often cannot be fully comprehended by functional analysis, nor represented in notation, this does not mean that we cannot become more aware and perceptive of these details.

In short, experimentation emphasizes the *action* and *awareness* for achieving and receiving complexity. As such it supplements the formal aspects of improvisation with experimental aspects that involve a variety of creative skills, such as being able to respond to changing circumstances. Where formal teaching tries to reductively repeat the music according to a series of more or less limitative constraints, experimental teaching is based more on an experimentation that challenges the student to more actively and consciously confront complexity. The experimental approach focuses on action and awareness rather than on inscriptional models and transmittable knowledge that depend on the teacher’s authority. Importantly, however, this approach involves not only embodied skills but also skills for reflection. It therefore emphasizes the importance of group discussions, together with collaborative work, in accordance with a more ecological perspective.

Formal teaching is certainly right, it must be said, in assuming that one can benefit from practicing something by reducing the possibilities to a limited and thus conceivable set of actions or elements; a *constraint* as it were. It is however of great importance how the limitations are construed, not least the extent to which one focuses on repetition and imitation, and whether one introduces factors such as adaptability, unpredictable response and reciprocal interaction. Indeed, it is only with very few skills, and then typically only at a very rudimentary level, that limitation sometimes needs to be *fully* constrained and controllable (as in formalization). But even in those cases we usually need to move on as soon as possible in order to learn also how to adapt to changing circumstances, or in order to achieve more complexity. For example, some techniques for playing on the piano will be different in different speeds, and thus a higher speed cannot be reduced to the same technique at a lower speed. The human hand and body simply does not always work according to such sequential logic. Moreover, the “technique” of playing piano is a lot about awareness and perception, in ways which cannot be reduced to a quantized mechanics (Fraser 2003). Indeed, attempts to reduce piano playing to a series of actions to be mechanically imitated, without emphasizing

awareness, has very often resulted in disastrous consequences. This is so because each pianoplayer has to discover for him- or herself how the body works, in and through an experimentation that creates awareness, with ever finer degrees of perceptual detail. Thus, even instrumental technique needs to be experimented with because otherwise it becomes too mechanical and repetitive. The student simply becomes unable to evolve within more complex circumstances. In fact, when circumstances reach a certain complexity we can no longer fully represent or comprehend reductively what's going on, although we may nevertheless sense and be aware of what is happening, in a non-reductive way. In these cases a new behaviour emerges, a kind of action that cannot be fully understood in terms of a set of more elementary actions.

Another example would be certain forms of rhythmic variation, such as free-metric rhythm and microscopic note placement. These skills seem to require that we confront complexity head-on because there is no basic skill that we can first master before we reach this purportedly higher stage. We can not go from metric to free-metric rhythm and microtiming. Even if they may reciprocally support each other's development, to some extent, they still have to be practiced and understood directly.

We can use experimental constraints when learning to deal with complexity, or when practicing skills of response, variation and adaptation. These are different from formalizing constraints because the experiment is not designed to reduce actions to only deliberate and determinate actions. On the contrary, experimental constraints are specifically designed to *increase* unpredictability, variation and complexity, sometimes even beyond deliberation, while sustaining awareness and perceptual-emotional receptivity.

So-called collective improvisation might have quite a lot to offer an experimental pedagogical approach. In the following, collective improvisation refers to improvised music in which there are typically very few pre-determined musical constraints, although ensemble members may more or less freely choose constraints in the process of the improvisation.<sup>6</sup> Scott Thomson (2008: 5-6) argues that collective improvisation is in itself a pedagogical process by which musicians actively learn from each other during performance. This is so because "inter-musician dynamics" is a highly important aspect of collective improvisation. Put differently, it is precisely with collective improvisation that the vitality of dialogic relationships between players can be practiced more directly. Indeed, the performance of collective improvisation becomes a site where "authority is enacted, tested, and negotiated through the music itself" (ibid.). Improvisers learn to circulate authority by enacting his or her musical micro-idiom with each gesture, thus claiming momentary authority, but also, and more importantly, developing a sense of responsibility. This involves literally an *ability to respond* to the other players by listening to and learning from what they are doing. Indeed, it is precisely with the establishment of openness and goodwill within the group that "a playful process of the acceptance, deferral, simultaneity or disavowal of authority" can be achieved. When all the group members are committed to learning the others' micro-idioms "in an ongoing, variable circulation of musical meaning and mutable social authority" then the collective

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<sup>6</sup> It is certainly a matter of perspective when we choose to call certain approaches to improvisation as being more "open" or "free". Indeed, if we take a closer look at much of that which is called "free jazz" or "free improv" we find that there are indeed harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures that can be analyzed accordingly (see Borgo 2006, Dean 1992, Nunn 1998, and Jost 1994 for good examples). However, these structures are then often highly complex, typically involving the use of musical parameters such as timbre, intonation, and dynamics in ways that differ from less "open" improvisations, particularly by creating high degrees of unpredictability and allowing for non-hierarchical interactions and fluctuating roles and transitions within the ensemble.

improvisation can become successful, or even meaningful. By contrast, authoritarian gestures will threaten the performance, the fluidity of authority being circumscribed by ways of playing that become domineering in some way. This is exemplified by “a player’s inability or unwillingness to listen to the other members of an ensemble, often coinciding with his or her unresponsive, soloistic musical contributions” (ibid.).<sup>7</sup>

In a sense, then, the skills that one learns through collective improvisation are not always solely musical. They include any number of affective skills, ranging from patience and responsibility to confidence and assertiveness. Thus, as a pedagogical method collective improvisation allows students to grow as sociomusical actors.

Unfortunately jazz education often focuses on a limited set of individualist skills, connected with a narrow ideal of “instrumental mastery”, and this excludes a variety of methods that can deal more directly with those skills that can only be practiced in a collective situation. Examples could include interpersonal communication; complex and non-ordinary forms of rhythmic variation; complex transitions and other formal aspects; variable roles within the collective; and so on. As David Borgo shows, experimental approaches may “deemphasize the musical dimensions that are most easily represented by notation -- quantized pitches and metered rhythms – in favor of subtle temporal, timbral, and expressive concerns. In this more open environment, students can explore ‘high-level’ aspects of musical gesture, interaction, and form in ways that may help them to avoid always reducing music to its component parts, and ultimately may benefit their ongoing development as artists” (Borgo 2007: 77). It is thus precisely by *not* having to concentrate on following a more or less rigid form, with its concomitant chord changes, or by not having to depend on certain scales and melodic developments, that the student can develop other skills, particularly communicative and interactive ones. And it is precisely these skills, it could be argued, that are so important to creative processes of personal expression, and to the development as a sociomusical actor.

An interesting aside is that many successful and highly acclaimed jazz musicians have in fact done extensive practice with more or less experimental approaches to improvisation. Examples could include bebop musicians who already in the 1940’s would get together and do collective improvisations, although rarely recording or performing these live. Coleman Hawkins recorded freely improvised saxophone solos already in 1948 (“Picasso”). Lennie Tristano’s famous Sextet with Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh experimented with collective improvisations for several years before recording in 1949 (“Intuition”, “Digression”). Jazz musicians like Charlie Mingus, Teo Macero, and Art Farmer met together with composer Edgar Varése already in 1957 in New York for Sunday evening collectively improvised sessions, also experimenting with a variety of extended instrumental techniques. In fact, a host of musicians that are typically canonized by many jazz departments, and that at some point in their career devoted themselves to experimental approaches, would include names ranging from John Coltrane to Keith Jarrett. Yet, any important experience that these musicians may have had from using experimental methods is too often left unacknowledged in the writing of jazz history, and equally so by an education system that devalues the potential of experimental approaches in favour of more formalized learning environments.

In summary, formal teaching strategies will typically fail to recognize the value of methods that deal more directly with group dynamics and personal development. Yet, an emphasis on the individual and on instrumental skill cannot adequately address the

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<sup>7</sup> Borgo also mentions how this is similar to methods that involve improvising actors (e.g., as discussed by Keith Johnstone): “The inherent challenge is to avoid circumscribing or over-directing the group flow” (Borgo 2007: 83).

fact that improvising musicians typically communicate and coordinate their sounds and intentions in very subtle ways. For example, qualities like “ensemble timing, phrasing, blend, intonation, and groove, are all examples of musical interactions and negotiations” (Borgo 2007: 72). This also means that such qualities actually occur in a *distributed* fashion within the group and cannot be reduced to an individual contribution. This is what in cognitive research is called “distributed cognition”. But jazz teachers rarely use pedagogical methods or experiments that can deal more directly and explicitly with this distributive process, instead only indirectly hinting at them, or simply reducing them to specific individual contributions. By contrast, experimental methods can extend the process of distributed cognition most fully into the realm of musical content, and thus more directly trains the improviser to perform both conscious and unconscious reactions to sound stimuli (Borgo 2007: 72-3).

One could of course argue that experimental methods are typically included within the purview of so-called “formal teaching” even if they are not always explicitly dealt with in course presentations, assessments or goals. Moreover, many successful teachers will often have a high awareness of the importance and usefulness of experimental methods when teaching, even if believing that assessment of a student’s development with such methods is best dealt with as less explicit and non-objective “informal” aspects. If this is the case, however, I believe we have to be very cautious so as not to marginalize experimental methodology when curriculums and programs are being increasingly controlled and administered, and when assessment of teacher or student competence is increasingly being judged solely according to formalized criteria. When experimental pedagogy is not *explicitly* assessed or reflected upon then we will risk their marginalization within higher music education.

It is important to emphasize that my arguments here are not concerned with aesthetic or genre-bound criteria. The problem has rather to do with power and pedagogy. If experimental methods are summarily dismissed, simply because they do not fit with a particular department agenda or improvisational genre, then the consequences of such a choice must be thoroughly analyzed and discussed if it is to be accepted as valid for a curriculum. I argue that the overuse of formalized teaching methods will tend to establish or reinforce certain power relations that block the creative integrity of many students. Moreover, these methods are also unproductive to metacognition and the student’s ability to own his or her learning. Finally, it must be said, improvisational approaches that emphasize higher degrees of freedom (as in collective improvisation) are perhaps fundamental to many areas of life and personal development, and thus should not be conflated with a particular genre of art. Indeed, as Jonty Stockdale has pointed out, “The ability to improvise freely is a common skill applied whether in conversation, role-play, movement, dance, or the playing of games, and yet it is an ability that is seemingly suppressed through the conventions of music training” (Stockdale 2004: 112).

### **Aspects of experimental pedagogy**

In this section I want to discuss selected aspects of experimental pedagogy that I have used in my teaching. As already stated, I believe that creative improvisation could be taught by designing experiments that are explicitly designed in a way that consistently encourages the student to experiment, and which develops an awareness of musical detail that is otherwise suppressed in more formal approaches. By using experimental methods that are specifically designed to more directly develop skills of imagination, interaction and perception, the teacher can guide the students how to listen

differently, how to respond differently, how to perceive differently, how to imagine differently, and so on. Although many of these skills are certainly emotional and intuitive, among other things, they could nevertheless be approached as *both* embodied and reflexive skills. As such they can be practiced by setting up an experimental situation where perceptual and emotive-intuitive aspects are developed alongside faculties of reflection and conscious choice.

On the one hand we have individual musico-technical skills. In my view, the creativity of such skills will ultimately depend on the extent to which one practices the *combination* of musical parameters, thus focusing on achieving complexity from the very beginning rather than postponing it for future performance. In order to challenge the student to experiment creatively it is thus vital to teach *how to practice in and through a particular variability and complexity of combinations of musical parameters*.<sup>8</sup> This entails being able to use musical parameters with an increased degree of differentiation,<sup>9</sup> with an enlarged range of intensification,<sup>10</sup> and with an ability to combine parameters in a wider variety of ways. This not only creates an increase in complexity but also introduces a certain *unpredictability*, due to the fact that the more parameters at work the less deliberate control we can have over the outcome. Although we can learn to be fully aware of everything that's going on in the music, thus never compromising awareness of the music's *relational* and *interactive* aspects, we can learn to invite for a complexity that entails precisely an inability to control or grasp all the constituent parts. Complexity entails that we cannot entirely predict the outcome of the music's relationality, even if we are able to consciously project "from" it, so to speak.

On the other hand, the individual's ability to accomplish complexity on an instrument should be matched by interactive skills that help to establish *a particular receptivity and fluidity within an ensemble*. For example, certain skills will make the individual able to respond and pick up on a variety of things going on in the performance, which will further affect the possibility of combining, varying and intensifying various musical parameters, both individually and collectively. Vijay Iyer (2002), for example, discusses a set of "listening skills" that involve microtiming variations and rhythmic asynchrony, and Tom Nunn (1998) mentions a variety of skills based on perceptions of transition and role-taking. Both of these authors show that these skills rely on an interactive setting that cannot be reduced to the individual's capacity, and as such they have to be practiced in an ensemble. These transindividual aspects of improvisation will introduce an increased unpredictability to the improvisation and an increased complexity of combinations of parameters, both of which are essentially beyond the individual's control. Ensemble exercises can thus

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<sup>8</sup> What I call "musical parameters" include a very large number of aspects that may influence the improvisational performance of sound; ranging from intonational, tonal, metric and harmonic control to non-formal applications of ornamentation, dynamics, and non-metrical rhythm.

<sup>9</sup> Differentiation entails using a particular parameter more or less independently of other parameters. This is perhaps the essence of what we would refer to as "instrumental technique" (cf. Bastian 1996). For example, it might mean being able to vary volume without at the same time varying, say, tempo. Or, as a pianist, being able to vary volume in one hand and not the other.

<sup>10</sup> In other words, with a larger spectrum, and with more ways of varying the intensity. For example, it might mean being able to vary dynamically in one's playing by using both more silent as well as louder volumes than otherwise, as well as being able to vary the volume in unconventional ways (both *internally* -- by using uncommon patterns of changing volume, and by combining common dynamics, such as *sforzando*, *diminuendo*, etc., with unexpected shifts -- and *externally*, that is to say in unexpected combinations with other volumes within the group.)

benefit from being designed to focus more exclusively on practicing interactive skills, for example by temporarily setting aside aspects like melodic or harmonic development.

The experimental approach also has to confront prevalent views on reflection. Indeed, reflection can no longer be simply a tool for reductive analysis or transcription, or for directing the improvisational or compositional process in its dependence solely on formal constraints. As Gary Peters argues, an approach that casts theory solely in the role of providing contextual and analytical support for practice, without directly engaging with the creative process itself, at worst will become hopelessly rigid, formularised and cumbersome; in short, an unproductive intellectualism that is irrelevant to the day-to-day productive concerns of the artist (Peters 2005: 300). So reflection too has to become experimental. That is to say, reflection itself needs to be developed in and through an experimental process, instead of simply receiving authoritative knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Reflection can be about learning how to devise new practices that suit one's own aspirations. This means that the teacher should always keep the student focused on understanding what this or that practice accomplishes, in which ways it might be changed and varied, as well as challenging the student to construct their own variations of a particular practice. If we simply present a routine procedure to be imitated then the student has not actually understood how to design his or her own experiments.

This view of reflection requires that the teacher knows how to connect with a student's needs and desires, because it is primarily when the experiments seem attractive to the student that he or she might become really interested in doing them, and reflecting on their import. In order to connect to their students, however, teachers have to be *willing* and *able* to listen to and encourage their students' needs. This requires a certain set of skills on behalf of the teacher, what we might call non-authoritarian or "connective" strategies for communication (Rosenberg 2003). Discussions on needs can thus be based on explicit strategies for creating an uncensored dialogue. However, this also requires that the teacher is willing to share his or her own needs and interests because this is ultimately what can create a connection between the teacher and the students, and perhaps between students too. In my experience, many students are interested in knowing why I have made certain choices in my musical and personal development, what needs and interests have been fulfilled by which strategies, and in which way my choices might be relevant to them. I believe that meeting such requests is highly important if the students are to develop a sustained, self-empowered motivation. It is really a matter of respect. If we take our own needs and strategies for granted then we will simply be imposing our authority on the student, to the effect that they will very often disown any actual learning.

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<sup>11</sup> Conceptual creativity is in essence experimental, similarly to improvisation: It needs to be able to *do* or *create* something, in and through variation. Conceptual creativity can be used by the musician to set up an experimental situation, and it can continue to create and re-create problems in ways that make it possible to set up yet other experiments. So reflection should not only be concerned with the structural, the linear, the individual, and the predictable. In fact, it has in some way to be able to invite for the complex, the non-linear, the interactive, and the unpredictable. Put differently, reflection itself has to actively engage directly with complexity. Thought itself can become experimental, or rhizomatic, to speak with the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (see, e.g., Roy 2003 and Semetsky 2007 for Deleuzian concepts relevant to pedagogy). It is to achieve a form of reflection that can constitute its own experimental situations, rather than simply re-solving according to a predetermined framework of understanding. It is a reflection that can think *with* complexity, in ways which establish a decentralized, complex network of ever-changing and unstable relations.

Without non-authoritarian methods for communicating a teacher will probably have more difficulty in connecting with the students' willingness to achieve. Being connected with needs and desires gets people engaged and interested, which means that they will ultimately be able to create their own theories and practices based on what is important for them rather than simply imitating someone else's solutions. And if self-assessment is an aspect of this empowerment then it is a self-assessment that includes being aware of one's own desires and needs, not least because this helps one to understand what one wants to accomplish, and how to do it (metacognition), and assess one's creative progress in those terms rather than according to a pre-given framework of rules and solutions.

### **Teaching/Learning creative Improvisation: Student comments**

In this section I will present selected statements from 13 students involved in three courses that I taught in 2009/2010. The statements are selected from replies to questionnaires and interviews that involved primarily open questions and that focused on issues pertaining to perceptions of purpose, content, inspiration and advancement: How did the students perceive and understand the learning that went on? Was their understanding congruent with my intentions? And what were their metacognitive reflections on their own progress, expectations, preparations and motivation?

I will use these statements to support some of the arguments put forward above. It must be said, however, that the data is not comprehensive, nor rigorously examined, so my selections are not to be taken as conclusive nor as statistical representations of the population of students participating in the courses.<sup>12</sup> My purpose is to discuss specific aspects of those learning processes that focus primarily on creativity and self-empowerment. Indeed, many of the students that participated acknowledged the importance of such things as self-motivation, free choice, and personal development. It is however primarily a philosophical perspective that I am pursuing here. Although I recognize the need and importance for research regarding there is, I think, nevertheless a need for philosophical problematization that also stands somewhat separated from research data. This is perhaps so because even so-called qualitative research sometimes risks emphasizing more formal aspects of research, all too often drawing conclusions that tend towards that which can be generalized according to "patterns of distribution". But the statistical, the typical and the evidential is in many ways different from the experimental, simply because as soon as the specific and the particular is compromised we lose something of the powerful link to personal needs and interests. If qualitative research could ever "prove" anything at all about the experimental it would be that it works, and that the experimental cannot be judged objectively, only assessed specifically according to personal and context-dependent criteria. And if this is so then philosophical problematization also must always have an important say, in order to keep the qualitative from turning into the quantitative. In this sense, then, the following selection of student comments should be seen as philosophically suggestive rather than as traditional "research data".

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<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to make a summary of the students' comments in English in the running text while providing literal quotations in Swedish (interspersed in block quotations). All in all there were ten male and three female students that participated in the questionnaires or interviews, or both. This disproportion unfortunately represents rather well a common unevenness of distribution of gender in jazz studies. In any case, I was also dependent on the willingness of students to participate. This probably also affected interview material, since the students that participated were in general highly positive to my form of teaching, whereas those that were more skeptical chose not to participate.



In the course called "Jazz Improvisation" we worked primarily with seminar-style discussions, home assignments and listening practices. The students were divided in two groups of approximately 12 students in each group. The course was obligatory and all the students were in their first year of the Undergraduate Level Program for "Performance - Jazz". Each lesson (five all in all) focused on specific themes concerning various aspects of improvisation: presence, expression, intensity, structure, creativity, and so on. Discussions would typically extend into closely associated topics, depending on the needs and interests of the students. Each week 3-4 students were assigned to do an experiment until next weeks lesson, and they were also expected to prepare a short presentation that discussed problems, challenges, results, insights, and so on. We also practiced what I call "non-judgemental listening". This involves listening "blindfold" to a variety of recorded performances of improvised music and using a list of concepts in an attempt to non-judgementally describe, analyze and understand how the music might have been created (and what we might learn from this process).

"Workshop Ensemble" was voluntarily chosen by 4 advanced students (in their second or third year of studies). We had 8 lessons together, each time focusing on a particular topic that we both discussed and experimented with in the form of improvisational ensemble practices. The topics included silence; chaos; transition; role-changes; intellect; and so on. Ensemble practices would primarily deal with interactive skills, such as fast interplay, responding to transitions and role-changes, and so on. We also devoted some time to discussing how to use reflection in real-time performance in ways that could support more spontaneous or "bodily" engagement.

"Advanced Ear Training in Jazz" too was voluntarily chosen by 4 advanced students. We worked with modal ear training and complex polyrhythm (especially quintuplets). Using transcriptions and musical examples from North-Indian Classical music we would explore a new mode each lesson, and the students were expected to do home assignments that were demonstrated in class. We discussed issues pertaining to timbre, intonation, and harmonic-melodic experience in modal music. We also analyzed and listened to tabla solo recordings using complex polyrhythm.

Students A, B, C and D participated in the Workshop Ensemble course and replied to a questionnaire that involved the course as a whole (in retrospect). Students E, F, G, H and J participated in the course on Jazz Improvisation. Students E, F and G replied to a questionnaire for the whole course in retrospect, as well as participated in recorded group-interviews, whereas H and J only participated in the interview. The interviews were conducted in two groups, consisting of 2 male students and 3 female students respectively. Students F and G also had individual lessons with me that partly worked with the same material as in the course. Students K, L, M and N participated in the course on Advanced Ear Training, and they all replied to a questionnaire in connection with each lesson during the course (both before and after the lesson).

In the first lesson of a course I generally preferred to convey the purposes and contents in an initial verbal presentation rather than in printed or written form. I would then complement this presentation with more or less improvised conceptual overviews later on in the course, most often by writing them on the whiteboard. These improvised overviews would be conducted either as a direct response to student needs and questions, or simply because I had planned to do so. To me this seems more adequate than simply presenting a written overview at the beginning of the course and then trying to refer back to it, simply because this sometimes invites the students to think in a repetitive mode. By contrast, recurrent but primarily improvised overviews seem to have a different effect on metacognition. This is so, I believe, for two reasons: First,

improvised presentations of a particular topic may adapt to the students and thus make their needs and comments directly relevant to the process, which in turn may work to motivate the students to become more actively involved (as opposed to passively receiving). Second, improvising will typically challenge us to explore a particular topic slightly different each time. Indeed, it is not perhaps even the "same" thing that is approached differently but the topic itself can change according to questions and comments by the students, even if within certain constraints. This makes a conceptual overview part of the learning process itself, as opposed to attempting to condense learning into a few repeatable statements. (Although written handouts certainly can work well as complementary to quasi-improvised verbal presentations.)

This method for continuously (re-)creating an overview of the course seems to have had desirable effects because several students commented that their lessons seemed flexible and adaptable to the various needs of the students, also creating a sense of equality within the group. Yet at the same time the course was nevertheless perceived as being very clear about its purposes. In other words, student comments would seem to indicate that it is indeed possible to maintain a structure and direction yet simultaneously adapt to student needs.

(Student A) "Läraren visade snabbt att han hade ett väl genomtänkt upplägg och en tydlig idé med kursen som eleverna fick ta del av och diskutera och utveckla. När vi redan från början visste vart vi ville komma med kursen, blev engagemanget stort från både lärare och elever. Under hela kursen anpassades upplägget efter vart eleverna ville ta det och inom vilka områden man ville fördjupa sig. Kommunikationen i gruppen fungerade väldigt bra, och känslan av lärare och elev suddades ut - vi var på samma nivå och spelade tillsammans."

(Student C) "Lärarens kanske största bidrag och kvalitet var den lyhörddhet och flexibilitet som gjorde att vi kunde forma kursen efter oss elevers individuella behov."

(Student E) "Otroligt skönt med en lärare som lyckas vara lärare och samtidigt jämlik med oss studenter. Med lärare menar jag att vara trygg i sig själv, att verkligen lyssna på vad studenterna har att säga, att komma med genomtänkta reflektioner på vad vi säger och att du tar oss på allvar. Att vi är på riktigt, att alla är unika personer på en unik resa och inte en samling studenter som du mött hundratals av och som du antar tänker på samma sätt. Svårt att säga vad som definierar de här egenskaperna men du var närvarande vilket var det största och viktigaste intrycket jag fick med mig från kursen."

(Student J) "Man kände det när man kom dit att det här formar vi tillsammans.. Alla andra kurser är som föreläsningar.. men här krävdes ju att man var delaktig.. Att du inte forcerade fram att folk skulle säga någonting.. Om nån inte ville säga någonting så var det lugnt.. Och du kändes väldigt trygg i det."

(Student K) "Jag är med i diskussioner, kommer med erfarenheter. Läraren tar lyhört upp vad studenterna säger och gör smidiga avsteg från en plan som ändå fylls upp."

(Student L) "Strukturerat men även öppet för diskussion"

(Student G) "Det blev ärligt också för att .. du var noga med att det alla sa var sin egen upplevelse.. och då kändes det verkligen som att man kunde vara ärlig.. du var noga med att allt det du tyckte inte var 'rätt', utan det var din upplevelse.. Det ledde till att folk var mer ärliga.. att man inte omedvetet anpassade sig.."

When the explicit purpose is to be adaptable to student needs -- experimenting with problems and questions in ways that are relevant to the particular moment and or

situation -- then expectations and preparations can easily become an obstacle to motivation and participation. To the extent that one has already created a sense of trust, mutual respect, and a non-judgemental situation then this could certainly invite for increased expectations. However, I generally prefer to try to make as much as possible from the time we have in class rather than depend on work outside class. This method relies on the idea that it is typically more profitable to *inspire* the students to working or practicing on their own rather than force them by giving assignments. In any case, several statements indicated that the students did not perceive the lack of expectations as a problem.

(Student F) "Ska jag vara helt ärlig så hade jag inte förberett mig alls. Jag visste knappt vad det hela handlade om. ... Mer insatt i kursen än så var jag inte innan vi började och hade där av inga specifika förväntningar vilket personligen passar mig ganska bra. Jag får oftast ut mest av saker å ting som jag inte har några förväntningar på."

(Student B) "Jag hade inte direkt förberett något innan kursen, vilket inte heller behövdes för att vi skulle komma igång direkt, då vi hade en väl förberedd lärare."

(Student G) "Jag hade inte så mycket förväntningar annat än att jag tyckte att det skulle bli intressant och hoppades på att få inspiration och kunna utveckla mina tankar. Inför varje enskilt lektionstillfälle försökte jag tänka lite på det vi diskuterat lektionen innan, och prova de övningar vi fått. Det blev även så att jag tog med mig det vi pratat om på lektionen, och tänkte på det när jag var i olika situationer under veckan. Ibland skrev jag ner saker jag kom på under lektionen eller annars, för att det kändes viktigt."

I did discuss with the students what it might mean to be mentally and emotionally prepared for class, particularly as something that could be based on a personal decision. That is to say, we discussed what it might mean to develop one's own desire to participate actively rather than relying on an external demand. This seems to have inspired several of the students, which relates to the issue concerning the teacher's expression of honesty as a way of connecting with the students.

(Student E) "En specifik situation är när många av oss var sena till lektionerna i början, och du satte ner foten och sa att det inte var ok. Då kursen handlade om närvaro i allra högsta grad, så gjorde det stort intryck på oss tror jag, alla fall på mig! Viktigt att någon formulerade sig kring varför det är så viktigt att vara i tid, och vara närvarande, i tid. [...] Det kan uppfattas som att Klas slösade ännu mer tid på att några var försenade, men jag tycker tvärt om att det var ett exempel på hur man kan möta en person eller grupp där den/de är och därifrån hjälpa. För om vi elever inte vill komma till lektionen så är det kanske ingen större idé för oss att göra det. Efter det tror jag inte att så många kom sent. Inte för att man kände sig tvingad eller pressad, utan rent av för att man kom i kontakt med vad man egentligen vill. Det är ju något som i allra högsta grad har med musikskap och övning att göra. När man utgår från eleven istället för en speciell läroplan eller något sånt, tycker jag att det känns som att läraren respekterar oss."

(Student F) "För mig började hela kursen med att jag kom sent. Det gjorde även några andra och det resulterade i att du hade en åsikt kring detta vilket jag tyckte var väldigt bra. ... så poängterade du vikten av att komma i tid, ett ansvarstagande både mot sig själv samt människor runt om kring en. Vikten av att ta ansvar för sitt egna fokus/ lärande. Att våga visa att man bryr sig. Den inledningen gjorde ett starkt intryck på mig och satte prägeln på hela kursen. Det var naturligtvis inte bara att du sa det utan hur du sa det. Jag upplevde att du uttryckte dig väl vilket jag måste erkänna inte tillhör vanligheten. Jag tyckte att det du sa (nu pratar jag kring hela kursen) upplevdes väldigt direkt. Det var lätt att ta det

till sig, jag gillar likhetstecknet mellan personlig utveckling och sitt musicerande som jag upplevde fanns ständigt närvarande. [...] "När du sa det här med 'att komma i tid är lite som att blotta sig själv'.. eller man liksom lämnar ut sig själv.. Det tyckte jag var väldigt bra sagt. Det är väldigt träffande.. det är lätt att vara, liksom.. 'äh, men fan, jag liksom'.. du vet, man håller sig 'safe' hela tiden. Men att faktiskt vara intresserad, och komma i tid.. det är naturligtvis lite svårare att vara så.."

I believe free choice is highly important for developing a sustained motivation for learning and a sense of responsibility. This is also something that several students commented on in connection with my courses.

(Student A) "För mig var det oerhört givande att få ha denna kurs. Att vi själva gick ihop och valde ensemble och lärare var väldigt lyckat. Denna möjlighet borde finnas i större grad på musikerutbildningen. Att denna kurs var längre än de vanliga ensemblekurserna på KMH var också mycket bra, då det var en förutsättning för att man skulle hinna fördjupa sig i området."

(Student B) "Jag och de andra eleverna hade valt just att ha denna ensemble ihop med just Klas Nevrin, vilket bidrog till att vi hade stort fokus på lektionerna. Under andra ensemblekurser, då man blir placerad i en slumpad grupp med slumpad lärare, upplever jag inte alls samma motivation och fokus som jag upplevt med denna kurs. ... I övrigt måste jag beklaga mig över hur synd det är att alla kurser inte kan vara lika inspirerande som denna. Ensemblekurser där alla slumpvis blivit indelade fungerar aldrig särskilt bra, så för utbildningsprogrammet tycker jag man kan tilldela mer poäng till ensembler som elever sätter ihop och där de väljer lärare."

(Student C) "Kursen känns som lite av en positiv ytterlighet i utbudet av kurser på KMH. Aldrig har man så ingående, med en så pass liten ensemble, och under så pass många timmar, fått jobba fokuserat kring ett enda ämne. Inför ett framtida musikerskap betyder det mycket att ha fått bena ut och öva på vissa frågor som annars kunnat lega och skava omedvetet under alltför lång tid."

(Student D) "... denna ens[emble] har varit den mest givande under min tid som musiker eller musikstuderande. Av denna orsak har jag nog engagerat mig mer i mina förberedelser runt om och verkligen märkt att mitt fokus blir bättre under lektionstid och därmed fått ut maximalt av kursen. ... Det är en stor del till att denna kurs varit så utvecklande, just att man verkligen har gått in i det djupt och haft gott om tid att bearbeta informationen. ... Jag känner att jag verkligen har hittat nya vägar att kunna uttrycka det jag vill utan att känna tvekan eller ångest och istället finna ro och lustfullhet. Något som jag innan bara upplevde ibland men inte kunnat påverka eller styra över."

(Student G) "Jag tycker att det var jättebra att kursen fanns för det blev ett sätt att inte tappa bort mig själv, liksom, för jag tycker det är lätt att göra det när det är så mycket grejer som man känner så här press.. det är så många som har andra värderingar än vad man själv har.. Man vill få en chans att tänka på dem.. att känna efter själv.. att inte bara följa med i nån slags ström.."

Several students commented on the importance of open discussions and metacognitive reflection, not least how this might have affected the possibility of working on their own.

(Student D) "Att vi hela tiden för diskussion runt om är en viktig faktor som har fått mig att förstå. Att inget är rätt eller fel och att läraren frågar "varför tycker du så?" bidrar till att man reflekterar mer och översätter samt formar begreppen så man själv förstår dem."

(Student J) "Just det här att man inte dömer för tidigt.. Hela det här att döma har jag reflekterat kring.. För det har man gjort mycket, det tänkte inte jag liksom innan.. Då var det självklart att man dömde, men nu fick jag en helt annan innebörd, att döma.. Så det har väl lite grann påverkat mitt personliga, utanför musiken.. Men först och främst på min musikaliska.. har det gjort påverkan."

(Student H) "Att öppna upp ögonen för improvisation.. var kommer idéerna ifrån, hur hittar man det här flowet som man pratar om? [...] det var väldigt bra att det var mycket filosofi och tankar.. för det är ju precis lika mycket det som musik handlar om.. Som musiker.. man kan bli lite djupsint ibland, och lite tung, och då kan det vara väldigt bra att kunna liksom hitta tillbaka till kärnan, hitta tillbaka till flödet.. det kan man aldrig påminna sig nog om, att inte bli medryckt i något.. vad är det jag vill göra, vad är den här glöden i mig.. hur når jag det? [...] ..det är lätt på den här skolan att man.. tar nånting på så himla stort allvar.. att man blir rädd eller nervös inför nånting, eller att man inte kommer klara det.. För mig gav det liksom förmåga att zooma ut och hitta tillbaka till 'just det, det var ju det här jag vill göra'.."

(Student M) "Jag vet hur jag ska gå vidare med övning tack vare läraren. ... fått nya sätt att jobba vidare, vilket jag tycker är den bästa undervisningsformen.."

Some students commented more specifically on the skills that were practiced on in experimental methods, indicating that these proved to be useful for various forms of improvisation.

(Student A) "Att forcera sig in i olika roller i musiken var väldigt givande för mig. Det gjorde att jag spelade på annorlunda sätt än vad jag gjort innan, och öppnade många dörrar för mig som improvisatör. Jag hade under kursens gång, och har fortfarande stor nytta av dessa olika förhållningssätt som jag tidigare inte hade reflekterat över. Jag har under hela kursen försökt testa dessa saker i andra sammanhang tex. olika ensembler på skolan där vi har hållit på med mer komponerad musik. Detta har gjort att även de andra ensemblerna känts mer värdefulla och givande för mig. ... För mig har det varit mycket givande att kunna applicera kursens innehåll i andra sammanhang, och i andra genres än jazz då jag främst håller på med experimentell rock/popmusik. ... Kursens innehåll bar jag med mig i mitt eget musiklyssnande och gjorde att jag analyserade musik utifrån kursens innehåll. Detta [...] fick mig att inse många saker jag inte tänkt på tidigare, om varför viss musik tilltalar mig mer än annan."

(Student A) "Det har varit mycket givande att öva sig på att renodla olika intensitetsparametrar. Det man har märkt är att utan att göra det, så befinner man sig ofta i en slags mittfåra, där man aldrig spelar med väldigt hög intensitet eller väldigt låg. Att renodla dessa saker har hjälpt till att bredda mitt musikaliska vokabulär. ... Det som varit mest givande för mig var att jag under kursen kom bort från ett tänk att de olika musikernas spel hela tiden skall sträva åt samma håll och riktning. Att våga hålla sig till en och samma idé, som kanske vid första anblicken kan krocka med medmusikernas spel, kan i slutändan skapa intressant musik."

(Student N) "Bra konkret kursmaterial. Oberoende från musikstil vilket är viktigt."

(Student L) ".. användbart oberoende av stil. Lätt att applicera."

Several students pointed out that having a class that focused on discussion and reflection, in ways that connected with their own needs and desires, helped them in developing more self-confidence.

(Student E) Jag har lärt mig, eller mest fått bekräftat snarare, att alla toner duger och att vi

studenter duger redan nu, som studenter och unga musiker. Men, att man alltid kan utvecklas, och att man skall vilja utvecklas för sin egen skull och inte för någon annans skull eller för någon annans bekräftelse."

(Student G) "Jag tror att jag lärde mig mycket, eller i alla fall kom i kontakt med många nya tankar. Jag tror att jag nu känner att jag i större grad kan tillåta mig själv att testa saker och inte lyckas. Eller jag kanske ibland har slutat känna att man kan lyckas eller misslyckas. Även att känna i varje situation att det är en egen situation som man får ta tillvara på: 'det här är det som bjuds'. Jag har också fått inspiration av att flytta fokus från mig själv till andra. [...] ..att väcka tankar hos oss.. att vi ska börja tänka på såna grejer.. man kanske tänker väldigt mycket på liksom vilka toner eller skalor man ska ha.. men för mig är det ett mycket större hinder om jag är nervös eller rädd när jag spelar.. Jag hade tänkt väldigt mycket.. på det hindret.. och så fort jag fick en formulering på den tanken så bara det gjorde att när jag var medveten om det så försvann dem där rädslorna nästan på en gång.. Det var skönt också att höra vad alla andra sa, att det var många i klassen som tänkte typ på samma tankar.."

(Student F) "..det är ju det som är konceptet.. att kunna hitta en riktning i det man gör när man väl gör det.. så att man inte bara gör det slentrian. Det är ju det som är det svåraste.. Jag kan känna för min egen del, jag låter bäst i övningsrummet, men att ta det i ett sammanhang, det är det som är svårt.. Och det har ju mycket med dom här grejerna som vi pratade om: dömande, nervositet, vad ska folk tycka och tänka.. så man låser sig på ett eller annat sätt."

Finally, several students highlighted the importance of connecting musical skills with more personal or existential aspects of development.

(Student G) ".. hur det kan kännas i olika situationer, inte bara när man spelar, utan även i andra situationer, hur det känns, och hur man kan påverka hur man känner för att komma dit man vill.. Man kom i kontakt med vad det var man ville.. en inre motivation.. Det tycker jag var inspirerande."

(Student H) "Vem man är som konstnär, det är det aldrig nåt på utbildningen.. så det är ju väldigt bra att det här har börjat finnas, därför jag tror att det är jättemånga som är besvikna, som kommer ut från musikhögskolan och fortfarande inte riktigt har fått gräva i det liksom psykiska i allting.."

(Student E) "..varför har vi valt improviserad musik, och vad som är skälen med det, vad som är charmen med det, och som jag tror det är lätt att tappa.. [...] Det som var bra.. var att det blev liksom ett helhetsperspektiv.. allt man gör, allting man är.. [...] Jag trodde den skulle bli mera strikt, mera jazzig.. Jag trodde att jag skulle få sitta där och bli sådär arg och upprörd för att folk sa inskränkta saker.. och så blev det inte så.. Att jazzen skulle ställas på något eget podium, för det är jag så trött på.. [...] För mig var det typ sista sekunden.. innan jag kände bara att jag går inte kvar här.. jag vet inte.. om det är ett visst synsätt på livet.. Man gick i nån sorts glasbur med en massa känslor.. och så kom det ett ämne där man fick prata om det.. [...] Att få formulera för sig själv vem man är.. hur vet jag om det känns bra?.. hur kan jag identifiera själv om det känns som att det här vill jag göra? ..formulera varför man gör det.. och varför nånting inte känns bra, och att det faktiskt kan vara ett led till något som man egentligen vill göra.. Att förstå att allting måste börja hos mig.. Jag kan inte låta som någon annan, jag kan inte spela som någon annan, men jag kan spela som jag.."

(Student F) "Jag tycker att kursen skiljer sig ganska mycket från dom andra kurserna som finns här. Och då tänker jag framförallt på.. den konstnärliga aspekten. Det är väldigt mycket eget reflekterande. Det är det inte så mycket, upplever jag, i andra kurser. Det kanske inte

har så mycket med ämnet att göra utan det har nog också med hur du lägger fram det. .. Jag tror att grunden till det ligger mycket i.. att du tar den här kursen på väldigt stort allvar, den är viktig för dig. Det handlar om livet, alltså det som vi har funderingar kring hela tiden, och att det är en del av ens personliga utveckling. .. Man känner liksom att 'okej, här är det någon som gör det här med hela sitt engagemang och kräver det tillbaks'."

(Student J) "Det som man fick på den kursen hade man ju aldrig fått om inte den kursen fanns.. för sånt sysslar man ju inte på dom andra lektionerna. Det är ju inte lika konstnärligt tänk på andra kurser.. Så den behandlar en bit som inte behandlas annars.."

## Conclusions

I believe that the experimental approach offers a paradigm shift in the way we can teach improvisation, not least by focusing on creativity itself. First, the experimental approach allows us to devise a variety of practices for dealing directly and explicitly with highly complex combinations of musical parameters. Second, it challenges us to practice also interactive and communicative skills within a group-based teaching, alongside the individual's musico-technical skills. Finally, the experimental approach seems to be a successful strategy for improving students' awarenesses and perceptions of learning processes, especially to the extent that it also acknowledges the importance of conceptual creativity and independent reflection. This is so because it challenges the teacher's ability to *motivate* students, not least by explicitly relating to needs and desires, which in turn enables the students to form metacognitive insights on their own terms. Teachers can reinforce this process by adopting skills for non-authoritarian ways of connecting with their students, thereby establishing an experimental practice that works more profoundly to empower the students in their own creative processes.

The experimental approach emphasizes that learning happens primarily by imitating the "doing" that produces things like high-level complexity, unpredictability, interactivity and spontaneity. This experimentation does not primarily rely on a reduction of detail, nor on a focus on the end-result, at least not in quite the same way as with formalizing methods (and especially dissimilar to those that depend on some form of inscriptional model for the transmission of knowledge). If learning is sometimes a kind of mimicing of the teacher's skills then this form of mimicing has to include those fundamentally uncontrollable and non-representable aspects that we can only call "experimental", and that inevitably bring the student on to his or her own forms of creative expression. The less dependance there is on inscriptional authority, and thus on predetermined and assessable results, the more creative processes can be activated. Furthermore, this is a form of apprenticeship that involves learning not only embodied skills but also the adopting of a variety of "reflexive" skills that are highly useful for the development of imagination, receptiveness, interactivity, responsibility, and many other resources for creativity. These too are skills that the teacher probably teaches best by setting an example, as it were, and by creating experimental learning environments in which they can be explored and tested "in action".

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