Improvisation in a Fourth-Grade Music Class

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IMPROVISATION IN A FOURTH-GRADE MUSIC CLASS

by

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ABSTRACT

With the intent of improving the understanding of music learning, I investigated the processes of tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation among my fourth-grade students and me. The following were the specific research questions that guided this qualitative case study. 1. How did I adapt music improvisation strategies for my intact class of fourth-grade students? 2. How did those students participate in music improvisation experiences? 3. How did those students describe their music improvisation experiences? Seventeen fourth-grade students participated in this study, and I participated in this study as a participant observer. Over the course of five weeks, I taught ten 50-minute music classes, and engaged students in a variety of improvisation activities. Data sources comprised video-recordings, student journals, my written reflections and observations, learning plans, and audio-recordings. I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data for emergent themes. Those themes included (a) establishing an effective music-learning environment, (b) strategy adaptations to scaffold music skills, and (c) students’ shared positive experiences. Additionally, I provided descriptions of individual, improvisation-learning experiences via vignettes. The improvisation teaching and learning process is a multifaceted phenomenon containing complicated emotional, social, and musical elements that still need further investigation; however, my experiences with these fourth-grade students has led me to believe that through improvisation, music educators may be able to foster creativity and self-expression while simultaneously developing students’ music skills and confidence levels.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researchers (Azzara, 1993; Campbell, Connel, & Beegle, 2007; Guilbault, 2009; Davis, 2009; Gordon, 2012; Randles 2010; Reese, 2007; Strand, 2006; Willing, 2010) have pondered how humans learn music and make music meaningful. Gordon (2012) posed that,

We give meaning to music by audiating the context and content of music. When we are listening to, performing, reading, writing, improvising, and creating pattern content and are simultaneously and continuously attending to tonality and meter context we are audiating even if we do not have formal word to explain what we are comprehending. (p.11)

Several researchers have surmised that through improvisation and music students develop a sense of ownership over their music creations (Azzara, Grunow, & Gordon, 1997; Guilbault, 2009; Gordon, 2012; Smith, 2009). Investigating how students and teachers describe their improvisation experiences may help music educators, and researchers better understand how students develop musically and what learning to improvise means to them.

Davis (2009) investigated the meaningfulness of music education to middle school students in general music classrooms by surveying 762 students in Grades 6 through 8. Davis collected data using a researcher-designed open-ended survey and
classified the students’ responses into four classifications of meaning: “vocational (career-oriented), academic (theory and/or history), belongingness (social interactions), and agency (self-esteem, motivation, and emotional development)” (p.61). Davis determined that “even students who choose not to participate in performance groups appear to benefit from music education” (p.75) and posed that by investigating and understanding meaningfulness of music education further, music educators may be able improve the process of music education. Although Davis (2009) investigated the broad roles that music can play in lives of adolescents, Davis did not investigate specifically how students and teachers describe the process of learning to improvise in a classroom setting.

Randles (2010) investigated high school instrumentalists’ music self-concepts and its relationship to music composition experiences. In that study, 77 high school band students completed an investigator-designed survey regarding their past composition experiences. Then they participated in a 12-week composition unit. Randles measured students’ music self-concepts with the Self-Esteem of Music Assessment (SEMA) (Austin, 1990) before and after the composition unit. Randles found a strong, positive correlation ($r = .86$) between students’ pre-treatment and post-treatment SEMA scores, suggesting that music self-concept was a “relatively stable characteristic over a period of 12 weeks” (p.15). Randles concluded that past composition experiences were the strongest predictors of self-concept as measured by SEMA, and stated, “Questionnaire responses indicated that many students were engaging in compositional experiences before this project started, and those students it was discovered [sic] had higher measures of music self-concept than their non-composing peers” (p.18). Randles’ research supports
the notion that allowing students to create their own music may influence their self-concepts; however, Randles did not investigate how students describe their music learning through improvisation, or how learning to improvise made them feel.

In 1994, music educators from the Music Educators National Conference made a strong statement regarding the importance of improvisation by incorporating it into the national standards for music education (Lehman, Hinckley, Hoffer, Lindeman, Reimer, Shuler, & Straub, 1994). Additionally, many researchers (Azzara, 1993; Gordon, 2003, 2012; Guilbault, 2004, 2009; Randles, 2010; Reese, 2007; Ruthmann, 2007; Rutkowski, 1996; Wiggins, 2005; Willing, 2010) have investigated the importance of improvisation in music education. Azzara (1993) and Guilbault (2009) found that improvisation experiences in the music classroom may contribute positively to music achievement. Moreover, Gordon, (2003) and Azzara (1993) suggested that improvisation is a readiness for music reading, similar to how conversation in language is readiness for reading in language. That is, the free exchange of musical ideas within music context while using music syntax may assist the music reading process. Similarly, the free exchange of ideas through language supports the language reading process (Cambourne, 1988; Reynolds, Long, & Valerio, 2007; Smith, 2006).

Azzara (1993) investigated the use of an improvisation curriculum to enhance music achievement. Azzara randomly assigned 66 fifth-grade students to participate in one of four groups. Two groups of students participated in instruction supplemented with improvisation, while the two other groups of students participated in music instruction without the improvisation supplement. After the treatment period, the students performed three etudes written by the researcher, and independent judges scored each performance.
Azzara stated, “Students who received instrumental music instruction that included an improvisation curriculum were found to have significantly higher composite etude performance scores than those students who received instrumental music instruction without an emphasis in improvisation” (p.338). Azzara also professed, “Improvisation ability appears to transfer to a student’s clearer comprehension of the tonal, rhythmic, and expressive elements of music in an instrumental performance from notation” (p. 339).

Guilbault (2009) investigated the effects of harmonic accompaniment on the tonal improvisation achievement of students in first through sixth grade. For that study, a treatment group of students received both rote song instruction and improvisation instruction with a root melody accompaniment. The control group received the same instruction without the root melody accompaniment. Guilbault found that tonal improvisation achievement was significantly higher for the treatment group of students who did receive the root melody accompaniment during instruction. Guilbault stated:

It seems plausible that elementary school students need exposure to the sound of harmonic progressions within the context of familiar songs to build a harmonic ‘speaking’ vocabulary, in a manner similar to the way in which they develop a listening vocabulary of tonalities. (p.87)

Guilbault’s and Azzara’s (1993) studies each support the notion that improvisation instruction may affect music achievement positively; however, neither researcher investigated how young students and their teachers describe the process of learning to improvise over time.

Reese (2007) investigated how three music educators defined improvisation, how they used improvisation in their classroom, and how they felt about their preparedness to
teach improvisation. Reese found that while participants’ definitions of improvisation were similar, how they implemented improvisation and their reasons for using improvisation in the classroom varied greatly. Participants did not feel their undergraduate experience sufficiently prepared them to teach improvisation to their students. Reese stated, “The practice of improvisation, evaluation of improvised musical products and ability, and the quest for pedagogical techniques lacks the focus and precision required to fulfill the role improvisation has as a prevalent musical achievement standard” (p. 137). On the importance of improvisation, Gordon (2012) stated:

> Notwithstanding the value of listening, performing, reading and writing through audiation, when a teacher provides students with skills to create and improvise their own music, music becomes the property of students themselves. This should be the ultimate goal of all teachers. The relative quality of music students create is not really important. What is important is that students believe music belongs to them. As a result they discover creativity relies on imitation, but art relies on creativity and implementation. (p. 41)

While music educators generally accept that improvisation is an important component of music education, the processes necessary for learning to improvise remains only partially understood. Moreover, researchers have not documented how young students act, think, and feel while engaging in music improvisation activities over time.

Nilges (2002) investigated fifth-grade students’ experiences during an 11-week creative dance unit. With the purpose of improving movement curriculum design and delivery, Nilges investigated how students felt during different movement activities and why they liked or disliked different movement activities. Though researchers have not
investigated how young students feel during music improvisation activities, music educators may use information gained from such an investigation to improve music curriculum design and delivery.

Wiggins and Bodoin (1998) investigated the teaching and learning processes in an intact second-grade music classroom. They found that the teacher self-reflection process is extremely important for allowing teachers “to examine their own work and consider how issues related to teaching and learning processes manifest themselves in their work” (p.302), however, researchers have not investigated the teacher self-reflective process specifically while guiding young students through music improvisation activities.

Though music educators and researchers generally agree that improvisation is a beneficial experience for music learners, and that teacher self-reflection is important for enhancing music curriculum design and delivery, the processes of music improvisation within music classroom settings remain partially understood. Those processes may be better understood by examining them concurrently from the perspective of a music educator and music students engaged in a series of improvisation activities.

**Purpose**

With the intent of improving the understanding of music learning, the purpose of this research was to investigate the processes of tonal, rhythm, melodic and harmonic improvisation among my fourth-grade students and me.

**Guiding Research Questions**

The following were the specific research questions that guided this qualitative case study.
1. Over the course of one five-week period, how did I adapt tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation strategies for my intact class of fourth-grade students?

2. How did those students participate in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation experiences?

3. How did those students describe their tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation experiences?

Operational Definitions

For this study, I used Reese’s (2007) definitions of tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation. Following are those definitions.

- **Tonal improvisation** – students are intentionally and thoughtfully making choices solely regarding the tonal content of their improvisation. Context, such as tonality, is provided by an external source (ex: teacher instruction, or tonality of the accompanying or related song when appropriate). (Reese, 2007, p. 143)

- **Rhythm improvisation** – students are intentionally and thoughtfully making choices solely regarding the rhythmic content of their improvisation. Context, such as meter, is provided by an external source (ex: teacher instruction, or meter of the accompanying or related song or chant when appropriate). (Reese, 2007, p. 143)

- **Melodic improvisation** – students are intentionally and thoughtfully making choices combining aspects of rhythmic and tonal improvisation. Context, such as meter and tonality, is provided by an external source (ex: teacher instruction, or meter or tonality of the accompanying or related song when appropriate). No
imposed structure is provided outside of the student for harmonic structure (ex: tonic function, dominant function), but may be intentionally chosen by the student. (Reese, 2007, p. 143)

- Harmonic improvisation – students are intentionally and thoughtfully making choices within the context of meter, tonality, and harmonic structure provided by an outside source (ex: teacher instruction, meter and tonality and harmonic structure of the accompanying or related song when appropriate, recording). (Reese, 2007, p. 143)
CHAPTER 2

RELATED RESEARCH

Ice Can Look Like Glass: A Phenomenological Investigation of Movement Meaning in One Fifth-Grade Class During a Creative Dance Unit

Nilges (2004)

Nilges investigated how one fifth-grade class described movement experiences in a creative dance movement through a phenomenological investigation. Nilges grounded that investigation in Metheny’s (1968) view that different students will derive meaning from physical education in different ways. Nilges posed that understanding movement meaning further would enhance curriculum design. The investigator described how the students experienced the phenomenon of movement during a creative dance unit and identified the meaning structures defining the students’ experiences. Nilges (2004) stated, “The creative dance unit focused on the effort concepts of force (strong/light), time (fast/slow), space (direct/indirect), and flow (bound/free)” (p.301), and structured the creative dance unit to encourage exploration of movement and expression of emotions through movement.

Method

Participants and setting. Using a phenomenological qualitative research design, the investigator taught a creative dance unit to 19 fifth-grade students at an elementary school located in the southeastern United States. The investigator had an existing relationship with the physical education instructor at that school and, as a result, gained
access to the site. The participants included 10 girls (6 White, 4 Black) and 9 boys (5 White, 4 Black).

**Data Collection and analysis.** Over 28 consecutive days, Nilges collected data from video recordings, semi-structured interviews, journal entries, and homework documents. During the instruction period, students completed homework assignments and journal entries to “explore their feelings related to the performance” and “reflect on daily content in terms of what they liked or disliked about it” (Nilges, 2004, p.303).

The investigator facilitated semi-structured interviews after the instruction period, and, consistent with the phenomenological approach, used the interviews as the primary data source. The investigator used a modified think-aloud protocol, projection techniques, and open-ended questions (Patton, 2002) during semi-structured interviews. Students watched a video recording of their own dance performance, and the investigator encouraged students to speak freely about how they felt as well as their likes and dislikes about the performance. In the second part of the interview, the investigator used projection techniques. Nilges gave students a list of 17 possible reasons why one may participate in physical activity. Students identified all the reasons they agreed with and then narrowed their choices to the top three reasons. The investigator asked the students if they participated in physical activity and movement for any of their selected reasons. Nilges (2004) stated, “This process led to meaning statements about participation in the unit that could be investigated further in the open-ended portion of the interview” (p.302). During the last part of the interview, Nilges asked students open-ended questions about their experiences.
For data analysis, Nilges used analytical induction (Patton, 2002) to reduce movement meaning to its “essential essence” (Nilges, 2004, p.304). The investigator reviewed the data, coded the data, and reduced the primary codes to develop the five underlying dimensions of movement meaning.

Findings

Nilges (2004) found five dimensions of students’ movement meaning including the expressive dimension, the sensory dimension, the experiential dimension, the competency dimension, and the intersubjective dimension. The expressive dimension portrayed students’ enjoyment in using movement activities to express feelings and ideas. The sensory dimension portrayed students’ bodies’ physical feelings from movement activities. The experiential dimension highlighted how students linked movement activities to past experiences. The competency dimension portrayed students’ attraction to movements that they felt they were “good at” (Nilges, 2004, p.308). The intersubjective dimension highlighted the gender and social interactions that students felt during movement activities.

Nilges (2004) stated, “Given the engaged subject-object relationship I assumed in this study, I am present within the interpretive commentaries embedded in the results of the study” (p.305). Nilges’s physical education philosophy emphasizes that students should understand their own feelings about movement in order find meaning in movement activities. Nilges structured the study to deliberately engage students in self-awareness and “bring a particular engaged subject-object relationship to the students” (Nilges, 2004, p.305). Nilges noted that it is important to understand that context when considering the findings of the study.
Relevance to the Current Study

Like Nilges, I used qualitative methods to document and investigate young students’ experiences over an instruction period. The instruction period in my study, however, focused on music improvisation activities rather than movement activities. I utilized similar data collection methods such as video recording and student journal entries. I also used Nilges’s projection-technique process as a model. Nilges gave students a list of 17 possible reasons why one may participate in physical activity. Students identified all the reasons they agreed with and then narrowed their choices to the top three reasons. In this case study, I created projection worksheets for my students to describe how they felt during improvisation activities. I provided students with a list of 27 possible emotions. Students identified all the emotions they felt, and then narrowed their choices down to two emotions they felt the strongest.

Additionally, I had a similar researcher-participant relationship as Nilges did with the participants in that study. My research was not strongly grounded in phenomenological methodology; rather, I investigated the processes of improvisation in a fourth-grade music class through my own experiences and through the experiences of my students.

Joint Music Attention Between Toddlers and a Music Teacher

McNair (2010)

In this qualitative case study McNair investigated the nature of joint music attention between toddlers and a music teachers. McNair grounded this investigation in Bruner’s (1995) theory on joint attention, Vygotsky’s (1930/1978) sociocultural theory,
and Gordon’s (2012) music learning theory. McNair used the following research questions to guide the study.

1. How do toddlers and I, a music teacher, exhibit signs of joint music attention when socially interacting using a music curriculum based on Gordon’s music learning theory?

2. What teacher-initiated music activities result in observations of joint music attention between toddlers and a music teacher?

3. What toddler-initiated music activities result in observations of joint music attention between toddlers and a music teacher?

4. What music acquisition skills are exhibited by toddlers during joint music attention?

5. What teacher-utilized materials or strategies result in observations of joint music attention?

Method

Participants and setting. McNair, a qualified music educator, participated in this study as a participant observer. McNair taught music to toddlers while investigating joint music attention. McNair enlisted three other participant observers including a music education graduate assistant and two early childhood classroom teachers at the research site. The site was a children’s development center that provided full day care and early childhood education for the nine toddlers that participated in the study. McNair also enlisted two independent music development specialists to complete video observations and participate in think-aloud interviews.
Data collection and analysis. McNair taught two 20-minute music play sessions a week for three weeks. After each session, McNair wrote observations and reflections regarding the session. The graduate assistant recorded each music play session and reviewed the video for observations and reflections. The two early childhood teachers in the toddler classroom wrote field notes during the music sessions. The independent music development specialists reviewed the videos and participated in think-aloud interviews as additional data sources. McNair transcribed all observation and reflections made by the participant observers and all data from the independent music development specialists. After reviewing the data, McNair coded the data and developed cultural domains relating to joint music attention. McNair (2010) selected “vignettes of particularly informative instances of joint music attention between the music teacher and the toddlers” (p.47), and completed a componential analysis of all observations.

Findings

McNair derived findings from cultural domains, emergent themes, vignettes, and componential analysis. McNair identified three cultural domains including shared music focus, shared music attention, and shared music understanding. Additionally, McNair found six themes regarding joint music attention: physical proximity influenced joint music attention, both toddlers and teacher initiated reciprocal music-making, a social and music-making history was necessary for joint music attention, purposeful silences encouraged joint music attention, objects were useful for achieving joint music attention, and play and playfulness encouraged joint music attention. McNair (2010) wrote four vignettes to “describe the phenomenon of joint music attention between toddlers and me” (p.114). Lastly, through componential analysis, McNair analyzed the similarities and
differences between the participants’ observations, finding that all observers noticed “direct social interaction between the toddlers and me while we were making music together” (McNair, 2010, p.115).

Relevance to the Current Study

Similar to McNair, I made use of participant observation while teaching a music class as a qualified music educator. My data sources, collected as a participant observer, were similar to McNair’s, including field notes, observations, and reflections. I, however, taught fourth-grade students, and gathered data from them, rather than toddlers. Moreover, like McNair, I grounded my study in aspects of Gordon’s (2012) music learning theory.

Painting a Big Soup: Teaching and Learning in a
Second-Grade General Music Classroom

Wiggins & Bodoin (1998)

The purpose of this research was to investigate the teaching and learning processes that took place in the second-grade general music classroom of Bodoin. Although Wiggins, the researcher, had research questions that guided the study, it was ultimately Bodoin’s “reactions to the data analysis process that emerged as the most important issue—more important, it seemed, than the analysis of what had occurred in the classroom” (Wiggins & Bodoin, 1998, p.282).

Method

Participants and setting. One class of second-grade students from a public elementary school in a suburban school district participated in the study. Wiggins asked
Bodoin to choose two students, one boy and one girl, who represented a typical second-grade student. The chosen students wore microphones with mini-tape recorders during each class to audio record their individual experiences.

**Data collection and analysis.** The researcher collected data over a nine-week period. The second-grade music class met for 30 minutes on Tuesday and Wednesday each week. The researcher collected data during each Wednesday session. Wiggins videotaped the sessions and the audio-recorded the perspectives of the two chosen children. Wiggins also observed and took field notes. Wiggins interviewed Bodoin throughout the data collection process and after the data collection period, provided Bodoin with transcriptions of all the collected data. Wiggins stated, “To triangulate the data they were collected from three different perspectives: the researcher’s (through observation, field notes, videotape), the teacher’s (through videotape and interview), and that of the two children (through audio-tape)” (Wiggins & Bodoin, 1998, p.284). The researcher used negative case analysis through the data analysis process for incidents that might refute emergent themes. Additionally, Wiggins enlisted an educational researcher to read portions of the data and identify the importance of emerging themes.

**Findings**

Wiggins and Bodoin found the teaching/learning process in the second-grade music classroom to be complex. They identified four themes relating to teacher expertise that affected the teaching/learning process. The themes were that the teacher was an expert musician, used a variety of instructional strategies, provided support for learning, and managed the classroom routine to facilitate learning. They also identified five themes relating to “the ways in which the students attempted to make sense out of the musical
ideas they encountered” (Wiggins & Bodoin, 1998, p.285). Students (a) figured things out for themselves, (b) established their own contexts, (c) were aware of what they already knew, (d) coached peers and sought coaching from peers, and (e) evaluated their own work.

Although those findings are important, the most powerful aspect of this study was that Bodoin “came to understand the impact of these issues on the teaching and learning in her own classroom” (Wiggins & Bodoin, 1998, p.300). Bodoin’s self-reflection throughout the data analysis process enabled her to learn a great deal about the “nature of the interactions that took place within the ‘big soup’ that is her music classroom” (Wiggins & Bodoin, 1998, p. 302).

Relevance to the Current Study

Like Wiggins and Bodoin, I investigated the nature of teaching and learning in an elementary music classroom; however, I focused my study on the specific processes of improvisation teaching and learning. For Wiggins and Bodoin, teacher self-reflection played an important role in the findings of that study. Similarly, while guiding students through improvisation as a participant observer my own self-reflections were an important component of my research
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Design

I chose a case study design to investigate the processes of improvisation in a fourth-grade music class as a case study. I used participant observation to investigate my experiences teaching improvisation (Spradley, 1980), and I purposefully selected student participants, as suggested for a case study by Patton (2002). I developed research questions that specifically focused on all participants. Maxwell (2013) confirmed the appropriateness of developing research questions with specific terms for a case study because it “helps you to focus on the specific beliefs, actions, and events that you observe or ask about and the actual contexts within which these are situated…” (p. 79). To obtain detailed, context specific, and useful data, I treated each individual participant as a single unit of analysis during data collection, and through the data analysis process, I used the individual experiences of each participant and the shared experiences between participants to produce a case study (Patton, 2002).

Setting

I chose my research site based on intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) and conducted my research at a small private elementary school for students in kindergarten through Grade 6. That school’s personnel have an existing relationship with the University of South Carolina (USC). Since 1999, graduate students from the USC School of Music have taught general music as part of a graduate assistantship while earning their
The students at the school learn in an information-rich music environment. As one of those graduate assistants, I am one of the general music teachers at the school.

I collected all student data in the school’s music room. That carpeted room contains a large open space that enables students to sit, stand, or move around the room, depending on the requirements to complete music activities. A SMART Board 685 interactive whiteboard sits at the front of the room next to an upright piano. A bookshelf holds a variety of barred Orff instruments and unpitched percussion instruments and sits underneath a window.

**Participants**

I examined my experiences and the experiences of my students as a participant observer. My students in an intact fourth-grade class also participated in the study. Following is a description of those participants.

**Participant observer.** As a participant observer, I investigated my experiences and my students’ experiences in a fourth-grade music class. My broad observations of my surroundings, dual roles as researcher and participant, introspective processes, explicit awareness of both my insider and outsider perspectives, and extensive record keeping classified me as a participant observer (Spradley, 1980).

My elementary music teaching experiences have qualified me to investigate this topic. I hold a Bachelor of Music with emphasis in Music Education and taught elementary general music, kindergarten through Grade 5, for two years. I achieved Gordon Institute for Music Learning (GIML) Elementary General Level One Mastership Certification (2010), GIML Elementary General Level Two Mastership Certification (2013), and GIML Early Childhood Level One Mastership Certification (2012). For the
1.5 years before data collection, I taught general music, Grade 1 through Grade 4, at my research site while pursuing a Masters in Music Education. I also taught early childhood music classes at USC during that time.

**Student participants.** Seventeen fourth grade students enrolled at the small private elementary school participated in this study. Eight female students and nine male students participated, including six African American students, two Asian American students, eight Caucasian students, and one Hispanic student. Student participants were nine to 10 years old at the time of data collection. Prior to data collection, I obtained the appropriate university IRB approval (see Appendix A) and then distributed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) to the parents of my participants. In that letter, I explained my research and insured that each student’s confidentiality would be maintained. I received a signed consent form for each of the 17 student participants.

I chose that group of students because I had an existing relationship with them, having taught their music classes during their third-grade year. While teaching those students as third-grade students, I realized that those students were appropriate participants for this study because they would be an information-rich source of data, intensely manifesting the processes of improvisation learning (Patton, 2002).

Twelve of the 17 student participants had attended that same elementary school since their kindergarten year, and each school year they received music instruction twice weekly. Although they had various music teachers over the years, each music teacher taught at the school as a part of a graduate assistantship while earning a graduate degree in music education at USC. Music learning theory\(^1\) influenced each teacher as a

\(^1\) For a detailed description of music learning theory, see Gordon (2012).
requirement of the music education program at USC, although none of those teachers investigated the processes of improvisation with their students. The fourth-grade students’ experiences in that music program made those students an information-rich source of data for this study.

Additionally, since their third-grade year, the student participants regularly wrote in journals to document and supplement their music learning. Journaling activities included various tasks; students wrote definitions, tonal patterns, rhythm patterns, as well as personal reflections about their music learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

Qualitative inquiry relies greatly on the researcher’s conceptual framework because it helps assess and refine his or her goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats (Maxwell, 2013). My conceptual framework supported and informed this qualitative case study as I drew on my beliefs, on my prior experiences, and on an existing theory to situate my research. Maxwell (2013) suggested that using an existing theory as part of the conceptual framework for qualitative inquiry can be useful because “it draws your attention to particular events or phenomena, and sheds light on relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood” (pp. 49-50).

The quest to understand how children learn music has led to the development of multiple approaches to music education including the Orff-Schulwerk approach, the Kodály approach, the Dalcroze approach, and Gordon’s music learning theory. Music learning theory, in particular, influenced my research. Gordon (2012) theorized that children learn music similarly to how they learn language, posing that children acquire
listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies in music just as they do for the language of their culture.

Gordon (2012) and Taggart, Reynolds, Valerio, Lange, Bailey, & Gordon (2010) recommended that teachers employ a whole-part-whole strategy when engaging students in music learning. When using a whole-part-whole strategy, teachers introduce students to the whole, then, using learning sequence activities\(^2\), help students apply various parts of the whole, and lastly, the students assimilate those separate parts back into the whole (Gordon, 2012; Taggart et al., 2010). While engaging students in the learning sequence activities, Gordon (2012) recommended that teachers use skill learning sequence,\(^3\) a detailed outline of skill levels required for music learning that enables teachers to guide students through the development of music imitation and music inference skills. Although I did not adhere to the learning sequence activities prescribed by Gordon (1990a, 1990b, 2012), I situated this research within a framework influenced by music learning theory. I relied on many of Gordon’s (2003, 2012) ideas about music learning and used Gordon’s (2012) definition of improvisation while guiding students through improvisation learning. Gordon (2012) defined improvisation as the “spontaneous audiation and use of tonal patterns, rhythm patterns, and harmonic patterns and progressions with restrictions” (p. 397).

Regarding improvisation, Gordon (2003) posed, “Every human is capable of improvising to some extent. All that is required to impel this reality is appropriate guidance, guidance that emphasizes learning rather than teaching . . .” (p. 2). Like

\(^2\) For a detailed description of learning sequence activities, see Gordon (1990a, 1990b, 2012).

\(^3\) For a detailed description of skill learning sequence, see Gordon (2012).
Gordon (2003), I believe that, with appropriate guidance from me, each student is capable of improvisation. That belief also framed this research. Because I believe each of my student participants to be capable of improvisation, I attentively and thoughtfully sought even the smallest signs that indicated their tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation development. I value those signs of development and believe them to be worthy of informing instruction. That belief also enabled me to see each student as an individual, allowed me to be sensitive to individual subtleties, and contributed to the credibility and rigor of this research.

Regarding the teaching and learning process required for improvisation, Gordon (2003) stated:

There are many pedagogical approaches for teaching (explaining to another) music improvisation, but the question of how one learns (explains to oneself) to improvise in terms of a music learning theory has received relatively little attention. As alluded to, that begs the question of whether improvisation can actually be taught. In other words, only the readiness to learn to improvise can be taught, and improvisation, itself, has to be learned. . . . That readiness consists of acquiring a vocabulary of tonal patterns, rhythm patterns, melodic patterns (the combining of tonal and rhythm patterns), and harmonic patterns as they relate to temporal aspects in music. (pp. 11-12)

I sought to provide sequential experiences for my students so they would have the readiness to engage successfully in improvisation activities. Those improvisation activities would allow each individual student the opportunity to teach him or herself to improvise and successfully engage in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic
improvisation. I chose to identify student success during improvisation activities as when students demonstrated levels of comfort while expressing themselves through tonal, rhythm, melodic, or harmonic improvisation. I wanted students to take musical risks without fear of ridicule should their vocal offerings be outside the tonal context, the rhythm context, the harmonic context, or the guidelines that I determined for the given activity. They found those levels of comfort as they learned to understand and to improvise using tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic patterns with ease, similarly to the way one understands and uses words with ease in his or her native language.

Having taught the student participants during their third-grade year using a curriculum influenced by music learning theory, I had an understanding of their prior experiences and of what kinds of sequential experiences they still needed to be successful at improvisation. Following is a description of their prior experiences.

**Fourth-grade participants’ prior experiences.** As Gordon (2012) suggested, I separated tonal content from rhythm content during music classes as my participants’ music teacher during their third-grade year. My students had many experiences using duple meter and triple meter content at each of the following skill learning sequence levels: aural/oral, verbal association, symbolic association, generalization aural/oral, generalization-verbal, and creativity/improvisation-aural/oral. They also had many experiences at the same skill learning sequence levels while using major and minor tonal content.

I exposed the student participants to the creativity/improvisation-aural/oral skill level during their third-grade year. Gordon (2012) defined that skill level as when “students create and improvise using familiar patterns, those imitated in discrimination
learning, and unfamiliar patterns” (p. 392). I engaged students in creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities using the following call and response technique suggested by Gordon (2012). During a rhythm, creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activity, I chanted a 4-macobeat, duple rhythm pattern on the neutral syllable, *bah*. Then, students improvised a different, 4-macobeat, duple rhythm pattern on the neutral syllable, *bah*. During those activities, students rarely improvised a rhythm pattern outside of the duple meter context. I repeated that activity using rhythm solfege syllables⁴, and students easily assigned rhythm solfege syllables to their improvisations.

I engaged students in similar tonal improvisation activities. For example, during a tonal, creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activity, I sang a major tonal pattern with either a tonic, dominant, or subdominant function on the neutral syllable, *bum*. Then, I asked students to respond by singing a different major tonal pattern on the neutral syllable, *bum*. During those activities, many students commonly sang tonal patterns outside of the major tonal context. A few students easily stayed within the major tonal context, but when I asked those students to use tonal solfege syllables⁵ for their tonal pattern improvisation, they inaccurately assigned tonal solfege syllables to the pitches of their patterns.

From my prior experiences with the student participants, I knew that while using meter content, they could easily engage in creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities; however, while using tonal content, they struggled with creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities. That information greatly influenced how I created and developed learning plans to instruct those students in improvisation.

⁴ For this study, I used the beat-function rhythm solfege system as recommended by Gordon (2012).
⁵ For this study, I used moveable-do tonal solfege syllables with la-based minor as recommended by Gordon (2012).
During my participants’ third-grade year, I also used a modified whole-part-whole strategy while I engaged students in the aural/oral, verbal association, symbolic association, generalization aural/oral, generalization-verbal, and creativity/improvisation-aural/oral skill levels. For example, I introduced a song or chant as the whole, and students listened to or performed it in its entirety. Then, paying close attention to levels of readiness recommended by Gordon (2012), I used a skill level, such as generalization-verbal, to help students study a part of the song or chant using a series of tonal patterns or rhythm patterns, that I selected, based on the context and the content of the song or chant. For example, if I introduced a song in harmonic minor tonality that implied the tonic and dominant functions, I chose arpeggioed, harmonic minor, tonic and dominant tonal patterns such as those presented in Appendix C. Lastly, students performed the song or chant in its entirety. I did not adhere to learning sequence activities prescribed by Gordon (1990a, 1990b, 2012) while using that whole-part-whole strategy with my students. Because the student participants were familiar with that modified whole-part-whole strategy, I incorporated a similar strategy into the learning plans that I developed to instruct those students in improvisation for this study.

**Learning Plans.** Before data collection, I developed learning plans that outlined my intended instruction for my students, emphasizing the whole-part-whole strategy and skill learning sequence. Additionally, I created and implemented additive rating scales (Appendix D) to inform instruction throughout the data collection period, and as recommended by Gordon (2012), I exposed my students to a variety of tonalities, including major, harmonic minor and Aeolian, and a variety of meters, including duple, triple, and unusual paired. By the end of the instruction period, I planned for each student
to successfully engage in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation in a major, duple context. In Appendix E, I present my original learning plans that guided the instruction for this inquiry. Following are descriptions of my modifications to whole-part-whole and skill learning sequence (Gordon, 2012; Taggart et al., 2010).

**Whole-part-whole modifications.** According to Gordon (2012), using a whole-part-whole strategy helps students audiate and perform with contextual meaning and more accuracy than they would without this sequencing. I chose the traditional African American spiritual *Down by the Riverside*, presented in Appendix F, to engage students in a modified whole-part-whole strategy. Based on my prior experiences with my students, I determined that *Down by the Riverside* would be an appropriate choice for this research inquiry because that song provided a major, duple context for improvisation instruction, implying only three different harmonic functions: tonic, dominant, and subdominant. Additionally, the harmonic progression remains on each function for at least four macrobeats every time the harmony changes which allows time for students to explore and experiment during improvisation.

I divided each learning plan for each music class into three parts representing the whole-part-whole strategy. First, I began each learning plan by having the students listen to me sing the melody or bass line of *Down by the Riverside*, or by having students sing the melody and bass line in various arrangements. Second, rather than engaging students in learning sequence activities, I used one or more skill levels from Gordon’s (2012) skill learning sequence to engage students in call and response activities that emphasized tonal patterns or rhythm patterns (part) of the tune. Lastly, we revisited the whole by concluding each learning plan with what I called *jam sessions*. During jam sessions,
students freely engaged in improvisation while I played the harmonic progression to

*Down by the Riverside* on the piano.

**Skill learning sequence modifications.** According to Gordon (2012), the
generalization-verbal skill level is a readiness level for the creativity/improvisation-
aural/oral level. Given my prior experiences with my student participants, I surmised that
my students would benefit from tonal content experiences at the generalization-verbal
skill level in order to successfully engage in the kind of melodic improvisation and
harmonic improvisation activities I planned. Gordon (2012) defined generalization-verbal
as when “students verbally associate and synthesize familiar and unfamiliar tonal patterns
and rhythm patterns in unfamiliar order” (p. 396).

I selected and ordered 12 tonal patterns (presented in Appendix G) of either tonic,
dominant, or subdominant function in major tonality, roughly basing their order on the
harmonic progression of the song *Down by the Riverside*. I introduced those patterns to
students at the verbal association skill level. Next, I engaged students in generalization-
verbal activities using the following call and response technique as suggested by Gordon
(2012). For example, I sang the series tonal patterns on the neutral syllable, *bum*. Then,
the students responded by repeating those patterns using the correlating tonal solfege
syllables. In a different generalization-verbal activity, I sang the series of tonal patterns
on the neutral syllable, *bum*, and the students responded by labeling the function of each
pattern as tonic, dominant, or subdominant. In order for my students to engage
successfully in tonal, melodic, and harmonic improvisation, I knew they would need to
hear, predict, perform, and understand the tonic, dominant, and subdominant harmonic
functions in major tonality. Generalization-verbal activities provided them with the
readiness for them to do so. After familiarizing the students with the tonal patterns and procedures outlined above I changed the order of those tonal patterns and added new tonic, dominant, and subdominant tonal patterns to enhance their tonal pattern vocabularies similar to learning procedures outlined by Grunow, Gordon, and Azzara (1999).

I planned a variety of tonal creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities. I engaged students in tonal creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities using the same call and response technique mentioned above. For example, I sang a tonal pattern, of either tonic, dominant, or subdominant function, in major tonality, on the neutral syllable, *bum*. Then, students responded with a different major tonal pattern on the neutral syllable, *bum*. Following that activity, I sang a tonal pattern, of either tonic, dominant, or subdominant function, in major tonality using tonal solfege syllables. Students responded with a different major tonal pattern also using tonal solfege syllables.

I planned to increase the difficulty level of those activities as students became more fluent in tonal pattern improvisation. For example, in a more difficult activity, I sang a tonal pattern, of either tonic, dominant, or subdominant function, in major tonality using tonal solfege syllables. Students responded with a different major tonal pattern, within the same function as my pattern, while using tonal solfege syllables. Following that activity, I sang a tonal pattern, of either tonic, dominant, or subdominant function, in major tonality using the neutral syllable, *bum*. Students responded with a different major tonal pattern, within the same function as my pattern, while using the neutral syllable, *bum*. 
Additionally, I planned to briefly review other skill levels to ensure that students had the proper readiness for creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities. The skill levels that I reviewed were: verbal association (using tonal content and rhythm content), symbolic association (using tonal content and rhythm content), partial synthesis (using tonal content and rhythm content), and creativity/improvisation-aural/oral (using rhythm content).

Next in my learning plans, as Gordon (2003) prescribed, I combined tonal and rhythm improvisation to engage students in melodic pattern improvisation. In those creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activities, I used a call and response technique as suggested by Gordon (2003). I sang a 4-macrobeat melodic pattern, and students improvised a different, 4-macrobeat melodic pattern. That creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activity provided students with the readiness to improvise melodically and harmonically.

**Data Collection**

Over the course of five weeks, I collected data during the fourth grade students’ regularly scheduled music class. Those classes took place for 50 minutes each Monday and Wednesday morning from 11:00 to 11:50 a.m. I taught each of the 10 classes and collected data from multiple sources to improve data triangulation, rigor, and credibility (Patton, 2002).

The first data source comprised videos of each music class. I positioned one stationary, high definition video camera prior to teaching. As a second data source, students wrote about their improvisation experiences in journals. I provided the students with prompts for each journal entry, and students completed journaling activities at
various times during each music class. Following each class, I wrote my own observations and reflections as a third data source. The fourth data source comprised learning plans for each class. I edited my original learning plans to reflect any adaptations that I made during class, and I adjusted the learning plans as necessary for each following class.

Throughout the data-collection period, I realized that students struggled to explain themselves fully in writing within the time constraints of our music classes. Projection techniques, or having an individual react to something other than a question, can be especially effective while interviewing children (Nilges, 2004; Patton, 2002). I decided to use a modified projection technique to facilitate journaling. I created projection worksheets with a list of 27 emotions, such as calm, happy, embarrassed, and irritated to which children could react. In a class discussion, I ensured that students understood the meanings of each word. I asked students to privately circle each emotion that they felt while they improvised, and then narrow their selections down to one or two emotions that they felt the strongest. Next, the students wrote a small explanation regarding why they felt the way they did. I began distributing the projection worksheets during the third week of data collection as a fifth data source. Students completed the projection worksheets along with journal prompts throughout the class period. In Appendix H, I present an example of a projection worksheet.

In the fourth week of data collection, I began using three Easi-Speak™ Pro LER 4408 digital recording microphones. Rather than amplifying sound, those microphones record sound as an .mp3 file. Students held those microphones during their solo improvisations, and those recordings comprised a sixth data source.
Data Transcription

I transcribed each of the 10 video-recordings using HyperTRANSCRIBE 1.6.1 software. I reviewed each transcription and video-recording a second time to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I transcribed my hand-written notes into a Microsoft Office Word 2007 document.

Data Analysis

Within qualitative analysis, Maxwell (2013) recommended using categorizing strategies and connecting strategies. Categorizing strategies focus on “relationships of similarity” (p.106), such as coding. Maxwell stated that “the goal of coding is not primarily to count things, but to ‘fracture’ (as cited in Strauss, 1987, p.29) the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p.108). Researchers who use connecting strategies, however, “do not focus primarily on similarities that can be used to sort data into categories independently of context, but instead look for relationships that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 113). Profiles, vignettes, and narrative analysis are all useful connecting strategies. I made use of both categorizing strategies and connecting strategies during my data analysis to provide a well-rounded account of this case study (Maxwell, 2013).

Categorizing strategies. Throughout the data collection period and following the data collection period, I watched all video-recordings, listened to all audio-recordings, and repeatedly read student journals as well as my own observations and reflections. Maxwell (2013) stated the following:
I want to emphasize that reading and thinking about your interview transcriptions and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analysis.

(p.105)

Many of those strategies informed my data analysis.

I determined initial organizational categories and applied these categories to a portion of data to test their usefulness (Maxwell, 2013). I then revised and narrowed those organization categories as needed, and I applied them to another portion of data. Eventually, as I narrowed down each broad organizational category, I developed codes. I created a matrix for each code as a way to organize the data (Maxwell, 2013). Then, I combined related codes to realize emerging themes. I present my codebook in Appendix I.

**Connecting strategies.** I analyzed student journals, projections worksheets, video transcriptions, audio recordings, and my written reflections and observations a second time using connecting strategies. I analyzed the individual experiences of each student, over the course of the data-collection period, related to the context of the music class. Additionally, I connected how each student described their experiences to his or her video-recorded and audio-recorded improvisation performances and my personal reflections and observations. I selected vignettes for three individual fourth grade students whose experiences intensely manifested the processes involved in improvisation learning in that fourth-grade music class (Patton, 2002).
Credibility

I collected data from multiple data sources, as recommended by Patton (2002). Like Nilges (2007), in order to obtain credible data from my student participants, I selected the most salient prompts for students to journal about and asked students to respond to those prompts repeatedly throughout the data collection period. I compared and crosschecked the consistency of information derived from different data sources to triangulate the data, and that triangulation process contributed to the credibility of this case study. During data analysis, I used categorizing strategies as well as connecting strategies in order to enhance credibility, as suggested by Maxwell (2013). My rigorous data collection methods and data analysis methods, my philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, and my experiences as a music educator all contributed to the credibility of this case study (Patton, 2002).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I expressed the findings for this qualitative case study using three emergent themes and three vignettes. Following is a description of those findings.

Emergent Themes Regarding Improvisation in a Fourth-Grade Music Class

Through my data analysis, three primary themes emerged regarding the processes of tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation among my fourth-grade students and me. Those themes included:

1. establishing an effective music-learning environment,
2. strategy adaptations to scaffold a music skill, and
3. students’ shared positive experiences.

I assigned each student participant a pseudonym to protect each child’s anonymity. I used the abbreviation LKD to represent my own comments and quotations from transcriptions of video-recordings. Following is a description of each primary theme.

Theme One: Establishing an effective music-learning environment. Given the age of my students, their social and emotional skills, and my prior experiences with them, I speculated that they would feel vulnerable while improvising in front of their peers, and that those feelings of vulnerability may affect the learning environment and their improvisation performances (Allen, 2011; Lehrer, 1987; Osborne & Franklin, 2002; Wang & Lindval, 1984; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O’Neil, 2001). I worked toward creating a learning environment with my students where improvisation teaching could
take place and where students could engage successfully in improvisation activities. As previously stated, I defined student success as when a student demonstrated a level of comfort while expressing him or herself through tonal, rhythm, melodic, or harmonic improvisation. In order to achieve that level of comfort, each student would need to learn to take musical risks without fear of ridicule should their vocal offerings be outside the tonal context, the rhythm context, the harmonic context, or the guidelines that I determined for the given activity. In order to create an effective music-learning environment, each student needed to feel supported and reassured, not only by me, but also by his or her peers. I continuously adapted learning plans and implemented a variety of strategies as I observed the emotional and social needs of my students. Those adaptations and strategies included making time for class discussions, helping students cope with music inaccuracies, giving students the opportunity to make musical choices, and adjusting classroom activities. Eventually, my students and I created a classroom music-learning environment that enhanced students’ comfort levels so that improvisation teaching and learning could take place.

**Class discussions.** During class discussions, I challenged students to consider how their own actions could affect the improvisation learning going on in class. On the first day of data collection, we discussed how to control our actions and demeanor while listening to another person’s improvisation. Following is an excerpt of the transcription:

LKD: Now let’s say I did an improvisation and it sounded like this. *LK sings* Down by the Riverside, repeatedly singing outside of the duple meter, major tonality context of the song. Some students laugh. Some students look around the room as if they are confused.
Jacqueline: That was horrible!

Class: *Laughs*

LKD: Jacqueline, say that again.

Jacqueline: *(Timidly)* That was horrible.

LKD: Yeah, now, listen. You might not think that was very good, but what if I was trying my hardest to improvise? How do you think that would make me feel if we were in class and somebody said, ‘That was horrible!’ Do you think that would make me feel good?

Students: No! *(Transcript of video recording, September 30, 2013)*

We continued the discussion and brainstormed what we could say to support each other’s improvisation efforts.

LKD: Nora?

Nora: That was a good try.

Eli: Good job, but it was a little bit out of order.

LKD: Good job, but it was a little bit out of order? So you are being a little bit constructive, and helping them. Jon?

Jon: You tried your best.

LKD: Yeah, good job, you tried your best!

I also requested that students discuss when and why it would be acceptable to laugh.

During class discussions, we distinguished the difference between *laughing at someone* and *laughing with someone*. The following is an excerpt from the discussion where students discussed when it is acceptable to laugh:

LKD: Now what if it's this situation, okay? *LKD sings the following:*
LKD: *Stops singing.* Oh! I forgot the words! *Laughing.* What happens if I make a mistake, and I laugh?

Several students: Then we can laugh.

LKD: Tell your neighbor, can you laugh then?

Class: Yes. *Students talking*

LKD: And stop! Jacqueline?

Jacqueline: You can laugh because that other person who made the mistake is laughing.

LKD: Yeah, so, Caleb?

Caleb: You're laughing along with them, you're not laughing against each other.

LKD: Exactly. So we can laugh along with each other, but we cannot laugh *at* each other. Does that make sense?

Student: Yes!

(Transcript of video recording. September 30, 2013)

Class discussions helped students determine how to act in our music class, and how to cope with the fear or anxiety they may have experienced during their improvisations.

After one class discussion, I reflected:

We discussed briefly how when we sang something we did not mean to [sing], it was not a major concern, and I reminded students that during music class, we are in a safe place to take musical risks. No one got hurt because they improvised. I also told them that I have felt the same way when I had to improvise or sing in
front of a group. What they are feeling is OK. I wanted to validate their feelings but also help them see that they can get over those fears. (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 23, 2013)

I allowed students to speak freely and honestly during class discussions. As a class, we decided what kinds of behaviors we expected from each other and decided how to show respect toward each other. That built a foundation for a learning environment where improvisation teaching and learning could take place.

**Coping with music inaccuracies.** Gordon (2012) stated that when learning to improvise, “Students build confidence when they are continually reminded there are no mistakes, only improper resolutions” (p.321); however, as I continually reminded students of that fact, I observed that students did not act as though they understood me or believed me. Many times, when a student thought that he or she made a mistake, he or she looked around the room to see how peers and I reacted. For example, Emily wrote in her journal, “Improvising is difficult because I might not hit the right note and it might sound different” (Emily, Student Journal, October 7, 2013). I felt that I needed a more practical strategy to help my students build confidence. I reflected:

If my students believe that they are making mistakes, regardless of my assurances that improvisation mistakes do not exist, they will continue struggling to build confidence about improvisation. Instead of continuously nagging them about it, what if I try to show them how to cope with those *imaginary* improvisation mistakes. Until they stop being scared of making mistakes, they will not actually believe me that mistakes do not exist. So, why are they so scared of mistakes? Do they think they will get into trouble? [Do they think that I will reprimand them?]
Perhaps in school they are so used to there being a right answer and a wrong answer [to most types of questions] that they are now struggling to be creative. Outside of improvisation, in other music classroom activities, I regularly make [perform] music inaccuracies. For example, today during a generalization-verbal activity while we labeled the functions of tonal patterns on a neutral syllable, I let my mind wander and labeled a dominant pattern as a tonic pattern by accident. I corrected myself immediately, pretended nothing happened, and nobody really took notice. When those kinds of inaccuracies happen, perhaps instead of shying away from them, I can embrace them by pointing them out and responding to them in a positive manner. My hope would be that students could see that music inaccuracies (outside of improvisation) and imaginary improvisation mistakes are both not a major concern. Perhaps, they will build more confidence by not fearing the right and wrong of improvisation, and then, maybe they will take more musical risks than they currently do while we improvise during jam sessions. (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 2, 2013)

In that reflection, I made an important distinction between a music inaccuracy and an improvisation mistake. I recognized that music inaccuracies happened regularly in any music activity, outside of a creativity/improvisation-aural/oral activity. Those types of inaccuracies, while not desirable, are an inevitable part of the teaching and learning process.

Improvisation mistakes, however, do not exist. Gordon (2012) posed that improvisation and creativity lie on a continuum, where creativity comes from the creator’s internal logic, and improvisation is based on a previously created set of rules.
Gordon (2012) stated, “As analogy, think of language. The spontaneous telling of an original story represents creativity whereas telling of an original story based on a predetermined theme and specific characters represents improvisation” (p. 136).

Therefore, during an improvisation activity with my students, every response a student gave was situated somewhere on that continuum, depending on how closely the response followed the set rules that I prescribed for the activity. Therefore, I considered every response my students made as acceptable as they explored creativity and improvisation.

My students continued to feel as though they were making improvisation mistakes during improvisation activities. I decided to call those imaginary improvisation mistakes. I observed imaginary improvisation mistakes when a student acted uneasy after or during an improvisation, when he or she looked around for social approval, or wrote in their journal that they worried about singing or chanting the right thing.

I began to point out my own music inaccuracies to students. For example, one day during a jam session, while I played the accompanying chords to Down by the Riverside on piano. By accident, I played the dominant chord too early, and my students quickly noticed that I played the inaccurate chord. I simply stated, “Oops! I messed up! Sorry!” and continued on to the next chord (Transcript of video recording, October 7, 2013). Sometimes, I used humor to cope with my music inaccuracies. After singing the wrong words to a passage of Down by the Riverside, I jokingly squealed, “Ah! No, no, no, no, no, no! Bad teacher! I messed up, I made a mistake!” (Transcript of video recording, October 16, 2013). That gave the students and me the opportunity to laugh at my music inaccuracy and quickly move on through the activity.
Eventually, we created a productive learning environment where we all accepted music inaccuracies as common, allowable occurrences. On the last days of data collection, when I asked students to reflect on what they had learned throughout the improvisation-learning unit, Jayden wrote, “The most important thing I’ve learned is to not be afraid if you mess up” (Jayden, Student Journal, October 30, 2013).

**Students’ musical choices.** Throughout the data collection period, I allowed and encouraged students to make choices about their improvisations and about their learning. In order for my students to successfully engage in improvisation activities, each student would need to quickly and comfortably make musical choices. I noticed that after allowing and encouraging students to make their own choices, many students became more confident and more involved in the improvisation process than they had been previously. For example, during class on October 7, 2013, all students participated in an improvisation activity designed for them to improvise rhythmically as they sang bass line of the song *Down by the Riverside*. At the end of class, I sat at the piano and played the harmonic accompaniment to *Down by the Riverside*. I stated:

> If you want, you can sing the melody. If you want, you can sing the bass line. If you want, you can improvise a new melody. If you want, you can improvise a new rhythm on the bass line. Tell your neighbor your four options of what you can do (Transcript of video recording, October 7, 2013).

By giving my students the different options, at varying degrees of difficulty, they could choose the option that best suited their needs in that moment. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for the students to take ownership of their choices and to participate fully in the improvisation-learning process. That day, I reflected:
The jam session today went really well. The first time, I gave the students four choices for what they could sing. I wanted to give them opportunities to explore, and I wanted to create an environment where they could make choices and take ownership over what they chose to do. Afterward, I observed that students seemed proud of what they had done during the jam session. They seemed to have a great time while singing and walked out of the room confidently, smiling, and happy. They seemed to enjoy having some control over their music making, and that contributed to the sense of pride and happiness that I witnessed following the jam session (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 7, 2013).

I recognized a different sense of confidence exuding from my students as I encouraged students to take ownership of their work, and for most students, this was a positive change. Even if their choices were not exactly what I would have chosen, I observed that this process helped build students’ comfort levels while improvising, helped contributed to the music-learning environment, and therefore, contributed to my students’ success while engaging in improvisation activities.

**Instructional adaptations.** I made instructional adaptations throughout the data collection period whenever I sensed an overwhelming feeling of uneasiness in my students. For example, on October 2, 2013, during a jam session at the end of class, I asked if there were any students who wanted to share their improvisation with the class. I reflected:

After students had one attempt at improvising all together as a class, I asked if anyone wanted to share their improvisation. This did not go as well as I had expected. Most students did not want to get up and perform. Caleb, Brenden, and
Anna ended up volunteering, but their improvisations were less sophisticated than when they were performing with the comfort of the big group. As they improvised, they looked uncomfortable and timid. Caleb looked around the room nervously and Anna looked down at the floor. Their improvisations seemed to remain in the duple context, but they were not strongly in major tonality. I should have given the class as a whole at least one or two more opportunities to solidify what they had just done. Instead, I asked for solo improvisation too early. I want all my students to be comfortable improvising individually, but pushing too fast ended poorly during this class (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 2, 2013).

The next week, I reflected again on the uneasiness I sensed. The students enjoyed improvising as a large group all at once, but shied away from individual improvisations. As I reflected, I developed a possible reason for my students’ uncertainty and planned an instructional strategy adaptation to help students with that issue. I worked to rid the students of their apprehensions in order to continuously build an environment where they felt able and willing to improvise. I wrote:

I want each student to be comfortable singing an improvisation by him or herself; however, students in my class have rarely, if ever, been given the opportunity to sing an entire song in solo. That has always been for time reasons. As I reflect, I cannot expect them to improvise an entire song in solo if they have not even done it without improvising! That is a big challenge! Especially for my group of fourth graders who are at a self-conscious age. They sing in solo every day when we do tonal patterns, resting tone activities, etc., but never a song in its entirety. I can
incorporate this into my next lesson easily. While we practice singing the harmonic 3-part accompaniment to *Down by the Riverside*, I can have one person sing the melody in solo. The other students will be busy, and there will be little pressure on the solo singer (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 9, 2013).

Although I had not planned on that strategy, it helped immensely with my students’ uneasiness. Soon after implementation, many students asked to sing the melody in solo while their classmates accompanied them. That type of instructional change facilitated the environment that I sought. In our classroom environment, many students became comfortable singing the melody in solo in front of their peers.

My next challenge was to help students feel comfortable improvising a new melody in solo in front of their peers. On October 23, 2013, I worked to solve that problem by bringing in three microphone-recording devices to class. The microphones did not amplify their sound in anyway, but rather they recorded the students’ improvisations as an .mp3 file. I wrote, “Using the microphone recording device will serve two purposes. It will enable me to get a clear recording [of each student’s voice], but more importantly it will give the students something to focus on other than their classmates” (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflection, October 23, 2013). I hoped that the microphones would create an extrinsic reward for improvising. By the end of the data collection period, the majority of the students asked for repeated turns improvising with the microphone and many students wrote that the microphones helped them improvise, and that holding the microphone made them feel good.
Those instructional changes did not completely eradicate the fear and anxiety of each individual fourth-grade student; however, as I implemented the instructional changes to foster a productive learning environment, the overwhelming sense of fear in the environment greatly decreased. I reflected, “Even though many of the students looked/felt nervous, after the solo improvisation session, the mood in the class was joyful. The atmosphere was light and cheerful” (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 23, 2013). By engaging students in class discussions, helping students cope with musical risk-taking, giving students the opportunity to make musical choices, and adjusting classroom activities we established a learning environment where improvisation teaching and learning became possible.

**Theme two: Strategy adaptations to scaffold music skills.** Scaffolding takes place when an individual helps guide another individual to a higher plane of knowledge, building on prior mastered knowledge (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). As I guided my students through improvisation learning, scaffolding became an important instructional strategy to help students successfully engage in improvisation activities.

*Scaffolding tonal pattern inferences.* During a tonal generalization-verbal activity, I performed major tonal patterns on the neutral syllable, *bum.* The students repeated the same pattern using the corresponding tonal syllables. Gordon (2012) posed that students must have many experiences with the verbal association and *generalization-aural/oral* skill levels before they can be successful at that type of generalization-verbal activity; however, even though my students did have many experiences at those skill levels, some students still struggled to assign accurate tonal solfege syllables to tonal patterns I performed on a neutral syllable. I did not feel that reverting back to either
verbal association or generalization-aural/oral skill levels would be productive because the majority of the class did not need those activities. Instead, I provided scaffolding for struggling students to the generalization-verbal skill level. For example, I sang the tonal pattern on the neutral syllable, *bum*. Then, if I recognized that a student struggled, I simply sang the first pitch of the pattern with the corresponding tonal syllable. Frequently, that technique enabled the student to infer the remaining one or two pitches of the tonal pattern on his or her own which guided him or her to a higher plane of knowledge. Eventually, the majority of the students successfully participated in the generalization-verbal skill level in major tonality while using tonic, dominant, and subdominant functioning patterns, and I no longer needed to provide the first pitch of the pattern using the corresponding tonal syllable.

During tonal pattern improvisation activities, I sang a tonal pattern on the neutral syllable, *bum* and each student would sing a different pattern back to me using the neutral syllable, *bum*. After the majority of students comfortably sang a new pattern within the major tonality context, I required students to use tonal syllables for their tonal pattern improvisation. As the difficulty of the task increased, some students began their improvised tonal pattern singing a pitch within the context of major tonality, but he or she applied an inaccurate tonal syllable to that pitch. When that happened, I used a scaffolding technique. As quickly as I could, I sang the tonal syllable back to the student singing the accurate pitch. The following is an excerpt from a tonal pattern improvisation activity in major tonality and the keyality of F.

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LKD: do - mi - do
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Although that student started out with an inaccurate tonal syllable, she ended up successfully completing the improvisation after help with the first pitch. Similar occurrences happened regularly as my students became more confident improvising tonally, and I observed this scaffolding technique to be the very effective. I reflected:

I have deliberated about the best way to handle the situation when a student sings a pitch, in the context of a certain tonality and keyality, but attaches an inaccurate tonal syllable. The student wants to sing a pattern that either starts on that pitch, or they want to sing a pattern that starts on that tonal syllable. It would be impossible for me to know which of those is their intention; however, I have
noticed that if I sing the accurate tonal syllable for that pitch, the student generally
looks up confused. They do not immediately understand why I have just
interrupted their pattern singing a different tonal syllable; but, if I use their tonal
syllable and sing the accurate pitch that corresponds to that tonal syllable, they
generally stop, have an epiphany, and continue on with the improvisation. (L.
King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 21, 2013)

I built on students’ prior knowledge at the verbal association and generalization-
verbal skill levels to guide them to tonal pattern improvisation, and that scaffolding
technique helped students infer the remaining tonal syllables for their pattern and engage
in tonal pattern improvisation. Also, using that strategy kept the tempo and energy of the
lesson high while providing individualized feedback.

*Modeling improvisation.* Modeling a desired behavior is another form of
scaffolding, and throughout the data collection period, I regularly modeled tonal, rhythm,
melodic, and harmonic improvisation for my students. On the first day of data collection,
after students became familiar with *Down by the Riverside*, I asked students to listen
while I improvised a new melody using the same words and the same implied harmonic
functions of *Down by the Riverside*. Then, I labeled my new melody as an
improvisation. Students immediately understood the difference between the melody and
an improvisation. I continued to sing either the melody or an improvisation of the melody
and asked students to label my performance as the melody or an improvisation. Although
my students did not have the readiness to improvise a new melody yet, by modeling

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6 I used words while I improvised during this activity; however, for all other
improvisation activities the students and I improvised on tonal solfege syllables, rhythm
solfege syllables, or the neutral syllable, *bum*, depending on the activity.
many different melodic improvisations, I familiarized them with the concept of improvisation. Additionally, I exposed them to the endless possibilities that one has when improvising. At the end of each class, during the jam sessions, I continued to model melodic and harmonic improvisation. I reflected:

I want to sing as many different kinds of improvisations as possible to continue to build each student’s listening vocabulary. I think that the more they hear different types of improvisation, the more patterns and ideas they will have to choose from while they improvise. (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 2, 2013)

Students also modeled improvisation for each other. Throughout the teaching and learning process, I asked students to write in their journals about what different kinds of things helped them improvise. Repeatedly, students wrote that they enjoyed listening to their peers improvise, and that they used their classmates’ ideas and patterns in their own improvisations. For example when answering the question, “What kinds of things did you do today to help you improvise?” one student wrote, “I used what my classmates said [sang] and then tried to use my own different pattern” (Ava, Student Journal, October 23, 2013). Many students reported that they imitated other students’ improvisations, but changed it somehow to create their own improvisations. I encouraged that free exchange of musical ideas while tonally, rhythmically, melodically, and harmonically improvising.

**Students’ harmonic improvisations.** As students became more comfortable with harmonic improvisation, I used another scaffolding technique to encourage musical risk-taking. I gave each student various opportunities to improvise a new melody into the microphone-recording devices while I played the harmonic accompaniment to *Down by the Riverside* on the piano. Three students could improvise at once with the three
microphone-recording devices. The other students listened and engaged in journaling activities while their classmates improvised. I observed that some students sang the same rhythm pattern or tonal pattern repeatedly, some students ventured only a pitch or two around of the resting tone, and some students decided to only use the pitches of the bass line. I wanted to help students take more musical risks. I reflected:

Initially, I silently listened, with respect, during students’ harmonic improvisations because I wanted them to know that I valued their improvisation; however, at this stage, most are successfully singing simple improvisations and need a little more encouragement to take risks. They need some more ideas to help them take more risks. (L. King Driscoll, Written Reflections, October 23, 2013)

I had been modeling my own improvisations throughout the entire data collection period; however, that did not seem to be enough. A natural next step for me was to improvise along with my students while I walked around and listened to their improvisations. I decided to record myself playing the harmonic progression to *Down by the Riverside* using the Voice Memos application on my personal iPhone 4s mobile device. I connected the iPhone 4s device to speakers, and played that recording for students to improvise to while I walked around the room and listened. If I heard a student repeating the same rhythm pattern over and over again, I walked over and used a different rhythm pattern on the same pitches that they had used. If I heard a student only singing on the few pitches around the resting tone, I came over and sang a pitch just out of that range. I also offered words of encouragement to my students, and I always had a smile on my face while improvising along with them. Those techniques encouraged students to
take musical risks during harmonic improvisation, taking them to a higher plane of improvisation knowledge. I improvised along with my students to scaffold musical risk-taking.

Generally, students immediately imitated what I performed, but eventually, they started to take more of their own risks while they improvised. I heard their improvisations transform. In the fourth week of data collection, nearly all students melodically improvised successfully, comfortably combining tonal patterns and rhythm patterns, and harmonically improvised successfully, comfortably combining tonal patterns and rhythm patterns to fit within the harmonic progression of *Down by the Riverside*. They expressed themselves through melodic improvisation and harmonic improvisation without fear of ridicule from their classmates. I gave all students multiple opportunities to use one of the microphone-recording devices to capture their improvisations. A few students continued to improvise rhythmically on the bass line, and a few students improvised rhythmically while only using one or two pitches near the resting tone of the song, but the majority of students created a new melody, within the harmonic functions, using arpeggied tonal patterns and even some passing tones.

**Theme three: Students’ shared positive experiences.** Although students occasionally described negative aspects of improvisation learning as they endured and overcame individual obstacles, my students overwhelmingly described their improvisation experiences positively. I will represent my students’ individual obstacles and journeys while learning to improvise using three vignettes found in the next section, but this theme exemplifies the shared positive experiences had by my students, how my students described their experiences, and how I observed their experiences during the
data collection period. I found that many of my students felt similarly about
improvisation and that they described their experiences in similar ways. Students
expressed, and I observed, improvisation learning in our fourth-grade music class as a
challenging, positive, and social experience.

As I engaged students in improvisation activities, my students taught themselves
to improvise by making musical inferences and making musical choices. They described
that process as challenging. Even though students felt challenged, they reported that they
enjoyed improvisation. For example, two students, Emily and Weston, repeatedly
reflected on the difficulty of improvisation and their enjoyment from improvisation
throughout the data collection period. In one journal entry, Emily wrote, “I felt kind of
challenged because you sometimes have to think of a different pattern at that very
minute” (Emily, Student Journal, September 30, 2013). On another day, she reflected, “I
feel really proud because I think I did a great job” (Emily, Student Journal, October 28,
2013). Weston reflected, “It felt really good inside when I made a new song in music
class” (Weston, Student Journal, October 2, 2013). He continued on a later day:

It was really easy [easier] today than last week because last week it was super
duper hard! . . . I think it’s really hard because you have to think of your own
[improvisation] and it takes me a while to think. I got a little confused a little, but
I got the hang of it! (Weston, Student Journal, October 9, 2013).

Throughout the improvisation-learning process, students learned to hear harmonic
changes, learned to improvise comfortably in front of their peers, and most students
learned to combine tonal patterns and rhythm patterns to fit within the harmonic
progression of *Down by the Riverside*. By the end of data collection, students regularly
described their experiences as positive. Many students reported feeling happy during and after improvising. Brenden wrote, “[I felt] good because it is really fun and some of it made me feel good inside” (Brenden, Student Journal, October 19, 2013), and Morgan reported that improvising helped her feel artistic. Ryan wrote, “I felt joyful [while improvising] and felt like a musician. . . . I like improvising because I can share my own way of music” (Ryan, Projection Sheet, October 28, 2013), and Anna reflected, “I felt happy and playful at the same time because I could get my feelings out” (Anna, Projection Sheet, October 28, 2013). Caleb reported that he liked “singing the different notes because it feels nice to just go with it” (Caleb, Projection Sheet, October 28, 2013).

Improvisation became a social experience for my students. Many students specifically wrote that they enjoyed improvisation, especially when they got to do it with their friends. I observed that the students enjoyed taking turns with the microphones and enjoyed making musical jokes with each other. For example, I saw one student end his improvisation by posing his body while singing a dramatic, loud, high note in hopes of making his friends laugh. I observed students giggling while they recorded improvisations with their friends in class, and as I listened to the .mp3 recordings of student improvisations, many times the student improvising giggles in a playful way during their improvisation. I regularly observed students complementing their peers on their improvisations and many students wrote that they enjoyed learning to improvise because they enjoyed listening to their classmates improvise.

Many students took pride in their improvisations. In their journals, students reported that they felt nervous and/or excited before harmonic improvisations with the microphones, but nearly all students reported feeling proud of themselves and/or happy
with themselves following their harmonic improvisation. I observed most students asking repeatedly for more turns with the digital recording microphones. One students wrote, “I loved it like I really loved it and I first thought that I couldn’t sing or improvise as well and now I can and loved it!” (Michael, Student Journal, October 28, 2013). Another student reflected, “At first I was scared, but when I got used to it, it was fun listening to other peoples [sic] voices and mine” (Morgan, Student Journal, October 28, 2013). In general, students enjoyed improvising in class and viewed improvisation as a challenging, positive experience that they could share with their friends.

**Vignettes**

**Rationale.** I wrote three vignettes to portray the individualized nature of improvisation learning in my students. Although the students in my fourth grade class generally described their experiences as positive, each student went through unique, individual struggles as they learned how to improvise. Following are three vignettes representing three students’ individual journeys as they learned to improvise. I selected these vignettes because each of the three students’ journeys intensely manifests how improvisation learning took place in our music class (Patton, 2002). I summarized how those three students described their experiences as they learned to improvise, and how I observed them participating in improvisation activities.

**Vignette one: It’s…been…AWESOME!** On the first day of data collection, Ryan wrote in his journal that he considered himself a musician because he loved music. When describing how he felt during improvisation activities, Ryan wrote that he felt excited, good, nice, wonderful, and joyful. Ryan reflected, “It’s [improvisation is] difficult because I get tones jammed in my head” (Ryan, Student Journal, October 7,
Ryan often described different visuals to express what he thought about while he improvised. He wrote, “I thought about a rainbow singing. I thought about the beauty of the sky” (Ryan, Student Journal, October 9, 2013), and he expressed that improvising made him feel like a “musical opera singer” (Ryan, Student Journal, October 21, 2013). While reflecting on his learning, he wrote, “I learned I can achieve [sic] anything if I try” (Ryan, Student Journal, October 21, 2013).

Ryan described how improvising made him feel lively, proclaiming in one journal entry, “It’s great to be alive!” On October 16, 2013, he filled out a projection worksheet, indicating he felt happy and cheerful because of his love for music. Often, he wrote about borrowing his classmates’ ideas and patterns during his own improvisations, which helped him to improvise. He noticed that before his improvisations, he felt nervous, but afterward, he always felt so much better. On October 28, 2013, Ryan wrote that he loved hitting the high notes while he improvised because it interested him, but that sometimes those kinds of patterns made him feel weird. He wrote that the most important thing he learned during the improvisation-learning unit was to believe in himself.

I observed Ryan as a confident, intelligent boy in class. He laughed playfully with his friends and always seemed joyful. His improvisations seemed to flow out of him with ease. He recognized and anticipated the harmonic changes, and his improvisations regularly remained within the tonal, rhythm, and harmonic context. While he improvised, Ryan seemed comfortable taking risks, and I observed Ryan improvise with a great sense of confidence. Unlike other student participants, Ryan never seemed to worry about what his classmates might think of his improvisations. He confidently sang and focused on his own music learning as he reflected in his journal. On the last day of data collection when
I asked the students to describe their overall experience as they learned to improvise, he wrote, “It’s…been…AWESOME!” (Ryan, Student Journal, October 30, 2013).

**Vignette two: I faced my fears.** At the beginning of data collection, Ava reported that she was not a musician because she did not like to sing very much. She did not have an interest in creating her own music, but did describe rhythm improvisation activities as being fun. Throughout the improvisation-learning process, Ava wrote that she learned she was pretty good at improvising and that she liked improvisation. She wrote, “I learned about myself wihle [sic] improving [improvising]. [I learned] that I was ok at it” (Ava, student journal, October 2, 2013). She described it as fun and easy. In the second week, she began to feel like a singer and wrote that she enjoyed singing outside of music class. She often wrote in her journal and projection sheets that she felt embarrassed, weird, uncomfortable and timid because she does not like to sing in front of people. She wrote that she liked being creative and enjoyed improvisation, but did not like that she had to improvise in front of her classmates. She reflected, “Well, I don’t like to sing in front of people. . . . I like that you just make it up as you go [while improvising]” (Ava, Student Journal, October 28, 2013).

I observed Ava as very timid and shy during music class, and when she sang in solo, she sang very softly. She often shook her head if I made eye-contact with her as I selected students to sing a tonal pattern improvisation in solo, but she openly participated in rhythm improvisation. The first day that I brought in the digital recording microphones, she requested that I not make her harmonically improvise in front of the class. I acquiesced to her request; however, I noticed that the digital microphones intrigued Ava. The next class, I asked Ava if she wanted to improvise with the
microphone, and after thinking long and hard, she decided that she did. Her first harmonic improvisation on the digital microphone starts out quietly; although the harmonic accompaniment plays in the background, no singing can be heard from Ava. Then, as Ava gathered the courage to begin her improvisation, she began singing in her chest voice. I knew Ava could use her head voice, given my prior experiences with her, so I walked over and reminded her to use her singing voice. I reassured her by smiling and singing my own improvisation along with her while she improvised. Soon, she started singing a harmonic improvisation. Her voice remained timid, and she regularly switched back and forth between chest voice and head voice, but she faced her fears and completed the improvisation. During that improvisation when Ava used her head voice, she regularly remained within the tonal, rhythm, and harmonic functions of the tune, but when she used her chest voice her improvisation did not regularly remain within the tonal, rhythm, and harmonic functions of the tune.

After that improvisation, Ava reflected, “I still feel scared. Well not that scared because I did it in front of class and it was pretty fun. And I might do it again so sorta[sic] faced my fears [sic] and I really like it!” (Ava, Student Journal, October 28, 2013) She also reflected that she enjoyed using the microphone, writing that it helped her improvise. On the last day of data collection when I asked students to describe their experiences as they learned to improvise, Ava wrote, “It was a little hard at first but as time went on it got easy and its [sic] now fun!” (Ava, Student Journal, October 30, 2013).

**Vignette three: I don’t like improvising, and I never will.** On the first day of data collection, Reese wrote that he was not a musician, but he expressed that he liked to create his own music. In the first two weeks, he described himself feeling good, weird,
scared, and quiet during improvisation activities, and he found improvising to be hard when having to think quickly.

As time went on, the positive feelings Reese had about improvisation seemed to diminish. On October 16, 2013, Reese filled out a projection worksheet indicating on that day he felt a variety of emotions including weird, sad, annoyed, embarrassed, confused, and irritated. He reported feeling those things because he worried about singing the “right thing in time” (Reese, Student Journal, October 16, 2013).

After an improvisation activity on October 28, 2013, Reese completed another projection worksheet indicating that he felt embarrassed, confused, weird, and annoyed because of his classmates. He wrote about his struggles trying to get his classmates to behave during class. I observed that Reese preferred to work alone in class. He did not enjoy being physically near his classmates, and he regularly tried to find a place in class where he could sit by himself, or as far away from everyone else as possible. I observed Reese looking annoyed and angry with his classmates during various classes, but on a regular basis, I observed him tonally improvising within the tonal context, rhythmically improvising within the rhythm context and harmonically improvising within the tonal, rhythm, and harmonic context. Even though Reese improvised well, he did not seem to gain a level of comfort while improvising around his classmates, and he did not seem to enjoy the social nature of improvisation that formed in our music class.

As I analyzed one of Reese’s harmonic improvisations from the digital recording microphone, he began his melody over the harmonic progression accompaniment within the major, duple context combining a variety of tonal patterns and rhythm patterns to fit within the harmonic functions. As the improvisation continued his voice began to quiver,
he began to take short, rapid breaths, and his harmonic improvisation became less complex as the recording continued.

To help himself improvise, Reese wrote in his journal that he tried to not think too much or worry too much, but that after his harmonic improvisations, he continued to worry about whether or not he did a *good* job. Throughout his journal entries, Reese expressed his frustration in the improvisation tasks and continued to dislike the quick thinking they required. The only in-class activity that Reese seemed to enjoy was journaling. He wrote that he enjoyed writing because he did not have to improvise or talk to his classmates. On the last day of data collection when I asked the students to describe what their experiences had been like while learning to improvise, he wrote, “Horrible. I don’t like improvising and I never will” (Reese, Student Journal, October 30, 2013).

**Reflections on vignettes.** I used the previous vignettes to portray three unique experiences, intensely manifesting how my students experienced improvisation. Ryan’s vignette revealed great joy and pleasure. Like several other student participants, Ryan found a new sense of musicality while learning to improvise. Ava’s vignette revealed transformation. Like several other student participants, she faced her fears and found a new sense of pride while learning to improvise. Reese’s story revealed hardship. Several other student participants shared Reese’s discomfort during improvisation activities, but in his case, he was unable to overcome it throughout the course of this study. Each of those three students had unique experiences and faced an individual journey that intensely manifested the processes of improvisation in our fourth-grade music class.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview of the Study

**Purpose and guiding research questions** With the intent of improving the understanding of music learning, the purpose of this research was to investigate the processes of tonal, rhythm, melodic and harmonic improvisation among my fourth-grade students and me. The following were the specific research questions that guided this qualitative case study.

1. Over the course of one five-week period, how did I adapt tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation strategies for my intact class of fourth-grade students?
2. How did those students participate in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation experiences?
3. How did those students describe their tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation experiences?

**Method.** I chose to investigate the processes of improvisation in a fourth-grade music class as a case study. I used participant observation techniques to investigate my experiences teaching improvisation (Spradley, 1980), and I purposefully selected student participants, as suggested for a case study by Patton (2002). I chose my research site based on intensity sampling (Patton, 2002), as I conducted my research at a small private
elementary school for kindergarten through Grade 6. I examined my experiences and the experiences of my students as a participant observer. My students in an intact fourth-grade music class also participated in the study. I situated this research within a framework influenced by music learning theory, and I relied on many of Gordon’s (2003, 2012) ideas about music learning and used Gordon’s (2012) definition of improvisation while guiding students through improvisation learning. Before data collection, I developed learning plans that outlined my intended instruction for my students, emphasizing the whole-part-whole strategy and skill learning sequence.

Over the course of five weeks, I collected data during the fourth grade students’ regularly scheduled music class. Data sources comprised video-recordings, learning plans, my own written reflections and observations, student journals, student-completed projections worksheets, and audio-recordings. I analyzed data using categorizing and connecting strategies as recommended by Maxwell (2013). I identified three emergent themes and wrote three vignettes to express the findings of this study. I compared and crosschecked the consistency of information derived from different data sources to triangulate the data and to contribute to the credibility of this case study (Patton, 2002).

Summary of the Findings

Emergent themes. Through my data analysis, three primary themes emerged regarding the processes of tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation among my fourth-grade students and me. Those themes included:

1. establishing an effective music learning environment,
2. strategy adaptations to scaffold a music skill, and
3. students’ shared positive experiences.
In order to establish an effective music-learning environment, I continuously adapted learning plans and implemented a variety of strategies as I observed the emotional and social needs of my students. Those adaptations and strategies included making time for class discussions, helping students cope with music inaccuracies, giving students the opportunity to make musical choices, and adjusting classroom activities. Eventually, my students and I created a classroom music-learning environment that enhanced students’ comfort levels so that improvisation teaching and learning could take place.

Scaffolding takes place when an individual helps guide another individual to a higher plane of knowledge, building on prior mastered knowledge (Wood et al., 1976). As I guided my students through improvisation learning, scaffolding became an important instructional strategy to help students successfully engage in improvisation activities. I implemented two techniques to scaffold tonal pattern inferences. I regularly modeled tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisations for my students, and students regularly modeled tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisations for each other. Additionally, I improvised along with my students to scaffold musical risk-taking. Those techniques encouraged students to take musical risks during harmonic improvisation, taking them to a higher plane of improvisation knowledge.

Although students occasionally described negative aspects of improvisation learning as they endured and overcame individual obstacles, my students overwhelmingly described their improvisation experiences positively. Many students took pride in their improvisations. In their journals, students reported that they felt nervous and/or excited before harmonic improvisations with the microphones, but nearly all students reported
feeling proud of themselves and/or happy with themselves following their harmonic improvisation.

Vignettes. I wrote three vignettes to portray the individualized nature of improvisation learning in my students. Although the students in my fourth grade class generally described their experiences as positive, each student went through unique, individual struggles as they learned how to improvise. I summarized how three students described their experiences as they learned to improvise and how I observed them participating in improvisation activities. Ryan’s vignette revealed great joy, Ava’s vignette revealed transformation, and Reese’s story revealed hardship. I selected three students whose individual journeys greatly differed from one another, but whose experiences intensely manifested the processes of improvisation learning in our fourth-grade music class.

Discussion

Powell & Kalina (2009) stated that social constructivist educators understand that “. . . social interaction and cultural influences have a huge effect on a student and how learning occurs” (p. 245). I observed social interactions between my students and cultural influences on my students, and through this process, I came to understand that those things did affect my students’ improvisation learning. As I reflected on my experiences with my students, and as I continue to reflect on those experiences, I have realized that many aspects of the teaching and learning process in this case study exemplify a social constructivist approach to music education. Similar to a social constructive approach, I emphasized dialogue to facilitate learning through class discussions and student journals, I encouraged an active and collaborative approach to improvisation learning, and I
facilitated a learning environment where improvisation learning happened through social interactions between my students and me (Bedrova & Leong, 2007; Fox, 2001; Powell et al., 2009; Piaget, 1953; Reusser, 2001; Vygotsky, 1962).

For example, throughout the course of this study, one of the most challenging obstacles that I faced was the task of trying to persuade my students that they could take risks without fear of ridicule or punishment. I intensely reflected about my students’ needs and about what I could do to create an environment where students felt safe to take risks. Student journals and class discussions were not just a source of data for me, but they were also a means of informing instruction. While my written observations and reflections revealed an initial sense of uneasiness in my students regarding their fear of improvisation in front of their peers and me, without the aid of student journals and class discussions, I would never have realized the extent of its influence on my students. Opening up that avenue of communication with my students contributed to an environment similar to a social constructivist learning environment.

Students told me about their fear of improvising in front of their peers and wrote in their journals about their fear of improvising in front of their peers. Those things motivated me to consider the environment as an influencing factor during improvisation learning. I shared with my students that throughout my own music education and career, I have regularly coped with anxiety while performing and improvising. My own performance anxiety helped me to be sensitive to my students’ improvisation apprehensions, and it allowed us all to see anxiety as a normal, common emotion that we all shared. Those kinds of discussions facilitated learning in a social constructivist manner.
I developed a rapport that I had not initially expected with my student participants. Through our conversations and class discussions, on many occasions, my students told me what they needed to be successful. I listened to their suggestions and used their contributions to shape our music classes. I feel as though they learned more than they would have had I not used their ideas. Our music classroom became louder and more chaotic than it had been prior to this study. I relinquished some of my control in our music classroom setting, and I learned that effective teaching and learning was not only still possible in that environment, but that it actually aided the teaching and learning process. As the environment in the classroom became welcoming and relaxed, and as students maintained a level of respect toward their peers, we created an effective learning environment where improvisation learning could take place and where students could successfully engage in improvisation activities by developing a level of comfort while improvising in front of their peers. That collaborative approach to our learning environment also demonstrated an educational approach similar to a social constructivist approach.

Throughout the course of data collection, my students also developed their musicianship. They became quite skilled at the generalization-verbal skill level in major tonality and tonal improvisation at the creativity/improvisation-aural/oral skill level in major tonality. Those skills enabled them to begin hearing and anticipating harmonic changes, build on their prior rhythm improvisation skills, and successfully engage in melodic and harmonic improvisation. Sequential guidance through necessary skill levels for improvisation contributed to their success as well as strategy adaptations during instruction to aid students in the inference-making process and in the musical risk-taking
process. Powell et al. (2009) stated, “The social constructivist environment includes activities where students experience their level of understanding and seek assistance to get to the next level” (p. 246). As I used scaffolding strategies and to facilitate students’ tonal pattern inferences, modeled improvisations for my students, encouraged students to model improvisations for each other, and harmonically improvised along with my students, my students and I engaged in a social constructivist approach (Powell et al., 2009).

My students were able to engage successfully in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and/or harmonic improvisation because they had the music-skill readiness to develop improvisation, and they were able to reach increasing levels of comfort while in the company of their peers and me, their music teacher. Many students developed a new level of confidence while successfully participating in improvisation activities. Most students enjoyed improvisation, enjoyed the social nature of improvisation, felt proud of themselves after their improvisations, and expressed themselves musically through improvisation. Those positive outcomes of improvisation learning contributed to that new level of confidence. My students wrote in their journals about enjoying the social nature of improvisation, reflecting that they enjoyed improvisation because they had the opportunity to improvise with their friends and listen to their friends’ improvisations. Those social interactions contributed to my students’ improvisation success and also contributed to a social constructivist environment.

During this study, I identified student success when a student demonstrated a level of comfort while expressing him or herself through tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation, without fear of ridicule should their vocal offerings be outside
the context of the improvisation activity, and/or when a student learns to understand and use tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic patterns with ease, similarly to the way one understands and uses words with ease in his or her native language. From my perspective, each of the 17 student participants achieved some level of individual improvisation success, either developing a level of comfort while improvising around their peers and/or developing his or her music skills to understand and use tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic patterns with a greater sense of ease than they previously had.

Additionally, I believe that each student participant, if given more time and more guidance, would continue to develop both their music skills and their level of comfort so that they continue to successfully engaging in tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation. While I hoped to encourage musical risk-taking, I did not push students to develop at a higher rate than was reasonable for them at the time. As with any music-learning endeavor, students develop at different rates (Gordon, 2012). Valerio, Reynolds, Bolton, Taggart, & Gordon (1998) stated “. . . music development, like language development, is a process, not a product. The process of music development must be fostered as early as possible and allowed to unfold naturally among children” (p.6). While my students found individual levels of success during tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation activities, I focused on the process of my students’ improvisation development through the course of this study.

My views on student success continue to be very important in framing this research, but I wonder how my students’ viewed their own success throughout this process and how my students viewed their peers’ success throughout this process. I assessed my students by using additive ratings scales and informally assessing students’
harmonic improvisation success, but perhaps a more social constructivist approach for viewing students’ success would incorporate students’ views on their success. Perhaps the development of a student-created measurement for assessing that success could have contributed to my students’ learning processes.

From my experiences with my students, I believe that learning to improvise became a beneficial experience for them as they navigated the complex, multifaceted phenomena of improvisation. As my students learned to take musical risks, their improvisations developed, becoming more complex and more sophisticated than their previous improvisations. As students’ improvisations developed, students began freely exchanging musical ideas to embellish their improvisations. Researchers (Azzara, 1993; Gordon, 2012; Guilbault, 2009) suggested that improvisation experiences in the music classroom may contribute positively to music achievement, and I believe that my students’ experiences while learning to improvise during this study will propel my students to a deeper understanding of music and aid students in their later music-learning endeavors.

Implications

Implications for future research. I recommend that researchers investigate the processes of improvisation with other grade levels, and how students of other ages describe their improvisation learning experiences. Researchers conducting that kind of investigation should consider the elements that influence improvisation learning in music-classroom settings and perhaps use a social constructivist approach to frame that research. That knowledge would be valuable for music educator preparation and practice.

I also recommend a deeper investigation regarding the individual, social, and emotional processes engaged while learning to improvise. I found that many of my
students needed to overcome fear in order to improvise. The three vignettes that I selected revealed the individualized nature of learning to improvise; each student went through individual struggles in order to develop their musical readiness to improvise and their comfort level around their peers. An in-depth investigation into the individual, improvisation-learning differences experienced by students would greatly enhance improvisation understanding and inform music educators’ practice in teaching improvisation.

Researchers should also design studies that implement large sample sizes while investigating improvisation among school-aged children. Based this introductory case study, I recommend that those researchers enhance the use of triangulation during the data analysis process, perhaps by using multiple analysts or through obtaining feedback from the inquiry participants, as recommended by Patton (2002). Only then may we generalize results to understand the processes of improvisation and affect music educator preparation and practice.

**Implications for elementary music educators.** Although the findings of this study are not generalizable to the population at large, there are important implications that music educators may want to consider and experiment with while teaching improvisation in their classrooms. Following are my suggestions for elementary music educators.

Music educators should consider modeling improvisation for their students. I regularly modeled tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation for my students and my students regularly modeled tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic improvisation for each other. That important scaffolding technique aided my students in understanding
improvisation, helped my students develop musical ideas to use in their own improvisations, and helped establish improvisation as a social experience for my students. As my students became more fluent in harmonic improvisation, modeling improvisation for each other also encouraged the free exchange of musical ideas that enhanced the level of music learning and understanding.

Elementary music educators should be sensitive to their students’ willingness to participate in challenging improvisation activities, and implement creative, playful means to encourage participation. I found success with my students when I created situations where students chose what they improvised and how they improvised. Student gained ownership over their improvisations as they made musical choices. Additionally, I provided students with a digital recording microphone to serve as an extrinsic reward for improvisation. As students’ focus shifted to the microphone, more students overcame their fears of improvisation.

Elementary music educators should also consider their students’ readiness to improvise. For this study, I used music learning theory and Gordon’s (2003, 2012) ideas regarding improvisation to inform my learning plans and instructional choices. I knew about my students’ prior music education experiences, and that enabled me to provide them with sequential experiences to help students learn to improvise. I considered individual music development and did not push students to develop at a faster rate than was appropriate for them at the time.

Elementary music educators should also consider how a social constructivist approach could be used in their classroom to aid student learning. I found that with my students, journals and class discussions were invaluable resources for understanding my
students and aiding them on their improvisation-learning journey. A social constructivist approach in music education may help music educators foster creativity in their classroom.

The improvisation teaching and learning process is a multifaceted phenomenon containing complicated emotional, social, and musical elements that still need further investigation; however, my experiences with these fourth-grade students has led me to believe that through improvisation, music educators may be able to foster creativity and self-expression while simultaneously developing students’ music skills and confidence levels. Gordon (2012) stated:

Notwithstanding the value of listening, performing, reading, and writing through audiation, when a teacher provides students with skills to create and improvise music, music becomes the property of the students themselves. . . . Relative merit of what music students create is not really important. What is important is students believe music belongs to them. As a result, they discover craft relies on imitation but art relies on creativity and implementation. . . They learn what music can be and has been, not only what music is. (p. 41)

I have grown as a music educator throughout this process, as I learned to understand and value tonal, rhythm, melodic and harmonic improvisation in my music classroom. The knowledge that I have gleaned from this experience will continue to influence my teaching practice as I hope to instill in my students that music can, and does belong to them.
REFERENCES


Publications.


McNair, A. A. (2010). *Joint music attention between toddlers and a music teacher.* (Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3433168)


Rutkowski, J. (1996). The effectiveness of individual/small-group singing activities on Kindergartners' use of singing voice and developmental music aptitude. *Journal*


August 30, 2013

Lauren King
School of Music
813 Assembly Street Columbia, SC 29208
Re: Pro00028548

Study Title: Improvisation and Composition in a Fourth-Grade Music Class

FYI: University of South Carolina Assurance number: FWA 00000404 / IRB Registration number: 00000240

Dear Ms. King:

In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on 8/30/2013. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, you must inform this office of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent
document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the USC Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, please contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson IRB Manager

cc: Wendy Valerio
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

University of South Carolina
School of Music

Dear Parent/Guardian: August 22, 2013

Presently, I am your child’s music teacher at St. Peter’s Catholic School for fourth grade, and I am concurrently a graduate student working on my master’s in music education at the University of South Carolina. As a part of our music education curriculum, students participate in music improvisation, composition, and journaling activities. This fall, I ask your permission to videotape our classes from September 30-October 30, 2013 to collect data for my master’s thesis, *Improvisation and Composition in a Fourth-Grade Music Class*. This research will provide information that may enable music educators to improve music improvisation and composition instruction for elementary school students.

Data for this study will be collected, as a part of the established music education curriculum and during the established fourth-grade music class. All classes during the data collection period will be videotaped. Other data sources will include my learning plans, my observations, and my personal reflections. All data will be coded and no names of individuals will be used to identify data. Videotapes will not be published, but may be used for educational purposes during my own research presentations.

As previously stated, journaling, improvisation, and composition activities are a part of our established curriculum. The use of your child’s journaling and videotaped improvisation and composition activities will provide data that will allow me to examine how fourth-grade students experience the processes of improvisation and composition. The use of any journaling and video
data provided by your child for this study is completely voluntary. All data will be coded to ensure the anonymity of your child, and you may discontinue your child’s participation at anytime without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate in this study, data provided by your child will not be analyzed or used in this study. Should you have any questions about this research, please contact Lauren King, at (330) 212-4610. The School of Music at the University of South Carolina is eager to ensure that all research participants are treated in a fair and respectful manner. If you have any concerns or questions about your child’s treatment as a subject in this project, contact Dr. Wendy Valerio, School of Music, Columbia, SC, 29208, (803) 777-5382.
If you agree for your child’s journaling and videotaped improvisation and composition activities to be used for this study, please complete the following page and return it to Lauren King by 9/23/2013. Thank you for considering supporting this project.

Sincerely,

Lauren King, MME in progress
Wendy H. Valerio, Ph.D.
USC School of Music
Faculty Advisor

Release Form:

My child has my permission to participate in *Improvisation and Composition in a Fourth-Grade Music Class*. I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the information outlined in the accompanying letter of informed consent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Today's Date</th>
<th>Name of Parent(s) or Guardian(s)</th>
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<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<th>Child's Name</th>
<th>Child's Birth Date</th>
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</table>
APPENDIX C

TONAL PATTERNS IN HARMONIC MINOR TONALITY
APPENDIX D

ADDITIONAL RATING SCALES

Assessment of rhythm improvisation using rhythm solfege syllables (creativity/improvisation-aural/oral skill level) in duple meter using a call and response technique:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student moves with continuous fluid movement (CFM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student chants a different rhythm pattern than teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student rhythm pattern is 4-Macobeats in length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student assigns accurate rhythm solfege syllables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/4 TOTAL

Assessment of the generalization-verbal skill level using tonal patterns in major tonality of tonic, dominant, or subdominant function using a call and response technique:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CFM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student takes a breath when gestured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student uses his or her singing voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student assigns accurate tonal solfege syllables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/4 TOTAL

Assessment of tonal pattern improvisation using tonal solfege syllables (creativity/improvisation-aural/oral skill level) in major tonality using a call and response technique:

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student moves with CFM and takes breath when gestured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student uses his or her singing voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student sings a different pattern than teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student assigns accurate tonal solfege syllables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/4 TOTAL
APPENDIX E

LEARNING PLANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song to be used</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Meter</th>
<th>Keyality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Down by the Riverside (DBR)</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Duple</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before start of data collection students will have:

- Participated in Rote Song Procedure for *Down by the Riverside*
- Sung tonal patterns at Aural/Oral skill level (major and minor)
- Sung tonal patterns at Verbal Association skill level (major and minor)
- Chanted duple meter and triple rhythm patterns at Aural/Oral skill level
- Chanted duple meter and triple meter rhythm patterns at Verbal Association skill level
- Labeled the Tonic, Dominant, and Subdominant functions in Major Tonality and labeled the Tonic and Dominant functions in Minor tonality (Verbal Association).
- Labeled the Macro/Micro and Division/Elongation functions in duple meter and labeled duple meter patterns (VA)
- Experienced Generalization-Aural/Oral and Generalization-Verbal (major and minor tonality, duple meter)
- Experienced Partial Synthesis (major and minor tonality)
- In four groups, sung melody plus 3-part harmonic chords in Minor Tonality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>La</td>
<td>Do La</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Re Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Fa Mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Melody</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jam Sessions: For the last 5-7 minutes of class, students will freely engage in melodic improvisation. I will play a simple accompaniment at the piano to *Down by the Riverside* using the tonic, dominant, and subdominant functions of major tonality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>Down by the Riverside ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>JOURNALING ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1   | 1. 2-part singing: Melody and Bass line.  
    2. Students sing melody while I sing bass line  
    3. Students sing bass line while I sing melody  
    4. Students split into two groups, one singing the melody and the other singing the bass line.  
    5. Students repeat 4-macrobeat rhythm patterns at the Verbal Association (VA) Level  
    6. I chant a 4-macrobeat rhythm pattern using rhythm syllables, students improvise a different 4-macrobeat pattern using rhythm syllables  
    7. Students improvise 4-macrobeat rhythm patterns while singing the bass line melody, macro/micro patterns only  
    8. Students read notation of 4-macrobeat rhythm patterns, Symbolic Association—Reading  
    9. Students write notation of 4-macrobeat rhythm patterns, Symbolic Association—Writing  
    10. Jam Session | Beginning of class  
    1. Do you consider yourself a musician? Why or why not?  
    2. Do you like making your own music? Why or why not?  
    After Class  
    1. Describe how you felt while creating different patterns today? |
| 2   | 1. Review bass line using tonal syllables and melody 2-part singing  
    2. Students sing melody while I sing bass line  
    3. Students sing bass line while I sing melody  
    4. Students split into two groups, one singing the melody and the other singing the bass line.  
    5. Students read tonal patterns in major tonality, Tonic and Dominant functions. Symbolic Association—Reading  
    6. I sing a major tonal pattern at the Aural/Oral level. Student sings back a different major tonal pattern at the Aural/Oral level. Creativity/Improvisation—Aural/Oral  
    7. Jam Session | 1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part of music class? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?  
    2. What did you learn about: music, improvisation, yourself?  
    3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.  
    4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why or why not? |
| 3   | 1. Review bass line using tonal syllables and melody 2-part singing | 1. Describe what did you notice about the songs as |
1. Students sing melody while I sing bass line
2. Students sing bass line while I sing melody
3. Students split into two groups, one singing the melody and the other singing the bass line.

- Divide students into two groups:
  1. Students sing melody in group 1 while students in group 2 improvise 4-macrobeat rhythm patterns on pitches of the bass line melody, macro/micro patterns only
  2. Switch groups

- Review the Harmonic Structure of *Down by the Riverside*. Divide class in 4 groups. Assign 4-part singing
  o Melody
  o 3-part harmonic accompaniment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Do</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>Fa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>La</td>
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</table>

- Rhythm Pattern Improv on new part, macro/micro patterns only
- Switch groups around so students experience singing different parts.
- Jam Session

4. Review bass line using tonal syllables and melody 2-part singing. Students split into two groups, one singing the melody and the other singing the bass line.

- Review the Harmonic Structure of *Down by the Riverside*. Divide class in 4 groups. Assign 4-part singing
  o Melody
  o 3-part harmonic accompaniment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>IV</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Fa</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So</td>
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<td>La</td>
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</table>

- Tonal Pattern Improvisation using tonal syllables. I sing a tonic, dominant or subdominant tonal pattern in major
Tonal Pattern Improvisation using tonal syllables. I sing a tonic, dominant or subdominant tonal pattern in major tonality using tonal syllables. Student improvise a different tonal pattern in the same function as my tonal pattern using tonal syllables.

- 4-macrobeat melodic patterns outlining I, V, and IV. Students repeat patterns (all patterns outline 4-macrobeats of the same tonal function to mirror the harmonic progression in the song)
- 4-macrobeat melodic patterns outline I, V, and IV – Students label the tonal Function of the pattern (Generalization—Verbal)
- 4-macrobeat melodic patterns outline I, V, IV – Students label the rhythmic Function of the pattern (Generalization—Verbal)
- Students improvise a different 4-macrobeat melodic pattern
- Jam Session

### 3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.
### 4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why or why not?

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Re</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>Fa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>La</td>
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</table>

5. Review the Harmonic Structure of *Down by the Riverside*. Divide class in 4 groups. Assign 4-part singing
   - Melody
   - Bass line melody
   - 3-part harmonic accompaniment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Do</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Fa</td>
<td>Fa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>La</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Tonal Pattern Improvisation using tonal syllables. I sing a tonic, dominant or subdominant tonal pattern in major tonality using tonal syllables. Student improvise a different tonal pattern in the same function as my tonal pattern using tonal syllables.
- Students read tonal patterns in major tonality (I, IV, and V), Symbolic Association—Reading
- Students write tonal patterns in major tonality (I, IV, and V), Symbolic Association—Writing
- Students read rhythm patterns in duple meter (M/m, D/E), Symbolic

1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?
2. What did you learn about music? Improvisation? Yourself?
3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.
4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why or why not?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association—Reading</th>
<th>1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students write rhythm patterns in duple meter (M/m, D/E), Symbolic Association—Writing</td>
<td>2. What did you learn about music? Improvisation? Yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Synthesis, Major/Harmonic Minor</td>
<td>3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jam Session</td>
<td>4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6
- Review the Harmonic Structure of *Down by the Riverside*. Divide class in 4 groups. Assign 4-part singing
  - Melody
  - 3-part harmonic accompaniment
    - I  V  IV
    - I  V  IV
    - I  V  IV

- Students read melodic patterns in major tonality and duple meter then write patterns. Symbolic association—Reading and Writing
- Assign 2 parts, melody/bass line. Add a 3rd part. Students in 3rd group improvise a 4-macrobeat melodic patterns
- Assign 6 part singing multiple times, every student singing different parts
  1. Melody
  2. One melodic pattern improviser
  3. 3-part harmonic accompaniment

7
- Students read melodic patterns in major tonality and duple meter then write patterns. Symbolic association—Reading and Writing
- Students create new melodic pattern (in audiation) /write (in journal) /read (to teacher and neighbor) new melodic pattern. Creativity/Improvisation—Writing
- Jam Session

1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?
2. What did you learn about music? Improvisation? Yourself?
3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.
4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why
| 8 | Review as needed  
    - Individual Melodic Improvisation Performances  
    - Jam Session | 1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?  
2. What did you learn about music? Improvisation? Yourself?  
3. Describe how you felt while improvising today.  
4. Did you enjoy improvising today? Why or why not? |
| --- | --- |
| 9 | Review as needed  
    - Individual Melodic Improvisation Performances  
    - Jam Session | Beginning of class  
3. Have you sang or audiated DR or JB outside of class? When? Where?  
4. Have you sang/chanted/audiated an improvisation for either song outside of class? When? Where?  
End of Class  
5. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why?  
7. Describe how you felt while composing today.  
8. Did you enjoy composing today? Why or why not? |
| 10 | Review as needed  
    - Individual Melodic Improvisation Performances  
    - Jam Session | 1. Describe how you felt during class today. What was your favorite part? Why? What was your least favorite part? Why? |
2. What did you learn about music? Improvisation? Yourself? Composing music?
3. Describe how you felt while composing today.
4. Did you enjoy composing today? Why or why not?

**Classroom activities using other tonalities and meters that will be inserted throughout data collection period:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Meter/Tonality</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| God rest ye merry Gentlemen (Traditional) – 5/8 version | Unusual Paired Meter Harmonic Minor Tonality | - Movement activity:
  - Teacher sings song, students walk to macrobeat.
  - Teacher sings song, students tip toe to microbeat.
  - Teacher improvises unusual paired rhythm chant on the neutral syllable, *bah*, students walk to macrobeat.
  - Teacher improvises unusual paired rhythm chant on the neutral syllable, *bah*, students tiptoe to microbeat.
  - Teacher sings song, students walk to macrobeat and tap microbeat on legs |
| Skin and Bones (Traditional) | Triple Meter Aeolian Tonality | - Review Song
- Students repeat tonal patterns, arpeggioed of either tonic or subtonic function.
- Students improvise a new “ooooooooo” part as a group
- Students improvise a new “ooooooooo” part: individual |
| Ghost of John              | Duple Meter Aeolian Tonality | - Students walk around room pretending to float while listening to song |
APPENDIX F

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

Down by the Riverside
Melody and Bass Line

Traditional

\[\text{\textbf{Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside,}}\]

\[\text{\textbf{down by the riverside, down by the riverside. Gonna}}\]

\[\text{\textbf{lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside,}}\]
Down by the Riverside

C7

Stu-dy war no more. I ain't gon-na

F

B9

Stu-dy war no more, ain't gon-na Stu-dy war no more, ain't gon-na

C7

Stu-dy war no more. I ain't gon-na

F

B9

Stu-dy war no more, ain't gon-na Stu-dy war no more, ain't gon-na

C7

Stu-dy war no

F
APPENDIX G

TONAL PATTERNS FOR _DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE_

1 2 3

4 5 6

7 8 9

10 11 12
APPENDIX H

SAMPLE PROJECTION WORKSHEET

Name _____________________ Date __________

1. Circle all the emotions that you felt today while improvising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pleased</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Uncomfortable</th>
<th>Proud</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>Shy</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Self-conscious</td>
<td>Uneasy</td>
<td>Timid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritated</td>
<td>Great</td>
<td>Weird</td>
<td>Curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>Playful</td>
<td>Annoyed</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Now, choose one or two emotions that you felt the **strongest** while improvising today.

1. _________________________ 2. _________________________

Why did you feel that way?

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

CODEBOOK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses excitement before improvisation</td>
<td>Good Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses dread before improvisation</td>
<td>Bad Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses nervousness before improvisation</td>
<td>Nervous Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses excitement while improvisation</td>
<td>Good During</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses dread while improvisation</td>
<td>Bad During</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses neutral feelings while improvisation</td>
<td>Neutral During</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses excitement after improvisation</td>
<td>Good After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses dread after improvisation</td>
<td>Bad After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student expresses after feelings while improvisation</td>
<td>Neutral After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes that he or she likes improvisation</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes that he or she dislikes improvisation</td>
<td>Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes he or she feels neutral about improvisation</td>
<td>Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes about expressing himself or herself through</td>
<td>Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes about digital recording microphone</td>
<td>Mic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes about social nature of improvisation- positive</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes social nature of improvisation- negative</td>
<td>Social bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes that they take ideas from other student’s</td>
<td>Collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvisation/patterns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student writes that thinking of family helps him or herself</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student visualizes to help him or herself improvise</td>
<td>Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behavior affects lesson, environment, learning</td>
<td>Student behave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with music inaccuracies, improvisation mistakes, imaginary</td>
<td>Mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvisation mistakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students make choices</td>
<td>Choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I attempt to manipulate environment, instructional change for</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional change for music skill</td>
<td>Instruct change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I observe a student who behaves nervous/uneasy</td>
<td>Nervous student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I observe a student who behaves confident/proud</td>
<td>Proud student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I slow down tempo of lesson to review or repeat a rhythm component of the lesson</td>
<td>Help w/ rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I slow down tempo of lesson to review or repeat a tonal component of the lesson</td>
<td>Help w/ tonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I slow down tempo of lesson to review or repeat a executive component of the lesson</td>
<td>Help w/ executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I slow down tempo of lesson to review or repeat a improvisation component of the lesson</td>
<td>Help w/ improv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I model improvisation</td>
<td>T improv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student models improvisation</td>
<td>S improv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student vocalizes epiphany/ makes connection</td>
<td>Epiphany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student vocalizes observation</td>
<td>S Observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual student helps individual student or group of students</td>
<td>S helps student/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher student helps individual student or group of students</td>
<td>T helps student/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student shows excitement for microphone</td>
<td>Mic observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation within rhythm context; Likert scale – most of the time, some of the time, none of the time</td>
<td>Tonal (M, S, or N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation within tonal context; Likert scale – most of the time, some of the time, none of the time</td>
<td>Rhythm (M, S, or N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation within rhythm and tonal context; Likert scale – most of the time, some of the time, none of the time</td>
<td>Melodic (M, S, or N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation within rhythm, tonal, and harmonic context; Likert scale – most of the time, some of the time, none of the time</td>
<td>Harmonic (M, S, or N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Codes Used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Theme 1:** Establishing an effective music learning environment | Discuss  
Student behave  
Mistakes  
Choices  
Environment  
Mic  
Nervous student  
Proud student  
S Observe  
S helps student/s  
T helps student/s |
| **Theme 2:** Strategy adaptations to scaffold a music skill | Help w/ rhythm  
Help w/ tonal  
Help w/ executive  
Help w/ improv  
T improv  
S improv  
Epiphany  
S Observe  
S helps student/s  
T helps student/s  
Tonal (M, S, N)  
Rhythm (M, S, N)  
Melodic (M, S, N)  
Harmonic (M, S, N)  
Mic  
Music Skill  
Collaborate  
Family  
Visualize |
| **Theme 3:** Improvisation as a shared, positive experience | Good Before  
Bad Before  
Nervous Before  
Good During  
Bad During  
Neutral During  
Good After  
Bad After  
Neutral After  
Like  
Dislike  
Normal  
Mic  
Friends  
Social bad  
Collaborate  
Nervous student  
Proud student |