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Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study

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FOURTH-GRADE MUSIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MUSIC IMPROVISATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

To better understand potential successes and challenges improvisatory music circles present in music facilitating and learning from the student perspective, the purpose of this research was to examine my fourth-grade students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles using the following guiding research questions. Regarding 30-minute improvisatory music circles: 1) How do fourth-grade students (a) define music improvisation, (b) respond to facilitator-selected improvisatory music activities during improvisatory music circles, and (c) make decisions while participating in improvisatory music circles? 2) How did those students' perceptions of music improvisation change throughout data collection?

I collected data from five 45-minute fourth-grade music classes over the course of three weeks. To achieve triangulation, I employed a variety of data collection sources: my learning plans, voice-recorded small-group opening discussions, video recordings of improvisatory music circles, student projection sheets, voice-recorded small-group closing discussions, passive participant-observer fieldnotes, moderate participant-observer memos, a focus-group discussion with member-checking, students' personal transcriptions, and voice-recorded, member-checking interviews. Through my data analysis process, I identified six emergent themes: students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways, determined our classroom music community elicited feelings of trust and prompted students to help each other and respond with empathy, utilized music improvisation as a tool to express their emotions and focus their

energy, used a variety of thinking strategies to inform their decision-making during improvisatory music circles, reported a balance between novelty and familiarity in facilitator-selected activities for improvisatory music circles improved their situational interests and engagement, and realized that improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes.

Through those findings, I gleaned insights from students' perceptions of music improvisation to determine that a co-constructed classroom music community is essential to developing an effective music learning environment. Exploring improvisatory music circles within that effective music learning environment may yield benefits for both music education and Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

Keywords: elementary general music, improvisation, perceptions, classroom community, meaning-making, Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

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INTRODUCTION

Music educators recognized music improvisation as a skill necessary for comprehensive musicianship[1] in 1994, when improvisation was added as a national standard for music education (Hickey et al., 2016; NAfME, n.d.-a; Orzolek, 2004). The 1994 National Standards for Arts Education prompted music educators to incorporate creative music activities, such as music improvisation, music composition, and arranging music to promote comprehensive musicianship (Norris, 2010). Although deemed an essential element in music education, music educators initially hesitated to incorporate music improvisation due to their lack of music improvisation self-efficacy, personal experience, professional training, and personal comfort level (Borgo, 2007; Hickey, 2016; Ng, 2011; Ng, 2021; Shouldice, 2018; Whitcomb, 2013). Nonetheless, incorporating music improvisation outweighed educators' personal fears and reluctance, as music improvisation has been recognized as a national standard for nearly 30 years (NAfME, n.d.-b).

Music educators adapted learning sequences, methodologies, activities, and repertoire to include music improvisation (Shouldice, 2018; West, 2019; Whitcomb, 2013). Researchers (Bradshaw, 1980; Burnard, 2002; Driscoll, 2014; Faulkner, 2022; Hickey et al., 2016; Koutsoupido & Hargreaves, 2009; Ng, 2021; Willox et al., 2011)

[1] Comprehensive musicianship refers to engaging students in music learning to promote music independence (Orzolek, 2004; Hickey et al., 2016).

have documented the benefits of student participation in improvisatory music activities; however, few have examined students' perceptions (Alexander, 2012; Borgo, 2007; Coulson & Burke, 2013; Driscoll, 2014; Young, 2021). To fully understand the role of improvisatory music activities in elementary music classes, researchers may consider examining students' perceptions of music improvisation (Borgo, 2007; Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019).

While serving as an elementary general music teacher at a small, private Catholic elementary school in the Southeastern United States, I frequently incorporated improvisatory music activities that I continue to utilize in my music classes today. I often utilize improvisatory music activities and improvisatory music circles to lead students to develop music understanding and enjoyment through active music-making. Due to the continued role improvisatory music circles serve in my elementary music classes, I consider myself a music facilitator rather than a music educator (Borgo, 2007; Oshinsky, 2008). In my elementary music classes, I work diligently to create opportunities for music engagement and learning following Music for People's philosophy, outlined in the Bill of Musical Rights (2019). I seek to incorporate improvisatory music circles in ways that honor the Bill of Musical Rights, by providing opportunities for joyful and healthy communication through music, individualized music-making, sincerely expressed emotion, and life skills and life-expression applied in music. When preparing, planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music activities for use in improvisatory music circles, I utilize several theories and approaches (Burnard, 2002; Gordon, 2012; Kratus, 1991; Orman, 2002; Roberts, 2017; Shouldice, 2018; Small, 1998).

Preparing for Improvisatory Music Activities

When preparing for improvisatory music activities, I begin with active music-making activities (Orman, 2002) to maintain students' situational interest: temporary interest in something from the immediate learning environment (Roberts, 2017). Roberts suggested balance between repetition and novelty, physical engagement, relation to prior knowledge, and authenticity help maintain situational interest in elementary music classes. In my elementary music classes, I approach music as a verb (Small, 1998) and use my students' situational interests to prepare them for improvisatory music activities and engage them in active music-making.

One may also refer to active music-making as musicking: "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (Small, 1998, p. 9). Musicking helps me prepare my students for improvisatory music activities based on pre-existing songs and corresponding tonal and rhythm patterns (Gordon, 2012; Shouldice, 2018). I also incorporate opportunities for free improvisatory music activities to guide my students' growth in improvisatory music activities. For example, I begin my elementary music classes with movement activities to songs in a variety of tonalities and meters (Gordon, 2012; Shouldice, 2018). I then present tonal patterns and rhythm patterns for students to imitate. Throughout my 30- to 45-minute elementary music classes, students may imitate tonal patterns and rhythm patterns, use those examples to improvise tonal patterns and rhythm patterns, or participate in free music improvisation.

Planning, Developing, and Implementing Improvisatory Music Activities

In planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music activities for my students, I reference Burnard (2002), Kratus (1991), and Shouldice (2018). To consider my students' perceptions of those improvisatory music activities, I reference Alexander (2012) and Coulson and Burke (2013). Following, I outline those approaches and studies.

Shouldice (2018) adapted Gordon's music learning theory (*About music learning theory*, n.d.; Gordon, 2012) into a sequential approach designed to refine students' tonal and metric awareness and cohesiveness to support readiness for music improvisation in the music classroom. Through audiation-based activities, students may develop listening, speaking, and audiation vocabularies. The listening vocabulary develops as students listen to music. The speaking vocabulary involves performance and imitation. "The audiation vocabulary is to music what the thinking vocabulary is to language" (Gordon, 2012, p. 122). As students develop those vocabularies, they begin to think about and understand music. Facilitating those sequential processes allows music educators to guide students from imitation to improvisation through audiation. I use Shouldice's (2018) approach to prepare my students for improvisatory music activities.

To ensure the improvisatory music activities I am planning, developing, and implementing for my elementary music classes are appropriate for my students, I consider both Kratus' (1991) and Burnard's (2002) perspectives on children's music improvisation. According to Kratus' model, most of my students improvise music at the exploration and process-oriented levels by exploring new sounds and creating their own rhythm patterns during improvisatory music activities. Students do not always synchronize when layering their rhythm patterns, indicative of the higher levels in

Kratus' model, but I give students the opportunity to synchronize with their classmates with hopes of tracking progress toward ensemble playing, or product-oriented music improvisation (Burnard, 2002). By introducing different types of music improvisation during improvisatory music activities, my students' perceptions of music improvisation may change.

Researchers Alexander (2012) and Coulson and Burke (2013) examined creativity, communication, and expression through students' perceptions of improvisatory music activities. Middle school music students reported feelings of confidence, anxiety, and inclusion playing a role in their improvisatory music activities (Alexander, 2012). Elementary music students discussed successes and difficulties with improvisatory music activities (Coulson & Burke, 2013). Student-reported successes included ease and comfortability, endless possibilities, making decisions, and finding success in music freedom. Student-reported difficulties included feeling vulnerable, feeling unprepared, and finding it more difficult to improvise through music when there was any emphasis on correctness. From student-reported successes and difficulties, Coulson and Burke determined that creativity expressed in improvisatory music activities may stem from variety, originality, personal appeal, and enjoyment.

Burnard (2002) examined students' thoughts and conversations on improvisatory music activities. Similarly, Alexander (2012) and Coulson and Burke (2013) documented students' perceptions of improvisatory music activities. While that research has influenced my planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music activities as modeled by Shouldice (2018), I also provide students with the opportunity to improvise freely.

Free Music Improvisation and Free Improvisatory Music Activities

Free music improvisation occurs when students improvise without rules and allows for student participation regardless of music skill (Borgo, 2007; Knysh, 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015; Ng, 2021; Norris, 2010; Oshinsky, 2008; Siljamäki, 2022). By participating in improvisatory music activities, students may utilize both convergent and divergent thinking (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009), creative thinking (Campbell, 2010; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995; Webster, 1990), comprehensive musicianship (Bradshaw, 1980; Norris, 2010; Orzolek, 2004), and transferable skills from everyday life (Bradshaw, 1980; Campbell, 2010; Faulkner, 2022; Nachmanovitch, 2019; Ng, 2021; Shouldice, 2018; Willox et al., 2011). When students interact with music through free improvisatory music activities, they actively create and manipulate music resulting in longer periods of music engagement (Janata et al., 2018) and can interact with music in a playful way, which is critical for development (Yogman et al., 2018).

Improvisatory Music Circles

While participating in free improvisatory music activities, my students utilize various music instruments including drums, bells, stringed instruments, hand clapping, and singing to form improvisatory music circles (Bradshaw, 1980; Price, 2013, p. 229-231). While participating in improvisatory music circles, my students may play games, such as: rumble, rumble firecracker, one sound around, and story-telling (Knysh 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015). By playing those types of games in my music classes, I promote student-to-student interaction, non-verbal communication, teamwork, and opportunities to explore music skills, such as music improvisation. Students may work

together to produce original, co-constructed music that is personal to them (Young, 2021) and channel their creativity, communication, problem-solving, and expression in new ways (Borgo, 2007; Faulkner, 2022). Bokor (2014) stated that music serves as more than simply an activity; music may express things deeper than words can. Therefore, improvisatory music circles may offer opportunities for synchrony and familiarity in rhythm (Ilari, 2015), sound-centered approaches to introduce topics like pitch, timbre, direction, color and texture that may be "too subtle for words" (Bradshaw, 1980, p. 114), and student-led and student-centered learning to showcase music ideas and independence (Luh, 2019).

Since preparing, planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles in my elementary music classes, I have noticed my students developing music independence and confidence. While I perceive improvisatory music circles as beneficial to my students, I do not know how my students perceive improvisatory music circles. To better understand potential successes and challenges improvisatory music circles present in music facilitating and learning from the student perspective, the purpose of this research was to examine my elementary students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles. Following are the guiding research questions for this study. Regarding 30-minute improvisatory music circles:

1. How do fourth-grade students
    a. define music improvisation,
    b. respond to facilitator-selected improvisatory music activities during improvisatory music circles, and
    c. make decisions while participating in improvisatory music circles?

2. How did those students' perceptions of music improvisation change throughout data collection?

CHAPTER 2

RELATED RESEARCH

Investigating Children's Meaning-Making and the Emergence of Musical Interaction in Group Improvisation

Burnard (2002)

Burnard described what improvising came to mean to a group of 12-year-old middle school students in a weekly lunchtime music club (Burnard, 2002). Burnard intended to fill a gap in literature regarding children's reflections on group improvisation with a series of ethnographic research done in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. In this 2002 study, Burnard focused on musical interaction and student reflection. Because Burnard served as a participant observer and agent for the student's reflections, the study was predominantly student-led. Burnard passed responsibility for decision-making to the students, in which students determined starting and ending points, limits and constraints on their improvisation, and approaches and strategies for group improvisation.

Method

Participants and Setting

Burnard (2002) performed this study with 18 12-year-old children at a multi-ethnic, comprehensive middle school in west London, England. There were 12 girls and six boys. Fourteen children were of British-descent, two were Afro-Caribbean, and two were Asian. Out of 18 children, 14 received music training, four received no music training, and 17 had at least one instrument at home. Children volunteered to join the

weekly lunchtime music club, and they met for an hour every Friday for six months. The children knew Burnard as a "friendly outsider", which helped keep interactions relaxed and relatively informal (Burnard, 2002, p. 159).

Data Collection and Analysis

Using qualitative ethnographic strategies of observation, interviews, and examination of music artifacts, Burnard divided research into Early, Middle, and Late Phases, each phase including seven sessions (Burnard, 2002). During those sessions, Burnard used video to record group interviews, observe interactions and behaviors, and capture children's reflections on group improvisation.

Burnard (2002) began collecting data as soon as children arrived for the lunchtime music club. Before improvising, students ate lunch and discussed, reflected, and reconstructed their music experiences. Burnard found that children's conversations included ideas related to the music community, approaches to improvisation, and group meanings of what improvisation meant to them. Through data analysis, Burnard presented themes describing each music interaction.

Findings and Implications

Burnard reported that children should have the opportunity to make choices to engage the entire body in the "multi-sensorial experience" that is music (Burnard, 2002, p. 168). Children's understanding of improvisation stems from the bodily experience and how they maintain continuity and spontaneity. Burnard (2002) suggested intervention if the group cannot employ the entire body or maintain continuity and spontaneity.

Burnard (2002) also observed increased music responsiveness when trust and empathy were established. Applying previous experiences, relating to others as a

community, celebrating success and failures, social bonding and individual identity, safety in risk-taking, and contributions to the creations characterized children's experiences with group music improvisation. With that in mind, the teacher may have to take on a role rooted in questioning rather than leadership to promote freedom and responsibility.

Burnard (2002) also found that children's discussions were equally as important as the group music improvisation. Those discussions were equally as interactive as improvising and were frequently formulated by most, if not all, children. Through discussions and reflections, the children gradually approached fluidity in improvisation and set goals for future improvisatory music-making.

Relevance to Current Study

Like Burnard, I used qualitative ethnographic strategies of observation, interviews, and examination of student-created music to examine my fourth-grade students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles, which serve as an example of group music improvisation. While students in my study participated in improvisatory music circles for less time than the lunchtime music club, I used Burnard's suggestions to guide instrument selection, my role as a participant observer, and questioning during group reflections. While I served as a moderate participant observer, my role as the facilitator in the music classroom prompted my playing an active role in the facilitation of and the questioning via member-checking following the improvisatory music circles.

Creativity in the Elementary Music Classroom: A Study of Students' Perceptions

Coulson & Burke (2013)

Coulson and Burke (2013) explored essential elements for developing and defining creativity in the elementary music classroom in their 2013 mixed-methods study. The researchers used the following questions to guide that study:

1) "What are students' perceptions of creativity?

2) How can music educators successfully implement improvisation lessons to promote student creativity and learning?" (p. 429).

Method

Participants and Setting

Coulson and Burke (2013) recruited 118 second-, third-, and fourth-grade student participants from a suburban elementary school in the Midwestern United States. According to data from the 2009–2010 academic year, 21 second-graders (11 males and 10 females), 47 third-graders (26 males and 21 females), and 50 fourth-graders (23 males and 27 females) served as student participants for this study. Second- and fourth-grade students had xylophone and metallophone experience and proper technique. All students had prior experience describing music, tempo, dynamics, and instrumentation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Coulson and Burke (2013) collected data through in-class performance assessments, listening homework, in-class listening center recording forms, observations from question/answer improvisation lessons, and follow-up discussions held with classes after improvisation lessons. The teacher in the study completed performance assessments during the lessons, and the researchers took field notes during improvisation lessons and

student participants' discussions. The researchers also analyzed student participants' homework and in-class listening assignments.

The researchers analyzed performance assessment data quantitatively and listening homework, in-class listening assignments, and field notes qualitatively. Coulson and Burke (2013) analyzed listening homework, in-class listening assignments, and field notes for "themes when describing creativity: originality, sense of appeal, and variety" (p. 434); they then compared and contrasted the teacher's observations with their field notes.

Findings and Implications

Student participants assisted Coulson and Burke (2013) in determining the difficulties and successes experienced while improvising, student participants' decision-making while improvising, and suggestions for the music teacher during music improvisation lessons. Student participants reported successes, including ease and comfortability, endless possibilities, making decisions, and finding success in music freedom. Student participants reported difficulties that included feeling vulnerable, feeling unprepared, and finding it more difficult to improvise through music when there was any emphasis on correctness. From student-reported successes and difficulties, Coulson and Burke determined that creativity expressed in improvisatory music activities may stem from variety, originality, personal appeal, and enjoyment.

Coulson and Burke (2013) also reported that student participants produced more original music when they felt confident in their music ability. Student participants labeled their music as creative and believed that a variety of instruments or rhythms make music more creative. Music improvisation was demonstrated for the student participants, but

Coulson and Burke suggested that student participants may take more risks when the music teacher demonstrates music skills and ideas.

Relevance to Current Study

For this study, I developed guiding research questions similar to Coulson and Burke's (2013). The findings they discussed focused partially on students' perceptions regarding music improvisation, which provided me with some insight regarding my students' perceptions. I focused primarily on students' perceptions regarding improvisatory music circles and framed that through their thoughts and feelings, aspects they enjoy, aspects they would change, and student-reported benefits and takeaways.

Improvisation in a Fourth-Grade Music Class

Driscoll (2014)

In this qualitative case study, Driscoll (2014) investigated the process of implementing music improvisation personally and amongst fourth-grade students. Driscoll implemented a variety of music improvisation, including tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic music improvisation. Driscoll used the following questions to guide the 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?" (p. 7).

Method

Participants and Setting

Driscoll (2014) selected her fourth-grade class to participate in this study. Her fourth-grade class consisted of 17 students aged 9- to 10 years-old: eight female students and nine male students including six African American students, two Asian American students, eight Caucasian students, and one Hispanic student. Students attended a small private elementary school for kindergarten through Grade 6. Driscoll also served as a participant observer during her research. Driscoll collected all data in the school music room during 50-minute music classes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Driscoll (2014) collected data over the course of five weeks during 50-minute music classes on Monday and Wednesday, 11:00 am to 11:50 am. Driscoll's data sources included video-recordings, student journals, personal written reflections and observations, learning plans, and audio-recordings. Driscoll then transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data for emergent themes: (a) establishing an effective music learning environment, (b) strategy adaptations to scaffold music skills, and (c) students' shared positive experiences. Driscoll also provided personal accounts with music improvisation through vignettes.

Findings and Implications

Driscoll (2014) found establishing an effective music-learning environment required scaffolding, adapting, and implementing a variety of strategies to meet students' needs. Students in this study occasionally reported negative aspects of improvisation, but

the majority reported growth and positive experiences. Students often reported nervousness, excitement, and pride in their music improvisations.

Students reported interactions with improvisation in a variety of ways. Driscoll (2014) incorporated vignettes of students to highlight the individual experiences with music improvisation. Some students reported enjoyment and positive experiences with music improvisation. Some students reported growth and transformation. Some students reported hardship and negative experiences with music improvisation. Students reporting authentic experiences allowed Driscoll to track the process of improvisation learning in her music classroom.

Relevance to Current Study

As readiness for improvisatory music circles, I provided my students opportunities to improvise music tonally, rhythmically, melodically, and harmonically through classroom activities. Through improvisatory music circles, students selected how they improvised, so tonal, rhythm, melodic, and harmonic music improvisation took place simultaneously. For this study, I incorporated learning plans, video-recordings, student projection sheets, and my personal reflections and observations via moderate participant observer memos as means of collecting data for my research. Driscoll's (2014) adapted whole-part-whole sequences and scaffolding suggestions proved helpful in planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles for my research.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

My Qualifications, Subjectivity, and Positionality

I am certified in the state of South Carolina to teach Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 music. I received my Bachelor of Music with Emphasis in Music Education from the University of South Carolina in 2022, and I was completing my Master of Music Education with Emphasis in Early Childhood and Elementary Music at the time of this study. While completing my Master of Music Education, I also served as a graduate assistant. While serving as a graduate assistant and graduate student, I have been a music teacher for USC's Children's Music Development Center and a small, private Catholic school near USC School of Music where I have facilitated music education for children, infants through grade 6. I have also completed improvisatory music circle training in MUED 554: Workshop in Music Education: Inclusive Music Circles–PreK-Grade 5 with Mary Knysh during summer 2022. In that course I learned how to facilitate improvisatory music circles through a variety of activities, and I have adapted those activities for my elementary music classes and as a graduate assistant for undergraduate courses, MUED 454: Music for Young Children, MUED 107: Classroom Instruments, and MUED 465: General Music in Elementary Schools. At USC School of Music, I also completed Music for People's Art of Improvisation in the summer of 2023, and have led or assisted with a variety of weekly improvisatory music circles for the past two years.

Through that training and experience in music improvisation and facilitation, I have developed an appreciation for music improvisation in my personal music-making. That appreciation sparked my interest in examining music improvisation with my elementary music students, however, I developed that appreciation over multiple semesters at USC as a formally trained, adult musician. I approached this study with my personal understanding of the freedom of choice and independent musicianship required in music improvisation, and I am interested in understanding how elementary students in my music classes perceive experiences in improvisatory music circles. I understand that my position as the facilitator may impact this study, as the perceived teacher-student power dynamic may influence how students interact with and perceive music improvisation.

Design

For this ethnographic case study, I examined my 2023-2024 fourth-grade elementary music students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles (Patton, 2015). I selected ethnography to examine those students' perceptions from their point of view. To do so, I maintained student-centered, co-constructed data collection procedures and analysis (Knysh, 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015; Young, 2021) to collect rich, saturated data for depth of understanding (Patton, 2015).

Student Participants

I selected my 2023-2024 fourth-grade music students as participants for this study using purposeful, intensity sampling (Patton, 2015; Spradley, 2016). By using purposeful, intensity sampling, I selected an information-rich population of students that demonstrated the critical music learning readinesses necessary for improvisatory music

circles to serve as participants for this study (Patton, 2015). My pre-existing relationship with those students indicated that their perceptions would provide information-rich data. As third graders during the 2022-2023 academic year, those students participated in improvisatory music activities and improvisatory music circles with me as their music facilitator. During that time those students consistently expressed their music thoughts and feelings using words and phrases I determined would provide a variety of information-rich data regarding my selected research questions.

During this study, 14 students were enrolled in fourth grade for the 2023-2024 academic year. Students were 9- to 10-years old at the time of data collection. In that fourth-grade class, seven students were female and seven students were male. Five students identified as Caucasian, six students identified as Black/African American, and three students identified as Two or More Races. Six of those students identified as Hispanic, and eight students identified as Non-Hispanic. In that class, I also had three English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students, as classified by the small, private Catholic elementary school.

I selected my 2023-2024 fourth-grade elementary students as participants because I have an existing relationship with those students, as I taught that class during their third-grade year. During the previous year, I provided those students with opportunities to participate in improvisatory music activities, free improvisatory music activities, and improvisatory music circles. Through those activities, I realized those students would provide information-rich data and be open to participating in improvisatory music circles and communicating their perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles (Patton, 2015).

To ensure this study was ethical and appropriate to conduct with my selected student participants, I obtained the appropriate university IRB approval prior to data collection (see Appendix A) and distributed a letter of informed consent to the principal of the school (see Appendix B). In that letter, I explained my research and ensured that students' confidentiality would be maintained and data collection would take place during students' regularly scheduled class time. I also distributed a letter of informed consent to student participants and the parents/guardians of student participants (see Appendix C). In that letter, I explained my research and ensured that students' confidentiality would be maintained. As recommended by Tisdall, Davis, and Gallagher (2009), for an ethical study involving child participants, I included a place for both the student participant and parent/guardian to sign and date for full informed consent.

Moderate Participant Observer

As the music facilitator, I chose to serve as a moderate participant observer in this ethnographic case study and observed my fourth-grade music students in their music class that I regularly facilitated. During this study, I selected moderate participation, as defined by Spradley (2016), to maintain a balance between participation and observation to ensure that students' perceptions regarding improvisatory music circles are unbiased and authentic to the students. I acted as a complete participant while facilitating and participating in improvisatory music circles; during opening discussions and closing discussions I selected to be a non-participant, and students conducted opening discussions and closing discussions in the presence of a passive participant observer.

Passive Participant Observer

I invited Hunter Thompson to serve as a passive participant observer and friendly outsider for this study (Burnard, 2002; Spradley 2016). Hunter Thompson also facilitated music education at the small, private Catholic elementary school for Early Childhood 2, Pre-Kindergarten 4, Grade 1, Grade 5, and Grade 6. He observed my music classes at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year to establish a relationship with the student participants and remained throughout data collection. As a passive participant and friendly outsider, Mr. Thompson[2] remained present in the arts room during data collection and recorded field notes.

Mr. Thompson received his Bachelor of Music with Emphasis in Music Education from the University of South Carolina in 2023 and was working toward completing his Master of Music Education with Emphasis in Early Childhood and Elementary Music. At the time of this study, he served as a graduate assistant at the University of South Carolina (USC). While serving as a graduate assistant and graduate student, he had been a music teacher for USC's Children's Music Development Center and a small, private Catholic school near USC School of Music where he facilitated music education for children, infants through grade 6. He also utilized and adapted activities from Knysh (2013) and Knysh and Leathley (2015) for his elementary music classes and as a graduate assistant for undergraduate courses, MUED 454: Music for Young Children, MUED 107: Classroom Instruments, and MUED 465: General Music in Elementary Schools. At USC School of Music, he also completed Music for People's Art of Improvisation in the

[2] Students referred to Hunter Thompson as Mr. Thompson, as he also facilitated music classes at the small, private Catholic elementary school.

summer of 2023, and had led or assisted with a variety of weekly improvisatory music circles for the past two years.

Setting

Physical Setting

I collected all student data regarding students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles in the music room of the small, private Catholic elementary school in downtown Columbia, SC. That room is shared by all special area teachers in the school including both music facilitators, the art teacher, the librarian, and occasionally the Spanish teacher. That room has laminate floors, various shelves with assorted visual art and music supplies, a desk for the teacher, six tables, and 30 stools. School administration scheduled special area classes on different weekdays, so Mondays and Wednesdays were reserved for music classes, and I had full access to the music room.

Music Setting

Each academic year, students from the small, private Catholic elementary school attended music classes taught twice weekly by music teachers enrolled in the graduate music education program at USC. Since 1997, those music teachers have often incorporated Gordon's (2012) music learning theory (Arrasmith, 2018; Driscoll, 2014; Spearman, 2022; Turner, 2023). While facilitating music education at that school during the 2022-2023 academic year, I referenced Gordon's (2012) music learning theory and Shouldice's (2018) approach to Gordon's (2012) music learning theory to prepare my students' listening, speaking, and audiation vocabularies for music activities, including improvisatory music activities (Gordon, 2012; Shouldice, 2018). I also introduced free

improvisatory music activities and games as an introduction to improvisatory music circles (Knysh, 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015).

At the time of this study, I referenced Shouldice's (2018) approach to Gordon's (2012) music learning theory when planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles. To track my students' progress during improvisatory music circles, I referenced Kratus' (1991) seven improvisation levels:

1. *Level 1: Exploration.* When students explore different sounds and combinations of sounds, they begin improvisation at the exploration level. Students may create patterns at that level.
2. *Level 2: Process-oriented improvisation.* When students begin to audiate patterns and improvise through those patterns, they reach process-oriented improvisation.
3. *Level 3: Product-oriented improvisation.* Students at the product-oriented improvisation stage learn to organize the patterns into larger music structures or ensembles. Students at that level develop awareness of constraints, such as pulse, meter, and tonality.
4. *Level 4: Fluid improvisation.* Once students reach fluid improvisation, they may improvise in a variety of tempos, tonalities, and meters. Those students demonstrate technical ability and control on the instrument.
5. *Level 5: Structural improvisation.* Upon reaching structural improvisation, students may structure and sequence their improvisations. Those students may use nonmusical strategies, such as moods or images, or musical strategies, such as patterns.

6. *Level 6: Stylistic improvisation.* Once students demonstrate the ability to shift improvisation strategies, they may begin stylistic improvisation. When students improvise stylistically, they skillfully imitate characteristics of a particular style.
7. *Level 7: Personal improvisation.* Students reach the most advanced level, personal improvisation, when they develop their own personal improvisation style. Students may experiment to create a new set of rules unique to their own improvisation style.

I selected Shouldice's (2018) approach to Gordon's (2012) music learning theory and Kratus' (1991) seven improvisation levels to establish a conceptual framework for this study. Establishing a conceptual framework allows me to support, inform, and justify my research by assessing and refining my goals, developing realistic and relevant research questions, selecting appropriate methods, and identifying potential validity threats to my conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). I consider that conceptual framework when planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles.

The Arc and Co-Created Collaboration. When planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles, I also considered the arc recommended by Knysh (2013). I planned for a beginning (opening), middle (activity sequence), and ending (closing) in each improvisatory music circle with the following session goals, outlined by Knysh (2013):

Opening:

- Create a safe space
- Warm up body and voice

- Use icebreakers and team builders
- Adapt a playful attitude

Activity Sequence:

- Provide accessible sequential activities that build upon one another
- Include activities that lead to individual and group empowerment
- Deliver experiential introductions to new skills and concepts
- Expand improvisational language

Closing:

- Generate a sense of celebration
- Incorporate activities that offer appreciation to self and group
- Construct culmination activities built upon session highlights (Knysh, 2013, p. 3).

When planning, developing, and implementing improvisatory music circles, I empowered and served my students' creative, co-created collaboration (Knysh, 2013; Young, 2021). I remained flexible and responsive when facilitating improvisatory music circles. To provide students with an active role during improvisatory music circles, I included opportunities for students to facilitate. I began by modeling activity facilitation and incorporating students' ideas. I then invited student volunteers to continue facilitating the activity. While I created learning plans for my music classes, my students assisted in facilitating the arc of improvisatory music circles.

Pilot Study

During the two fourth-grade music classes prior to data collection for this ethnographic study, I piloted my data collection process to assess its feasibility and to

ensure students were familiar with the technology and procedures necessary. I set clear goals for that pilot study, as recommended by In (2017) and Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose, and Shevlin (2019). Those goals included determining:

- student-selected procedures for opening and closing discussions,
- student voice recording capabilities on university-provided iPad minis,
- length of time students engaged in relevant student-led discussions,
- small discussion groups,
- depth of voice recorded small-group opening and closing discussions, and
- optimum procedures for camera angles for video recording on university-provided iPads.

Following, I explain my reasoning for each of the goals outlined above, and considerations after piloting those data collection procedures that influenced my finalized data collection procedures.

Student-Selected Procedures for Opening and Closing Discussions

To honor the co-constructive nature of improvisatory music circles outlined in my conceptual framework and because I selected an ethnographic case study, I provided opportunities for student choice in the opening and closing discussions (Knysh, 2013; Patton, 2015; Young, 2021). During the first fourth-grade music class of the pilot study, students scarcely participated in an opening full-class discussion. During that day's closing discussion, students elected to discuss in small discussion groups of three to four students, and student engagement during those discussions was higher compared to the opening full-class discussion.

Student Voice Recording Capabilities on University-Provided iPad Minis

Because students elected to discuss in small discussion groups of three to four students, my initial data collection method of video recording did not adequately capture the data for transcription. Therefore, I sourced university-provided iPad minis for each small discussion group to use during opening and closing discussions. During the second fourth-grade music class of the pilot study, I assigned a university-provided iPad mini to each small discussion group for them to voice record their opening and closing discussions. I photographed each small discussion group to ensure that group received the same iPad mini each day of data collection and briefly introduced students to the voice recorder app by showing them how to record and how to stop recording. I provided time for students to practice voice recording and asking and answering questions of their own during a mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussion. Then, I reviewed and manually transcribed those mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussion voice recordings to evaluate student voice recording capabilities on university-provided iPad minis. Each small discussion group successfully recorded their mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussion using the voice recorder app on the university-provided iPad minis. I could hear all members of each small discussion group, and the small discussion group members helped me identify them by introducing themselves before the questions and answers they provided.

Length of Time Students Engaged in Relevant Student-Led Discussions

While manually transcribing the mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions, I also considered the length of time students engaged in those relevant student-led discussions to ensure small discussion groups had enough time to discuss and

produce saturated data. During the 5 minutes of the mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions, Group 1 discussed for 40 seconds; Group 2 discussed for 1 minute, 45 seconds; Group 3 discussed for 3 minutes, 58 seconds; and Group 4 discussed for 4 minutes, 1 second.

Small Discussion Groups

To promote the co-constructive nature of improvisatory music circles outlined in my conceptual framework and because I selected an ethnographic case study, I provided opportunities for student choice in the opening discussions and closing discussions (Knysh, 2013; Patton, 2015; Young, 2021). Students selected their small discussion group members for those opening and closing discussions. During the second fourth-grade music class of the pilot study, I reviewed the video recordings from the university-provided iPads and voice recordings from the university-provided iPad minis to check for efficiency and student behavior in those small discussion groups during the mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions. Students were responsible and remained on task during the mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions. They remained in those specific small discussion groups throughout data collection.

Depth of Opening and Closing Student-Led Discussions

To evaluate the quality of voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions and determine the potential success of those voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions providing rich, saturated data, I considered the depth of content discussed in the mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions. I evaluated those mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions using aspects of Kvale's (1994) interview quality criteria. I considered the extent of spontaneous, rich,

specific, and relevant answers from the small discussion group members; how often small discussion group members followed up and/or clarified the meaning of the relevant aspect of the answers; as well as the small discussion group members' active listening and ability to probe for more information. Each small discussion group successfully conducted mock voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions that fit the criteria outlined above.

Camera Angles for Video Recording on University-Provided iPads

I experimented with various camera angles in the music room to ensure I captured as many students as possible while recording on university-provided iPads. I selected the camera angles that captured the most students in frame. After considering those findings from my pilot study, I analyzed my proposed procedures and addressed potential weaknesses in my proposed data collection process (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Following is my revised data collection process.

Data Collection

During this study, I collected data from six 45-minute fourth-grade music classes over the course of three weeks. I present my data collection schedule, arranged chronologically, with brief descriptions of the data collection processes used in each of those 45-minute fourth-grade music classes and member-checking activities in Table 3.1.

Triangulation

To achieve triangulation, I employed a variety of data collection sources. Those sources included my learning plans, voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions, video recordings of improvisatory music circles, student projection sheets, voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions, passive participant-observer fieldnotes,

moderate participant-observer memos, and a focus-group discussion with member-checking. Following I present each data collection source.

Table 3.1 Data Collection Schedule

Dates	Data Collection Process(es)	Allotted Time
Music Classes 1-5 (10/9/23-10/23/23)	1. Voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions 2. Video-recorded improvisatory music circle 3. Student projection sheets 4. Voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions 5. Passive participant-observer field notes 6. Moderate participant-observer memos	1. 5 minutes 2. 30 minutes 3. 5 minutes 4. 5 minutes 5. Entire music class (45 min) 6. After music class (30 min)
Music Class 6 (10/25/23)	Focus-group discussion with member-checking (McKim, 2023)	20 minutes
10/30/23-12/6/23	Member-checking via student personal transcriptions (Simpson & Quigley, 2016)	10 minutes per student (each music class, until completed)
12/11/23	Voice-recorded, member-checking interviews	30 minutes

Learning Plans. For each fourth-grade music class, I created a learning plan designed to facilitate the arc of an improvisatory music circle and expand students' music improvisational language, as suggested by Knysh (2013). To do so, I used Kratus' (1991)

music improvisation levels to informally assess my students' music improvisation abilities. I present a sample learning plan in Appendix D.

Voice-Recorded, Small-Group Opening Discussions. During the first 5 minutes of each fourth-grade music class, I invited students to participate in voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions using university-provided iPad minis. As the fourth-grade music facilitator, I did not lead or participate in the voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions because I recognized the unequal status between myself, as the adult teacher-researcher, and my students (Tisdall et al., 2009). To prioritize student voices, I removed myself from the room with hope that students would feel empowered to authentically express their perceptions. Students participated in voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions in the presence of Mr. Thompson, the passive participant and friendly outsider, as recommended by Burnard (2002). He remained present during the voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions to ensure students remained on task and to assist, as necessary.

Students discussed in the specific, small discussion groups determined during the pilot study. As recommended by Hill and Wiggins (2023), I provided students with the opportunity to explore collaborative inquiry by asking and answering their own questions in their small discussion groups during Music Class 1. While transcribing voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions from Music Class 1, I determined some groups would benefit from assistance in remaining on task for the 5-minute activity. To provide that assistance, I made note of thought-provoking questions students asked during each voice-recorded, small-group opening discussion. I then displayed those students' questions on

the chalkboard as essential questions for optional use in subsequent voice recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions.

Video-Recorded Improvisatory Music Circles. After students completed each voice-recorded, small-group opening discussion, I returned to the music room and began video recording the improvisatory music circles that lasted for 30 minutes.
I used two university-provided iPads, iPad A and iPad B, to video record each improvisatory music circle from different angles to best capture students' music-making, verbal responses, and other relevant behaviors. I placed iPad A on a tripod in front of the chalkboard to capture students on one side of the music circle. I placed iPad B on another tripod, directly across from iPad A, to capture students on the other side of the music circle. I present a photograph of the music room in Figure 3.1, accompanied by a two-dimensional diagram of the music room in Figure 3.2, to provide visual representations of the music room.

To maintain a balance between novelty and familiarity to promote students' situational interest in the video-recorded improvisatory music circles, as recommended by Roberts (2017), I added new elements to those video-recorded improvisatory music circles each music class. Following, I describe each music class.

Music Class 1. During Music Class 1, I presented improvisatory music circle activities that promoted students' exploration. Students and I improvised ostinati in duple meter and layered those ostinati to create a groove. Once students consistently performed their ostinati, I reinforced facilitator cues including 1-2 back to the groove, stop-cut, sculpting, and rumble (Knysh 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015). We shifted from repeating ostinati to improvising freely, without constraints or limitations, using those facilitator

cues. Once student engagement drifted during those activities, we closed with a rumble and rumble firecracker facilitated by students. During each activity, students and I took time to define music improvisation and label when we were improvising in our music-making. I created a similar learning plan for Music Class 2.

Figure 3.1 Photo of Music Room

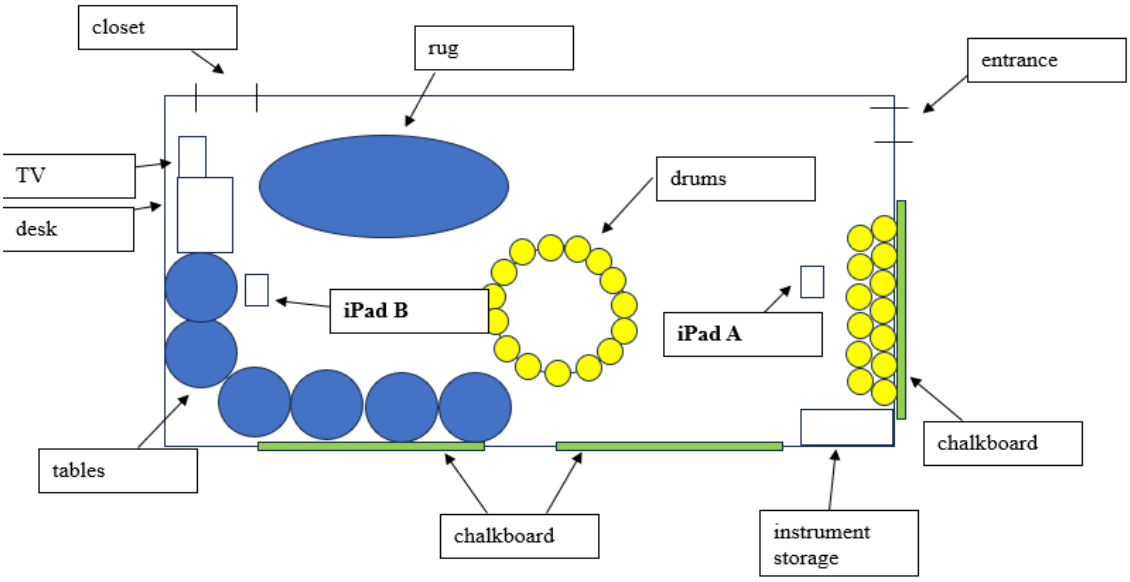

Figure 3.2 Two-dimensional Diagram of Music Room

Music Class 2. During Music Class 2, students and I improvised ostinati in triple meter using our voices and body percussion and layered those ostinati to create a groove. Once students consistently performed their ostinati, I reinforced facilitator cues including 1-2 back to the groove, stop-cut, sculpting, and rumble (Knysh 2013; Knysh & Leathley, 2015). We shifted from repeating ostinati to improvising freely, without constraints or limitations, using those facilitator cues. While students freely improvised using voices and body percussion, I distributed percussion instruments. Students freely improvised using those percussion instruments. We closed with a rumble and rumble firecracker facilitated by students. During each activity, students and I took time to define music improvisation and label when we were improvising in our music-making.

Music Class 3. During Music Class 3, I began the improvisatory music circle with a body percussion warm-up using the "Fire Circle Dance" drum loop (M. Knysh,

personal communication, July 5, 2022). I modeled speaking and playing 2- or 4-beat body percussion ostinati for students to echo. Students then took turns speaking and playing their improvised 2- or 4-beat body percussion ostinati for the rest of the class to echo. Once all students had an opportunity to lead during that call-and-response activity, students practiced new ostinati patterns. While students were practicing, I informally assessed their speaking, playing, and continuous fluid movement music jobs. Students performing those music jobs earned a drum.

Once all students had drums, we performed a call-and-response activity using the bass and tone sounds of the drums. I described those sounds and the "low" and "high" sounds on the drum. I then provided more time for students to improvise ostinati or freely improvise on the drums. I introduced a new activity following the free improvisation component of the improvisatory music circle. Rather than freely improvising with the entire class, students freely improvised in their small discussion groups. Those small discussion groups were seated in a smaller circle inside of the circle for the full class; the rest of the class remained seated in the larger, full-class circle. Students in the smaller circle improvised using instruments selected from a bucket of various small percussion instruments that students affectionately named the "mystery bucket" (see Figure 3.3). Students in the larger circle improvised using expressive movements that paralleled a student's music improvisation from the smaller circle. Each small discussion group had an opportunity to freely improvise for 2 minutes, or until a natural ending occurred. I created a similar learning plan for Music Class 4.

Figure 3.3 Photo of “Mystery Bucket”

Music Class 4. During Music Class 4, I began the improvisatory music circle with a drumming warm-up using the “Fire Circle Dance” drum loop (M. Knysh, personal communication, July 5, 2022). I modeled speaking and playing 2- or 4-beat drum ostinati using bass and tone (or low and high) for students to echo. Students then took turns speaking and playing their improvised 2- or 4-beat drum ostinati for the rest of the class to echo. Once all students had an opportunity to lead during that call-and response activity, students practiced new ostinati patterns or freely improvised using their drums. Rather than just freely improvising with the entire class, students also freely improvised in their small discussion groups. Those small discussion groups were seated in a smaller circle inside of the circle for the full class; the rest of the class remained seated in the larger, full-class circle. Students in the smaller circle improvised using instruments selected from a bucket of various small percussion instruments that students affectionately named the “mystery bucket.” Students in the larger circle improvised using expressive movements that paralleled a student’s music improvisation from the smaller circle. Each small discussion group had an opportunity to freely improvise for 2 minutes, or until a natural ending occurred.

Music Class 5. During Music Class 5, I began the improvisatory music circle with a drumming warm-up using the “Dancing in the Sand” drum loop (M. Knysh, personal

communication, July 5, 2022). I modeled speaking and playing 2- or 4-beat drum ostinati using bass and tone (or low and high) for students to echo. Students then took turns speaking and playing their improvised 2- or 4-beat drum ostinati for the rest of the class to echo. Once all students had an opportunity to lead during that call-and response activity, students practiced new ostinati patterns. Before freely improvising, students selected new instruments from the "mystery bucket" and continued practicing new ostinati patterns or freely improvising. Students also freely improvised in their small discussion groups. Those small discussion groups were seated in a smaller circle inside of the circle for the full class; the rest of the class remained seated in the larger, full-class circle. Students in the smaller circle improvised using instruments selected from the "mystery bucket." Students in the larger circle improvised using expressive movements that paralleled a student's music improvisation from the smaller circle. Each discussion group had an opportunity to freely improvise for 2 minutes, or until a natural ending occurred.

Music Class 6 Focus-Group Discussion with Member-Checking. On October 25th, 2023, the small, private Catholic elementary school scheduled a fire drill that took place during Music Class 6. After returning from the fire drill, we had 20 minutes remaining in Music Class 6. The learning plan I created for Music Class 6 was designed to take 45 minutes: 5 minutes dedicated to voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions, 30 minutes dedicated to a video-recorded improvisatory music circle, 5 minutes dedicated to student projection sheets, and 5 minutes dedicated to voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions. Rather than implementing that learning plan, I utilized Music Class 6 to begin member-checking via a focus-group discussion with the

hope of yielding data that was richer and more saturated than data that would be collected from an abridged version of the learning plan created for Music Class 6.

To make my member-checking meaningful for students, and to provide them with an active role in the member-checking process, I considered suggestions from McKim (2023). I conducted a focus-group discussion with member-checking to provide students with another opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, understandings, and perceptions regarding music improvisation via improvisatory music circles. I used the essential questions drafted for the voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions to guide that focus-group discussion. I invited students to explain, edit, or discard their previous responses or provide new responses, if essential questions drafted for voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions were not answered in their small discussion groups. As students responded, I restated direct quotations for students' approval, formatted their responses as questions to probe further, and summarized their responses for students' approval to further incorporate member-checking into the focus-group discussion protocol. I transcribed all data collected from that focus-group discussion within 24 hours of collection.

Student Projection Sheets. Students reflected on video-recorded improvisatory music circles during Music Classes 1–5 via student projection sheets. Following each 30-minute video-recorded improvisatory music circle in those classes, I distributed student projection sheets and pencils to each student. Students had 5 minutes to complete the student projection sheet presented in Appendix E, modeled after Driscoll (2014). Students wrote their names and the date at the top of their student projection sheets and began by circling all emotions they felt that day while participating in the improvisatory

music circle. After circling all emotions they felt, students identified the two emotions they felt the strongest that day while participating in the improvisatory music circle. I invited students to elaborate on those selections through the open-ended question, "Why did you feel that way?" I provided space at the bottom of student projections sheets for students to write their explanations for those selections. All students provided written explanations, but some students included drawings to support their selections. I present examples of completed student projection sheets in Appendix F.

Voice-Recorded, Small-Group Closing Discussions. During the final 5 minutes of each music class, I invited students to participate in voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions. I distributed university-provided iPad minis to each small discussion group. As the fourth-grade music facilitator, I did not lead or participate in the voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions because I recognized the unequal status between myself, as the adult teacher-researcher, and my students (Tisdall et al., 2009). To prioritize student voices, I removed myself from the room with hope that students would feel empowered to authentically express their perceptions. Students participated in voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions in the presence of Mr. Thompson, the passive participant and friendly outsider, as recommended by Burnard (2002). He remained present during the voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions to ensure students remained on task and to assist, as necessary.

Students discussed in the specific small discussion groups determined during the pilot study. As recommended by Hill and Wiggins (2023), I provided students with the opportunity to explore collaborative inquiry by asking and answering their own questions in their small discussion groups during Music Class 1. While transcribing voice-recorded,

small-group closing discussions from Music Class 1, I determined some groups would benefit from assistance in remaining on task for the 5-minute activity. To provide that assistance, I made note of thought-provoking questions students asked during each voice-recorded, small-group closing discussion. I then displayed those students' questions on the chalkboard as essential questions for optional use in subsequent voice recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions.

Passive Participant-Observer Field Notes. Mr. Thompson completed written field notes for each of the 45-minute music classes. Those written field notes included both objective observations and his subjective interpretations of the observations. I used those field notes to triangulate data and compare my written reflections and observations to his. Serving as a passive participant observer provided Mr. Thompson with more opportunities to explore his role as an observer, rather than an active participant at any point in this study, which provided an outside perspective of the community created in my fourth-grade music class (Spradley, 2016).

Moderate Participant-Observer Memos. Immediately after each 45-minute music class, I either typed or voice recorded personal memos. In those memos I wrote or recorded my objective observations and interpretations of events. I included students' nuanced non-verbal behaviors and my perceptions of students' attention during the music classes, my personal reflections, lists of activities completed in the corresponding music class, and considerations regarding content and the arc of the next music class. Those written or recorded observations also included my perceptions, understandings, and interpretations related to the music classes, students' behaviors, and students' responses, which may be both necessary and inevitable (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Transcribing

Within 24 hours of each music class, I transcribed the data collected during that music class. I transcribed video-recorded data first. That data included the beginning of class, as students entered the room; distribution of university-provided iPad minis; and video-recorded improvisatory music circles. To practice epoch and ensure my planning for each subsequent music class was unbiased and not influenced by students' responses in voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions, I created my learning plan for each subsequent music class after transcribing video-recorded data. After I created each learning plan, I transcribed the voice-recorded data, which included voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions. I wanted to capture as many verbal and non-verbal cues as possible, as suggested by Bailey (2008), to ensure my later interpretations of the data would be appropriate. To do that, I included students' pauses, hesitations, tone, and non-verbal cues in my transcription. See Table 3.2 for a diagram depicting that transcription and learning plan creation process.

Table 3.2 Transcription and Learning Plan Creation Process

Dates	Data Analysis Process(es)
10/9/23 Music Class 1	1. Transcribed video-recorded data 2. Created learning plan for Music Class 2 3. Transcribed voice-recorded data
10/11/23 Music Class 2	1. Transcribed video-recorded data 2. Created learning plan for Music Class 3 3. Transcribed voice-recorded data
10/16/23 Music Class 3	1. Transcribed video-recorded data 2. Created learning plan for Music Class 4

	3. Transcribed voice-recorded data
10/18/23 Music Class 4	1. Transcribed video-recorded data 2. Created learning plan for Music Class 5 3. Transcribed voice-recorded data
10/23/23 Music Class 5	1. Transcribed video-recorded data 2. Created learning plan for Music Class 6[3] 3. Transcribed voice-recorded data

Member-Checking

A core principle of qualitative research is that participants are experts, and the expertise of those participants should be considered and fully utilized (McKim, 2023). To promote the co-constructive nature of improvisatory music circles and to honor my students' expertise regarding their own perceptions, I gave students an active role in the member-checking process. Following, I present that member-checking process.

Member-Checking via Student Personal Transcriptions. After the focus-group discussion in Music Class 6, students began completing personal transcriptions during music classes held from October 30th, 2023, through December 6th, 2023. I introduced those student personal transcriptions as a form of member-checking, adapted from Simpson and Quigley (2016). Students began those student personal transcriptions on October 30th, 2023. One student at a time from each small discussion group used their university-provided iPad mini to transcribe their responses given during the voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing full-class discussions. I provided each student with 10 minutes each music class after Music Class 6 to complete their student personal

[3] Due to a fire drill scheduled during Music Class 6, I did not follow my learning plan created for Music Class 6. I utilized Music Class 6 as a focus-group discussion with member-checking.

transcriptions. I allotted until December 6th, 2023, for students' personal transcriptions, as I had to return the university-provided iPad minis. Over half of the students completed their student personal transcriptions by December 6th, 2023. I then compared students' personal transcriptions to my transcriptions, and revised my transcriptions as necessary, as an additional form of member-checking.

Voice-Recorded, Member-Checking Interviews. Some students did not complete their personal transcriptions within the allotted time due to absences. To ensure that my member-checking process was as fair as possible to all students, I selected those students for voice-recorded, member-checking interviews. I voice-recorded those voice-recorded, member-checking interviews using a university-provided iPad mini. I provided my revised transcripts for those students to read, verbal context for the data from the voice-recorded, small-group opening or closing discussion I selected to member-check, and read selected data aloud to students. During voice-recorded, member-checking interviews, I invited students to explain, edit, or discard their responses. Once those voice-recorded, member-checking interviews were completed, I transcribed them within 24 hours of data collection and began coding all member-checked data.

Coding

I manually coded all member-checked data according to my guiding research questions for this study. During first-round coding, I performed In Vivo Coding and Emotion Coding for transcriptions of voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions. By selecting In Vivo Coding, I coded using words and phrases that highlight and prioritize my students' voices (Saldaña, 2016). By selecting Emotion Coding, I coded for my students' perspectives and emotions related to experiences during improvisatory

music circles; that keeps students' emotions at the forefront of data collection, which may both provide insight into their perceptions regarding improvisatory music circles and enrich the ethnographic accounts students provided (Saldaña, 2016). To code transcriptions of video-recorded improvisatory music circles, I performed In Vivo Coding and Process Coding. By selecting In Vivo Coding, I coded using words and phrases that highlight and prioritize my students' voices (Saldaña, 2016). By selecting Process Coding, I used gerunds to code observable activities and actions to better examine the dynamics of time and potential changes in students' actions and reactions while participating in improvisatory music circles, students' understandings, and students' perceptions throughout the study (Saldaña, 2016).

I performed second-round coding to further organize member-checked data into themes using Pattern Coding. By selecting Pattern Coding, I organized member-checked data into more meaningful collections to analyze (Saldaña, 2016). I then used coded, member-checked data to identify patterns in the data and generate themes (Spradley, 2016). I present my code books in Appendix G.

Credibility

According to Patton (2015), qualitative researchers may add credibility in a variety of ways. To ensure this study is credible and trustworthy, I collected and analyzed data through a process that is "logical, traceable, and documented" (Patton, 2015, p. 685), and I achieved triangulation via multiple data sources. After transcribing video recordings and reviewing students' written reflections, I used member-checking and invited participants to review and adjust their individual statements to ensure accuracy and gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions regarding music improvisation via

improvisatory music circles (Maxwell, 2013). To improve the trustworthiness of this study and ensure my findings are accurate, after each round of coding, I had an expert with elementary music facilitation experience and qualitative research experience, Celina Reed, check my codes and themes (Patton, 2015). At the time of this study, Celina Reed had 2 prior years of experience teaching elementary music as well as 10 years of experience in teaching student-centered private piano, vocal, and early childhood music lessons. At the time of the study, she held an associate degree in education and an associate degree in music from Mercer County Community College, a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Central Arkansas and was engaging in qualitative research while pursuing a master's degree in music education from the University of South Carolina.

Confidentiality

I observed institutional guidelines regarding participant wellbeing, remaining mindful of my role in protecting participants' confidentiality throughout the research process. To protect student-participants' confidentiality, I stored all student data including voice recordings, video recordings, and transcripts in a password-protected, online folder shared with my thesis advisor. I saved any student data that were too large to be uploaded into that password-protected, online folder to an external USB flash drive specifically used for student data collected during this study. I will destroy all data collected for this study one year after data analysis.

I requested that students state their names during voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions and write their names on student projection sheets so data collected was traceable to individual students. To ensure confidentiality and provide

additional ownership to students and continued opportunities for co-construction, I invited students to select their own pseudonyms for use in this document. I further protected students' identities by removing identifiable information from this document, including names and the exact setting location.

Adult participants in this study, including passive participant-observer, Mr. Hunter Thompson, and expert, Celina Reed, approved their inclusion in this document and provided me with their preferred names and titles, preferred pronouns, and qualifications and credentials for inclusion in this document.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Students communicated their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions during data collection that I utilized to examine their perceptions of music improvisation. After coding and thematic analysis of those data, I identified the following six emergent themes.

1. Students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways.
2. Students determined our classroom music community elicited feelings of trust and prompted students to help each other and respond with empathy.
3. Students utilized music improvisation as a tool to express their emotions and focus their energy.
4. Students used a variety of thinking strategies to inform their decision-making during improvisatory music circles.
5. Students reported that a balance between novelty and familiarity in facilitator-selected activities for improvisatory music circles improved their situational interests and engagement.
6. Students realized that improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes.

Following, I provide rich, thick descriptions of each emergent theme.

Theme 1: Students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways.

When beginning data collection, students and I worked together to co-construct a music improvisation definition they could understand and remember. Students and I co-constructed that music improvisation is "on-the-spot making of brand-new music." Students often discussed the definition of music improvisation during our music classes. Students used our co-constructed definition of music improvisation to develop their own definitions. Following, I include two excerpts of students' definitions that are similar to that co-constructed definition of music improvisation.

> Lavender: My definition of improvisation is making your own music and rhythm.
>
> Violet: For me, improvising is like making up my own things and improvising on some instruments I've never done before. Doing new things and improvising and making something up and sometimes repeating things other people do.

As students continued defining music improvisation, students' definitions shifted from echoing the co-constructed definition of music improvisation from music classes to more personal definitions of music improvisation. Following, I present an excerpt from a voice-recorded, small-group opening discussion between two students.

> Rose: What do you feel that improvisation is? What do you like about improvisation?
>
> Ryland: I like that you get to do different things, and you can do different things that people haven't done. Like, we do different instruments and another class won't get to do exactly that.

Many students included our music community in their personal definitions of music improvisation. Following, I present an excerpt from a voice-recorded, small-group closing discussion in which students discussed their feelings after the music class that day.

> Daisy: I am going to be talking about how I felt in class today. So I felt very happy because we sat in a circle and all did music together.
>
> Sara: We get to make new patterns and it's really fun to make new patterns because it sounds really cool when the group of us, the children, are [improvising] together.

Some personal definitions were specific to individual students. Following, I present an excerpt from the focus-group discussion with Rose, a student whose personal definition involved improving.

> Rose: [Improvisation] It's when you improve what you've done.
>
> Ms. C: Tell me more about that. What do you mean by improve what you've done?
>
> Rose: So when you take a pattern that you already made and adding something new. Like three new sounds or something.

During that same focus-group discussion, another student, Thomas, detailed his personal definition of music improvisation.

> Thomas: [talking quickly] Improvisation is kind of like, you get to do your own stuff, and you get to make it all up, and then you get to share it in front of people and they can share the word.

Ms. C: Okay, so let me make sure I got that because you did talk really fast. So, it's making new music?

Thomas: No.

Ms. C: Okay, say it again, then.

Thomas: You get to make up your own stuff and then,

Ms. C: So [your] own stuff.

Thomas: And then you get to tell other people all about it, and then they copyright it. Then they go to jail.

While initially his responses seemed off-topic, I continued probing Thomas with hope that I could better understand his personal definition of music improvisation.

Ms. C: Okay! [Class quiets.] Just to make sure I understand, you're making something that you could eventually share with everybody else. And then they can choose whether or not they copy it or not. And if they do copy it, and you have copyright, then they would go to jail?

Thomas: Yeah, exactly!

Ms. C: Okay, so what you're, so, just making sure. So when people put copyright on things, they normally do it because it's important or they find it valuable.

Thomas: Yeah, 'cause it's valuable to me!

Ms. C: Is that what you would say, that if someone copied your improvisation, that it would be copyrighted?

Thomas: Duh!

Other students agreed with Thomas' personal definition, so I probed further by asking them the definition of *valuable*.

Ms. C: Who can tell me what *valuable* means?

Thomas: [Raises hand, bounces, and shouts] ME!

Ms. C: Okay, Thomas?

Thomas: Valuable means precious.

Ben: Diamonds.

Mei: Like gold.

While students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways, their definitions included the co-constructed definition of music improvisation from music classes, their perceptions of the music community's role in music improvisation, or their personal definitions that were specific to their perceived experience.

Theme 2: Students determined that our classroom music community elicited feelings of trust and prompted students to help each other and respond with empathy.

Many students referenced our classroom music community in their personal definitions of music improvisation and while discussing interpersonal relationships shared by classmates. Many students perceived music improvisation to be a shared classroom music community experience; however, details of those perceptions differed from student to student. Following, I include excerpts from my member-checked transcriptions that I feel best represent those differing students' perceptions.

Rose: What is one of the things you felt today, Ryland?

Ryland: One of the things I felt today was proud. I felt proud because Mei, on the other hand, was making me, Rose, and Lavender go crazy [while dancing].

Lavender?

Lavender: I felt calm because we were all together as a class.

Rose: I felt okay because it was not like, I don't like to improvise in front of everyone, so that, but I didn't feel bad today or sad.

Rose: Second round of questions.

Ryland: I felt great because and why, Mei and Daisy were making me swing my hair!

Lavender: I felt more confident today than other days on today.

Rose: I felt calm because today the music wasn't as crazy, not as much people were crazy as other times. Mei was the only one that was bit more crazy when he started to dance, but yeah!

Sara, Violet, Valerie, and Daisy shared their perceptions regarding music improvisation and our classroom music community in the following excerpt.

Daisy: I felt happy because I got to be with my friends while doing music.

Sara: I felt playful because we got to make really nice sounds and it was fun.

Violet: I felt excited because I like music and making it with my friends.

Valerie: I felt calm because it was relaxing in music [class].

Sara: I felt really great today because no one was mean to me and it was really fun.

Daisy: We're never mean to you!

Daisy: I felt playful and fun because everybody was nice to me and stuff.

Violet: I felt comfortable because the class is not a lot of people to make music in front of or people to laugh at me.

Rose, Ryland, and Lavender discussed the feelings they experienced when talking about music improvisation with their classmates in the following excerpt.

Rose: How do you feel when talking to your classmates about improvisation? Ryland?

Ryland: What I feel when I'm talking to my classmates about improvisation is shy. Lavender?

Lavender: When I'm talking to my classmates about improvisation, I feel, umm, I don't really like talking about improvisation.

Rose: Why?

Lavender: Because, I feel shy when I'm in front of all my friends.

Rose: Why do you feel shy? Sorry, I'm curious.

Lavender: Because, I like keeping my answers to myself. Rose?

Rose: When I share to my classmates about improvisation, I don't really like it because sometimes, like, there might be different answers that people might not like and might make fun of.

I spoke with the students represented in the previous excerpts during voice-recorded, member-checking interviews. While most students still identified with their initial responses, Rose adjusted her response with the following statement.

Ms. C: This one you said, "When you share with your classmates about improvisation you don't really like it because sometimes there might be different answers and that people might make fun of your answers." Do you still feel like that's true?

Rose: Ummm, no.

Ms. C: No? Why?

Rose: Because you trust your friends because they trust you.

Students became aware of our classroom music community and verbalized its impact in their personal definitions and perceptions. Some students, like Rose, recognized that they could trust members of our classroom music community. Other students utilized their awareness as a tool to further establish and strengthen our classroom music community. Following, I present excerpts from multiple voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions. Some students featured in these excerpts consistently referenced their perceived roles, desire to help, and awareness and empathy for their classmates that were new to music improvisation.

> Sara: My definition [of improvisation] is when you get to learn new things and help.

Sara referenced her personal definition of music improvisation in other voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions. In the following excerpt, Sara, Violet, Valerie, and Daisy discussed why they like music improvisation. Both Sara's explanation and Violet's explanation include ideas of sharing and helping their classmates "feel better."

> Sara: I like to improvise because I get to share with everybody.
>
> Violet: I like improvising because I think it's very fun. I can show everyone how I improvise and maybe they'll feel better about it.
>
> Valerie: I like improvising because [pause] because [pause] it's fun to do.
>
> Daisy: I dislike improvising because [laughs and stops recording] Because sometimes it takes away from me doing my music class.
>
> Sara: If somebody is new to improvising, it's going to take us a while, like I mean a while, to practice it over and over again.

In the following excerpt, Sara explained how she felt while participating in an improvisatory music circle. In her explanation, Sara empathized with her classmates' feelings and abilities regarding music improvisation.

> Sara: I feel good because, um, because a big group it sounds really nice. But sometimes if the classmates are new it'll take us a while to start it again.

Most students referred to our classroom music community, in some capacity, and its impact on their experiences and perceptions of music improvisation. Some students became aware of their role in that classroom music community, and they used their music improvisation to further establish and strengthen our classroom music community.

Theme 3: Students utilized music improvisation as a tool to express their emotions and focus their energy.

Students experienced diverse emotions while participating in improvisatory music circles. Those emotions often influenced their perceptions of music improvisation. To account for the variety of emotions students experienced, I included those emotions and the number of times those emotions were selected by students on their student projection sheets in Table 4.1 (Sandelowski, 2001).

Table 4.1 Projection Sheet Responses

Emotions	Number of Times Selected by Students
Excited	26
Frustrated	9
Happy	31
Curious	9
Confused	8
Playful	25

Comfortable	13
Calm	19
Relaxed	11
Sad	8
Weird	10
Cheerful	27
Shy	11
Proud	18
Anxious	8
Normal	22
Self-conscious	8
Energized	22
Great	23
Confident	12

While most students reported experiencing emotions during improvisatory music circles, music improvisation became a tool to aid some students in expressing those emotions. Following, I include an excerpt from the focus-group discussion with a student, Isaiah.

Ms. C: How did it feel when you were actually making the music? Isaiah?

Isaiah: It actually kinda felt good.

Ms. C: Why?

Isaiah: Because I kinda get like most of my emotions out and put it [them] on like the drum, and like, let's say I'm angry, and I get that out on the drum.

Ms. C: Okay, so you said it felt good because you got to get your emotions out on the instrument, and your example was if I felt angry, I could put that on the drum?

Isaiah: Well, not put it on the drum. Like, I would not, I'm not gonna hit it hard, but I'm just, you know, it just makes it funner for me. It makes me, like, feel better.

Other students reported how facilitator-selected activities and cues influenced their emotions. Following, I present an excerpt from the focus-group discussion with another student, Thomas, who reported feeling energetic while participating in improvisatory music circles regarding a specific activity. He focused that energy into his music improvisation.

Ms. C: Thomas, how did it feel when you improvised?

Thomas: Smart!

Ms. C: You felt smart? Why?

Thomas: Well, no, not always smart [pause] energetic!

Ms. C: Energetic, why?

Thomas: Well, whenever you do small, medium, humongous [shows sculpting facilitation cues] I get to spread my energy out so that way, when I get home, I'm not a big pain in the butt with my parents.

While most students experienced emotions while participating in improvisatory music circles, and those emotions often influenced their perceptions of music improvisation, some students utilized their music improvisations as tools to express their emotions while participating in improvisatory music circles. Other students took time

while participating in improvisatory music circles to consider and incorporate their energy in their music improvisation.

Theme 4: Students used a variety of thinking strategies to inform their decision-making during improvisatory music circles.

Students participating in improvisatory music circles made a variety of independent decisions in their music improvisations. For each student, the way they made those independent decisions differed. For some students, decisions made while crafting their music improvisations were guided by the facilitator of the improvisatory music circle. Other students engaged in thoughtful, personal processes to help them make decisions while participating in improvisatory music circles. Following, I include excerpts from voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions and the focus-group discussion in which students detailed their thinking strategies and decision-making.

Luke: When do we improvise?

Ben: We improvise when we think about something and it's just random.

Daisy: Why do we do improvisation? It's because, um, it helps us think about what we can do in substitute of something we can't do.

Sara, Violet, Valerie, and Daisy discussed their thinking strategies and decision-making in the following excerpt.

Daisy: How do you make [pauses] choices while improvising? Improvisation? You do fun things while doing other things while making different, uh–

Violet: My choices for improvising are definitely going to be how I use the instruments and how I want to use the instruments and what instruments.

Sara: I improvise by doing my jobs and to help others.

In the following excerpt, Mark asked Ben how he made choices while participating in improvisatory music circles.

Mark: How do you make choices while improvising?

Ben: You make choices while improvising by going with the flow.

Rose, Ryland, and Lavender each detailed their thinking strategies and decision-making in the following excerpt.

Rose: How do you make choices while improvising? Ryland?

Ryland: I make choices while improvising, well, I make choices is when I'm voting for something with different people. So whoever has the most votes gets to do that thing instead of the other person and whatever they wanted to do.

Lavender: I make choices in improvising by making my own rhythms. Rose?

Rose: I make choices of when to improvise and change to a different thing when the teacher tells me to because if not, I stay with the same rhythm.

In the following excerpt Violet, Valerie, and Daisy mentioned their thinking strategies and decision-making while discussing their feelings.

Valerie: How do you feel while improvising with your classmates? I feel relaxed and calm.

Violet: I feel good. I like doing it, but sometimes I can't think of it, so it's like last-minute choices.

Daisy: What did I dislike about improvisation is that sometimes, when I'm doing improvisation, it takes away from my music class because we have to think of something else to do.

Violet: So, how I dislike improvising is because sometimes I can't think of things and like, improvising [pauses over group talking] and it's my turn to play something I have to think of it while I show it.

In the following excerpt, Mei detailed his thinking strategies and decision-making. I member-checked that response for accuracy.

Mei: Because when, for example, um, there's this radio station, and then I come up with a song and I write the lyrics down, and I make some music, and I have to think of what words I gotta say, if it's gonna rhyme, does it have to rhyme? Does it have to make sense? Kinda.

Ms. C: So Mei, what you're getting at, just to make sure I understand. You're saying that it [improvisation] made you think about what comes next? You had to make choices while you were improvising, like if it would rhyme or if it wouldn't rhyme, and you'd do all that while improvising, too? Is that what you're saying?

Mei: Yes.

Students used individual thinking strategies to help them make decisions while participating in improvisatory music circles. For some students, crafting their music improvisations during improvisatory music circles was random. For other students, their music improvisations were flexible, yielding to the wants of the classroom music community. Some students reported cycles of listening, planning, and performing that involved conscious, last-minute decisions to help their music improvisations "make sense" with the rest of the classroom music community's music improvisations.

Theme 5: Students reported that a balance between novelty and familiarity in facilitator-selected activities for improvisatory music circles improved their situational interests and engagement.

Although most students actively participated in improvisatory music circles, those students often included their genuine interests in facilitator-selected activities when writing and discussing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. During Music Class 1, a student, Mark, reported feeling "comfortable" and "calm" on his student projection sheet. As data collection continued, he included more of his opinions regarding facilitator-selected activities. During Music Class 2, Mark reported feeling "bored" and "normal" on his second student projection sheet.

> Mark: Because it's what we just did last week, and it got boring. But I felt normal because it's another normal music class.

During Music Class 3, I introduced the mystery bucket. That introduction evoked different emotions from Mark, who reported feeling "happy" and "cheerful" on his third student projection sheet.

> Mark: I felt better because we actually did something [and] we didn't do that last time. I also was excited because I wanted to see what I got out of the bucket. I wish we could do that again.

In Music Class 4, Mark reported feeling "excited," "happy," "comfortable," "relaxed," "cheerful," "proud," "energized," "great," and "confident" on his fourth student projection sheet.

> Mark: Because music class was actually was fun, even though we did the funnest thing ever mystery bucket!

In Music Class 5, Mark reported feeling “relaxed,” “weird,” “normal,” and “energized” on his fifth student projection sheet.

Mark: Because we did the same thing as last time, but I like what we did.

Other students reported feeling similar emotions to Mark. For example, Thomas reported the following statement on his student projection sheet for Music Class 2.

Thomas: I was annoyed because I didn’t like music today. It was boring, confusing, and loud, and I don’t like when it is loud.

Violet, in contrast, reported feeling “excited,” “happy,” “playful,” “cheerful,” “proud,” and “normal” on her student projection sheet for Music Class 3 for similar reasons to Mark.

Violet: I felt happy because I like picking the instruments out of the bucket. I felt excited because I like making music with my friends.

Other students reported their opinions of facilitator-selected activities in voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions. Following, I present excerpts from those voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions in which students shared their opinions of facilitator-selected activities.

Mei: How do you feel while improvising with your classmates?

Thomas: I feel boring when I do it.

Mario: [hesitantly] I think I feel fine when I do that?

Isaiah: Well, how I feel about talking about improvisation…

Thomas: [indistinguishable yelling]

Isaiah: While talking to my classmates [laughs] I kind of don’t like it and I like it at the same time. I like that.

Thomas: [singing] I said I like it like that!

Isaiah: They figure out how I'm feeling, and then like, they do it over, like y'all tell us to do some new stuff, and I like the way y'all make us do new stuff. Like, I just don't like doing the same thing.

Mei: What was different in today's music class? We got to copy people after the drum, and we got to copy like the person sitting in the middle. The groups, they sit in the middle and they play the instrument they get, and there's like this little green thing and whenever they get that they get a drum, and I liked that that was different and it made me want to join more.

I invited students to share their thoughts, feelings, understandings, and perceptions throughout data collection. In many cases, students reported thoughts, feelings, understandings, and perceptions that were broad and applicable to music improvisation and improvisatory music circles, in general. Some students, however, reported thoughts, feelings, understandings, and perceptions that were influenced by facilitator-selected activities. While all students participated in the improvisatory music circles, many students reported feeling more engaged when the facilitator-selected activities included a balance between familiar activities and novel activities, such as the mystery bucket. The mystery bucket, for many students, became one of the more enjoyable components of facilitator-selected activities.

Theme 6: Students realized that improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes.

Skills, such as improvisation, that may be used in, but are not limited to, music may be referred to as extramusical skills. In voice-recorded, small-group opening and

closing discussions, students often discussed improvisation as an extramusical skill. Following, I present an excerpt from a voice-recorded, small group opening discussion that took place during Music Class 2.

Rose: Do you think it's possible to do improvisation in anything else? Yes or no?

Lavender: I think yes because you can make your own patterns when improvising.

Ryland: I think improvisation can be used in something else. Like, it can be used in math, in any subject in school, or anything else.

Rose: I also think that you can do it [improvisation] in anything else because improvisation starts with an "im" like improve and it makes me want to improve.

I posed that same question to students during the focus-group discussion. Following, I present two excerpts from that focus-group discussion.

Ms. C: Okay, Luke?

Luke: I improvise because I need more education so I won't be on the street when I grow up.

Ms. C: [Pauses] Okay, so you said, you're saying improvisation is important for your education?

Class: [Verbal approval] [head nodding].

Ms. C: Okay, why do you say that?

Luke: Um, because it's special enough that we have to learn it in music class.

Ms. C: Okay, and you're saying that it's special enough to learn in music class and that music class is important to your education?

Luke: No.

Ms. C: So it's not just music? You're saying that improvisation, the skill, is important to your education?

Luke: [Nods] Because you learn a lot and it makes your brain grow, and I need my brain to grow in order to be a great person.

Thomas: [Gasps] We're improvisation [improvising] right now!

Ms. C: Thomas? Say that again, Thomas.

Thomas: We're doing it [improvisation] right now.

Ms. C: How?

Thomas: By answering these questions you're asking.

Ms. C: Yeah! Were you able to think about these questions and your answers before you came into the room?

Luke: [Shakes head no] That's why we're improvising!

During voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions and the focus-group discussion, students realized that, although they were participating in music improvisation, improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes. Some students considered improvisation useful in other classes at school and considered it important to their education. Those students identified improvisation both as a skill that helped their learning and a skill that helped their "brain[s] grow…in order to be a great person." Another student led the class to the realization that aspects of their daily conversations, such as answering questions, could be considered improvisation. Those students determined through their daily interactions they may actually improvise every day, but especially in music classes during this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

Purpose and Guiding Research Questions

To better understand potential successes and challenges improvisatory music circles present in music facilitating and learning from the student perspective, the purpose of this research was to examine my elementary students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles. Following are the guiding research questions for this study. Regarding 30-minute improvisatory music circles:

1. How do fourth-grade students
    a. define music improvisation,
    b. respond to facilitator-selected improvisatory music activities during improvisatory music circles, and
    c. make decisions while participating in improvisatory music circles?
2. How did those students' perceptions change throughout data collection?

Method

I selected my fourth-grade student participants using purposeful, intensity sampling. During this study, those fourth-grade students attended a small, private Catholic elementary school in Columbia, South Carolina. I collected all data in that small, private Catholic elementary school's music room.

Data collection methods included:

- my learning plans,
- voice-recorded, small-group opening discussions,
- video-recorded improvisatory music circles,
- student projection sheets,
- voice-recorded, small-group closing discussions,
- passive participant observer field notes, and
- moderate participant observer memos.

I triangulated a variety of data sources to promote credibility and trustworthiness. I transcribed all data within 24 hours of collection, used a variety of strategies to member-check those transcriptions, and coded member-checked transcriptions to organize data into themes.

Findings

During this study, students communicated their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that I utilized to examine their perceptions of music improvisation. After coding and thematic analysis of those data, I identified the following six emergent themes:

1. Students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways.
2. Students determined our classroom music community elicited feelings of trust and prompted students to help each other and respond with empathy.
3. Students utilized music improvisation as a tool to express their emotions and focus their energy.

4. Students used a variety of thinking strategies to inform their decision-making during improvisatory music circles.
5. Students reported that a balance between novelty and familiarity in facilitator-selected activities for improvisatory music circles improved their situational interests and engagement.
6. Students realized that improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes.

Through my thematic analysis of those findings, I gained insight regarding my guiding research questions.

Discussion and Implications

I do not claim generalizability of my findings; however, my findings may be transferable to similar populations and aid in understanding how elementary students perceive music improvisation. I identified six emergent themes through coding and thematic analysis of those students' verbal and written reflections, which yield professional, pedagogical, and methodological implications that support further incorporation of improvisatory music circles in elementary general music classes. Following, I discuss and present the implications of this study.

Professional Discussion and Implications

Balancing Subjectivity and Objectivity. By balancing my subjectivity and objectivity, I effectively scaffolded students' music improvisations while still empowering students' reporting of authentic perceptions. As a music facilitator and researcher, I remained reflexive by continuously acknowledging my role in the research process. Aware that my prior experiences, assumptions, and personal beliefs potentially

affected the research process and trustworthiness of my findings, I worked diligently to build trustworthiness through triangulation of data sources and credibility by consulting experts in music education and qualitative research. While practicing reflexivity made me cognizant of potential weaknesses of this study and how to address them, I also frequently considered the balance between my subjectivity and objectivity.

According to Patton (2015), my subjectivity and informal assessment of students' music improvisations was inevitable. Through my informal assessment, I created learning plans that intentionally scaffolded students' music improvisations to promote creativity and imagination; however, I remained as objective as possible to ensure authenticity of students' reported perceptions. By balancing my subjectivity and objectivity in my informal assessment of students' music improvisations, I promoted students' independence during improvisatory music circles. As students freely improvised during improvisatory music circles, they began independently structuring and planning their music improvisations. In small discussion groups, students collaborated using verbal and nonverbal communication. That collaboration included determining starting and ending points, taking turns, soloing and accompanying, and including expressive elements. Like Wall (2018), I observed that those small discussion groups made collaborative music-making decisions independent from the music facilitator. By balancing my subjectivity and objectivity, I provided a space for students to independently explore, make collaborative decisions, and communicate while making music.

Affect and Effect. I engaged in a cycle of planning, implementing, and analyzing to maintain awareness of my subjectivity and objectivity. Through that cycle, I observed my personal traits that allowed me to be both an affective and effective music facilitator.

To be affective, I remained mindful of ways I impacted students' moods, emotions, and engagement by co-constructing a classroom music community with my students. Our co-constructed classroom music community celebrated students' creativity and empowered them to create and share their authentic perceptions. To be effective, I intentionally scaffolded improvisatory music circles to maintain students' situational interests and expand students' music improvisational language.

Pedagogical Discussion and Implications

To better understand those students' perceptions of music improvisation, I determined the reflection opportunities I provided students were equally as beneficial as participation in improvisatory music circles. Following, I discuss the pedagogical implications of this study.

Exploring Meaning-Making. Throughout data collection, students defined music improvisation in a variety of ways. Students initially defined music improvisation by referencing our co-constructed definition. As data collection continued, students began sharing personal definitions of music improvisation. Students shared definitions that demonstrated both understanding and personal meaning-making regarding music improvisation. Wright (2007) describes children's meaning-making as a complex, multi-faceted experience, in which my students likely considered their thoughts, physical and environmental feedback, and emotions. I believe the shift in students' definitions, from co-constructed to personal, supports my students' meaning-making in data collection procedures, such as voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions; student projection sheets; the focus-group discussion; and voice-recorded, member-checking interviews.

Social-Emotional Benefits. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (CASEL, n.d.). Following, I present the social-emotional benefits I observed during this study.

Students included our classroom music community in their meaning-making and determined that our community elicited feelings of trust and prompted students to help each other and respond with empathy. Most students commented on the attitudes and actions of our classroom music community; and for many students, our classroom music community affected their enjoyment and perceptions. Some students began exhibiting prosocial skills, such as empathy, as those students specified their role in our classroom music community as someone who helped others learn and participate in music improvisation. According to Spiro, Schofield, and Himberg (2013), empathy may be linked to the process of entrainment, which students experienced during improvisatory music circles. Entrainment involves synchronization. When participating in improvisatory music circles during this study, students experienced a variety of opportunities to synchronize with members of our classroom music community during small and large ensembles and within a variety of tonalities, meters, and tempos. By incorporating a variety of music constraints, groupings, and task difficulties, students experienced synchrony and entrainment in a variety of contexts, which may explain the emergence of empathy among some students.

I also observed a variety of social-emotional benefits stemming from participation in improvisatory music circles. Faulkner (2023); MacDonald and Wilson (2014); Mason, Sonke, and Lee (2021); Perkins, Ascenso, Atkins, Fancourt, and Williamon (2016); Snow and D'Amico (2010); Vougioukalou, Dow, Bradshaw, and Pallant (2019); Willemin, Litchke, Liu, and Ekins (2018); and Willox, Heble, Jackson, Walker, and Waterman (2011) utilized improvisatory music circles as therapeutic intervention. Those researchers determined that participation in improvisatory music circles promotes community and social-connectedness, yields physical and mental health benefits, and aids in development of social-emotional literacy. While I did not intend to utilize improvisatory music circles for therapeutic intervention, many students reported benefits regarding community and social-connectedness that I determined indicated development of social-emotional literacy.

I determined that improvisatory music circles may be utilized as an approach for Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Music educators and music facilitators may utilize SEL as universal intervention to help all students in school settings (Edgar, 2020). The social and communal aspects of improvisatory music circles make music improvisation accessible as universal intervention that may yield social-emotional benefits and development in students' social-emotional literacy.

The trust established in our classroom music community, and some students' prosocial behaviors, prompted other students' utilizing music improvisation as a tool to express their emotions and focus their energy. My students demonstrated social-emotional literacy in their emotional communications during voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions, student projection sheets, the focus-group discussion,

and voice-recorded member-checking interviews. Improvisatory music circles also allow students to model new relationship dynamics; increase students' engagement and curiosity; and lead to achievements regarding personal insight, social cooperation, and equity (Willox et al., 2011); however, those successes of improvisatory music circles, as therapeutic intervention or as music education, may largely be attributed to the music facilitator's social-emotional literacy (Vougioukalou et al., 2019).

The music facilitator's social-emotional literacy, and the activities they select, both play key roles in establishing the flow and attitude of the improvisatory music circle. The activities I selected for improvisatory music circles during this study stimulated touch and movement senses, which are central to learning and focus and provide a variety of physical and emotional benefits (Faulkner, 2023). In the activities I selected, students modeled rhythm patterns for others to imitate, imitated each other, created complimentary patterns, created a groove using repeated patterns, accompanied each other, and used their emotions and perceptions to reflect. According to MacDonald and Wilson (2014), those activities resemble activities utilized for therapeutic intervention via music improvisation, which yield a variety of social and emotional benefits that improved my students' social-emotional literacy. The music-making environment I established as music facilitator and the scaffolding of those activities support the social-emotional benefits students reported.

Situational Interest and Scaffolding. Throughout this study, I considered various activities to engage my students in improvisatory music circles. Those students reported that a balance between novelty and familiarity in facilitator-selected activities for improvisatory music circles improved their situational interests and engagement.

Situational interest refers to temporary interest emerging from characteristics of the immediate learning environment (Roberts, 2017). In music classes, students' situational interests may be impacted by novel learning experiences, physical engagement, relationships between novel and familiar materials, and awareness of performers. To examine students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles, I maintained their situational interests and engagement. To do so, I invited students to assume active roles in discussing and performing, and I often selected novel activities. Those novel, facilitator-selected activities included small changes to familiar activities as well as completely new activities. Students primarily identified completely new activities as novel. Students rarely identified small changes-such as tempo, meter, and tonality-to familiar activities as new or novel. When creating learning plans with students' situational interests and engagement in mind, I balanced novelty and familiarity but found students engaged more during facilitator-selected activities with higher degrees of novelty.

During this study, I provided students opportunities to explore music improvisation. Students explored and created music during improvisatory music circles. Through that exploration and creation, students realized that improvisation, as an extramusical skill, may be used outside of music classes. My learning plans based on suggestions from Knysh (2013) and Knysh and Leathley (2015) and my interpretation of students' music improvisation development (Kratus, 1991), prompted students to make connections and understand that improvisation is an extramusical skill.

In creating my learning plans, I considered Knysh's (2013) arc and Knysh and Leathley's (2015) improvisatory music activities. I selected those improvisatory music

activities based on my interpretation of my students' music improvisation abilities (Kratus, 1991). I determined my students' music improvisation abilities largely depended on selected instruments. For example, some students operated in product-oriented improvisation when playing a drum but operated in exploration when singing. To expand students' music improvisational language, regardless of instrument, I included improvisatory music activities that challenged their music creativity.

Psychological scientists define *creativity* as the generation of ideas or products that are both original and valuable (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.). Creativity relies on imagination. Students used their imaginations, the conscious representation of what is not immediately present to the senses, to generate ideas and products: their music improvisations (Coulson & Burke, 2013; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Norris, 2010; Webster, 1990; Whitcomb, 2013). Bakhurst (2024) synthesized Ilyenkov and Vygotsky's understandings of imagination as something essential to human life and development. We engage our imaginations when we make judgments about what to think and do, when we create, and when we grasp wholes in relation to parts. Imagination cannot be taught but may be scaffolded and celebrated. During this study, I scaffolded and celebrated my students' imagination and music improvisations. During improvisatory music circles, students explored their imaginations. I intentionally scaffolded my learning plans to encourage that exploration, allowing students to understand reality and consider more than their immediate perceptions. Through that intentionally scaffolded exploration, students realized their improvisations were transferable outside of music classes and improvisatory music circles.

Methodological Discussion and Implications

Because of the co-constructed nature of this study, I worked diligently to provide my students active roles in data collection and data analysis. Providing those students with active roles made data collection and data analysis more meaningful for those students.

Data Collection. During data collection, students led voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions; facilitated during video-recorded improvisatory music circles; created their small-group music improvisations; and reflected using student projection sheets. Students' voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions and student projection sheets were equally as beneficial as students' experiences while participating in improvisatory music circles in examining students' perceptions.

Data Analysis. During data analysis, students completed their own personal transcriptions as a form of member-checking. Completing those personal transcriptions became a time-consuming process. Each student listened to their voice-recorded, small-group opening and closing discussions on university-provided iPad minis and transcribed everything they said. Although time-consuming, completing those personal transcriptions provided students with context regarding the study and their responses, resulting in more meaningful and ethical member-checking with young children.

Intersections Between Professional, Pedagogical, and Methodological Discussion and Implications

Although I categorized implications of this study into professional, pedagogical, and methodological implications, those categories of implications intersect. I identified those intersections and present them in Figure 5.1.

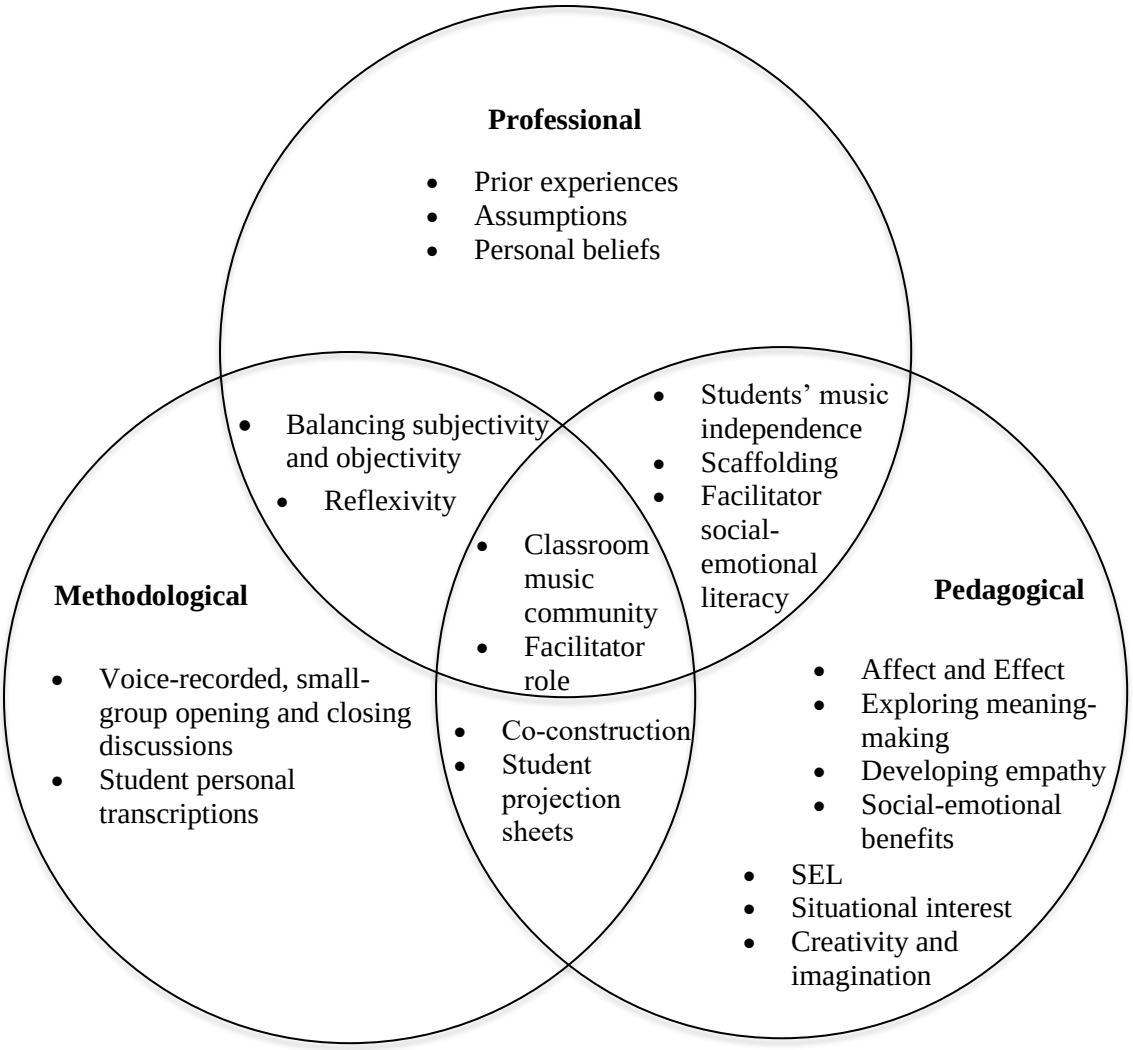

Figure 5.1 Intersections Between Professional, Pedagogical, and Methodological Implications

Professional and Pedagogical. I identified guiding students to develop music independence, scaffolding, and the facilitator's social-emotional literacy as both personal and pedagogical implications. As I guided students to develop music independence, I often considered my prior experiences, assumptions, and personal beliefs regarding those students to make pedagogical choices, such as selecting improvisatory music activities and music constraints. I often considered my scaffolding when selecting improvisatory music activities and music constraints. While scaffolding may be largely dependent on

the music facilitator's prior experiences, assumptions, and personal beliefs regarding their students, the scaffolding I presented in this study may have pedagogical implications for music facilitators incorporating music improvisation and improvisatory music circles. My social-emotional literacy, as the music facilitator, proved necessary in facilitating improvisatory music circles that promoted SEL. Music facilitators must be willing to engage students' social-emotional literacy, and consider their own social-emotional literacy, to promote SEL and other social-emotional benefits.

Pedagogical and Methodological. I invited students to co-construct a classroom music community, data collection processes, and data analysis procedures. Students accepted that invitation and helped me develop meaningful data collection processes and data analysis procedures. Me incorporating those data collection processes and data analysis procedures certainly impacted my method, however, our co-construction continues to impact my classroom management. Students' projection sheet responses prompted me to incorporate student projection sheets into my daily classroom management protocol to better understand students' choices and behaviors. I present my adapted student projection sheet for classroom management in Appendix H.

Professional and Methodological. I balanced my subjectivity and objectivity and practiced reflexivity to improve the trustworthiness and credibility of my study, as the researcher. Through my planning, implementing, and analyzing process, I determined that balancing my subjectivity and objectivity and practicing reflexivity also became a professional choice, as the music facilitator. Being aware of my prior experiences, assumptions, and personal beliefs supported my trustworthiness and credibility as a researcher, but it continues to strengthen my trustworthiness and credibility with my

students. As the music facilitator, I am now more conscious of my role in the classroom and how my choices may support or hinder students' music improvisation and music independence.

Professional, Pedagogical, and Methodological. I present the intersection of professional, pedagogical, and methodological implications to provide a visual representation of the interconnectedness of an effective music facilitator and classroom music community. I attribute many of the findings and consequent implications to the interconnectedness of that classroom music community and my role as music facilitator in shaping music experiences for that classroom music community.

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

My recommendations for future inquiry include identifying effective improvisatory music circle models for this population, exploring other approaches to music improvisation, considering music facilitator affect and effect, and expanding this research to include more populations. Following, I outline each recommendation.

Improvisatory Music Circle Models

I primarily utilized Knysh's (2013) arc as a model to create my learning plans for this study. While that model proved effective for my selected population, other improvisatory music circle models and programs may be effective, as well. Identifying those effective improvisatory music circle models, utilizing them in an elementary general music classroom setting, and considering students' perceptions may provide further insight regarding the most effective way to incorporate improvisatory music circles in elementary general music classes.

Other Approaches to Music Improvisation

Music educators and music facilitators may approach music improvisation without the use of improvisatory music circles. While I examined my fourth-grade music students' perceptions of music improvisation via improvisatory music circles, other approaches may influence students' perceptions of music improvisation. Identifying and utilizing other structured, semi-structured, and free approaches to music improvisation may provide further insight regarding students' perceptions of music improvisation.

Music Facilitator Affect and Effect

As indicated by my thematic analysis of data presented in this study and the supporting literature, the music facilitator plays a key role in the success of an improvisatory music circle. To fully understand what makes a music facilitator affective and effective, researchers may select to focus on a music facilitator's affect and effect.

More Populations

While I do not claim generalizability of the findings presented in this study, they may be used to inform and shape the focus of future ethnographic studies. I recommend researchers conduct similar ethnographic studies with other populations. A variety of elementary grades may serve as participants, but researchers may also consider expanding beyond the elementary general music classroom.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DECLARATION of NOT RESEARCH

Ashley Cobb
126 Dupont Blvd
Lugoff, SC 29078

Re: **Pro00131772**

Dear Ashley Cobb:

This is to certify that research study entitled ***Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study*** was reviewed on **9/5/2023** by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
Director

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
School of Music

12 September 2023

Dear Mrs. Aubrey Wall:

As a MME candidate at the University of South Carolina I am conducting an ethnographic research project, *Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study.* This ethnographic study has been approved by the UofSC Internal Review Board, IRB number Pro00131772. The purpose of this ethnographic research study is to examine fourth-grade students' perceptions regarding improvisatory music circles. For this study, I will use data gathered from the fourth-grade music classes that I teach at St. Peter's Catholic Elementary School to examine the following guiding research questions: 1. What are students' thoughts and feelings? 2. What aspects did students enjoy? 3. What would students change about their experiences? 4. What are student-reported benefits and takeaways? I will collect data during six music class periods for fourth-grade during October, 2023. To gather data I will use qualitative ethnographic strategies of video recorded music classes and full-class discussions, observation, field notes, student journaling, and review of student-created music to examine fourth-grade students' perceptions of music improvisation during regularly scheduled music classes. I will transcribe and analyze data qualitatively. All data will be transcribed, 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 research presentations.
Findings from this study will allow me to gain understanding of students' perceptions regarding improvisation through improvisatory music circles, and I will share my findings with you.

Should you have any questions about this research, please contact me at 803-729-6289, or Dr. Wendy Valerio, my faculty research advisor wvalerio@mozart.sc.edu. If you agree for me to conduct this ethnographic research project at your school, please complete the following Informed Consent Agreement and return it to me at your earliest convenience. After receiving your approval, I will distribute the attached letter of informed consent and release form to parents/guardians of St. Peter's fourth-grade students.

Sincerely,

Ashley Cobb
126 Dupont Blvd.
Lugoff, SC 29078
aecobb@email.sc.edu

Dr. Wendy Valerio, MME Thesis Advisor
Professor of Music
USC School of Music - 813 Assembly
Columbia, SC 29208
wvalerio@mozart.sc.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
School of Music

Please complete and return this attached form to aecobb@email.sc.edu at your earliest convenience.

Informed Consent Agreement

I grant permission for Ashley Cobb to collect data for Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study during Fall 2023 fourth-grade music classes at St. Peter's Catholic School. I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the information outlined in the accompanying letter of informed consent.

Today's Date	Principal's Printed Name
Signature of Principal	
Principal's Phone	Principal's Email
P.O. Box	Street
City	State Zip Code

APPENDIX C

PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT

18 September 2023

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Presently, I am your child's music teacher at St. Peter's Catholic School for fourth grade, and I am a graduate student working on my master's in music education at the University of South Carolina. As a part of our St. Peter's music education curriculum, students participate in improvisatory music circles. I ask your permission to videotape our classes and full-class discussions during October to collect data for my master's thesis ethnographic research project, *Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study.* This research will provide information that allows me to examine students' perceptions of improvisation through improvisatory music circles.

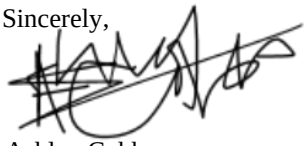
The purpose of this ethnographic research study is to examine fourth-grade students' perceptions regarding improvisatory music circles. For this study, I will use data gathered from the fourth-grade music classes that I teach at St. Peter's Catholic Elementary School to examine the following guiding research questions: 1. What are students' thoughts and feelings? 2. What aspects did students enjoy? 3. What would students change about their experiences? 4. What are student-reported benefits and takeaways? I will collect data during six music class periods for fourth-grade during October, 2023. To gather data I will use qualitative ethnographic strategies of video recorded music classes and full-class discussions, observation, field notes, student journaling, and review of student-created music to examine fourth-grade students' perceptions of music improvisation during regularly scheduled music classes. I will transcribe and analyze data qualitatively. All data will be transcribed, 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 research presentations.

As previously stated, improvisatory music circles are a part of our established curriculum. The use of your child's journaling and videotaped improvisation will provide data that will allow me to examine how fourth-grade students understand and perceive music improvisation through improvisatory music circles. The use of any 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 any time without prejudice. If you do not wish your child 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 my advisor or me at the email addresses provided below. I had the opportunity to describe my project and answer all questions for your student during music class. Recognizing that students are equal and valued

members of our music learning community, I would appreciate the signature of your child for complete informed consent.

If you and your child agree for data provided by your child during the described music classes to be used for this study, please complete the following page and return it to St. Peter's by Friday, September 22, 2023. Thank you for considering supporting this project!

Sincerely,



Ashley Cobb
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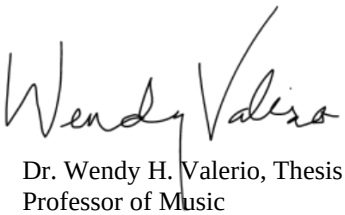


Dr. Wendy H. Valerio, Thesis Advisor
Professor of Music
USC School of Music - 813 Assembly
Columbia, SC 29208
wvalerio@mozart.sc.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina
School of Music

Parent/Guardian Release Form on Behalf of Child

I have read and understand the letter of informed consent regarding Ashley Cobb's ethnographic research study, *Fourth-Grade Music Students' Perceptions of Music Improvisation: An Ethnographic Case Study*.

Please check the appropriate statement.

_____ I grant permission for data provided by my child to be used for this study.

_____ I do not grant permission for data provided by my child to be used for this study.

_____
Child's Name

_____
Signature of Child

_____
Today's Date

_____
Parent/Guardian's Printed Name

_____
Signature of Parent/Guardian

_____
Parent/Guardian Email Address

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE LEARNING PLAN

Grade	Date	Learning Targets	Activities	Meter	Tonality	Executive Music Skills	Artistic Processes & Indicators
4th	10/9	Learning Target 1 I can improvise music. Learning Target 2 I can create ostinati. Learning Target 3 I can discuss my understanding(s) of music improvisation.	1. Opening full-class discussion Instructions: Student participants will reconstruct and reflect on prior experiences with music improvisation and improvisatory music circles.	n/a	n/a		Benchmark GM.R NL.7 I can use my words to talk about music.
			2. Warm-up: Layering the Groove Instructions: Facilitator models an ostinato with space and invites students to join. When students join, they add one new sound. Stop cut and starting the groove. Scaffold into all students adding ostinati.	Duple	n/a	CFM, watching, listening, steady beat, establish-ing commun-ity, creating ostinati, explorat-ion and process-oriented improv	Indicator GM.CR NH.2.2 I can improvise rhythm patterns, songs or chants to create a musical idea. Indicator GM.P NL.4.2 I can play pitched and unpitched instruments.

			3. Rhythmic: Title: 1-2 Back to the Groove and Stop Cut (Knysh) Instructions: Facilitator will model starting and stopping the groove. Students will perform music improvisation. After facilitator cues are demonstrated, students may facilitate the improvisatory music circle.	Student Created (SC)	SC	CFM, watching, listening, steady beat, creating, improvisation	Indicator GM.P NL.4.3 I can follow the teacher when I use classroom instruments. Indicator GM.CR NH.2.2 I can improvise rhythm patterns, songs or chants to create a musical idea.

			4. Free improvisation: Instructions: Facilitator and students improvise freely, without constraints or expectations. Facilitator and students take turns facilitating. Full class will switch instruments	SC	SC	CFM, watching, listening, steady beat, creating, improvisation, audiation	Indicator GM.CR NH.2.2 I can improvise rhythm patterns, songs or chants to create a musical idea.

			5. Rhythmic: Title: Rumble, Rumble Firecracker (Kynsh) Instructions: Facilitator will cue students to rumble. Rumbling is when students play their drums as quickly as possible. Facilitator demonstrates sculpting dynamics. After demonstrating, the facilitator lowers dynamic to piano. Students rumble at piano. Facilitator points to students to make one loud sound (firecracker). Students play rumble firecracker. Facilitator invites students to facilitate the game.	n/a	n/a	CFM, watching, listening, dynamics	Indicator GM.P NL.4.3 I can follow the teacher when I use classroom instruments.

			6. Tonal: Title: Sing What You Play Instructions: 1-2 Back to the Groove. Facilitator starts the groove again. Students improvise using percussion instruments and voices. Students may facilitate using cues learned in class. Facilitator invites students to sing what they play. Stop Cut. End of circle.	SC	SC	CFM, watching, listening, steady beat, creating, improvisation	Indicator GM.PNL.4.3 I can follow the teacher when I use classroom instruments. Indicator GM.CRNH.2.2 I can improvise rhythm patterns, songs or chants to create a musical idea.

			7. Closing Full-Class Discussion Instructions: Students will answer questions provided on an emotion chart. Once finished, students may flip the paper over and write/draw/journal any other thoughts they had (5 mins). Students will have a closing full-class discussion without Ms. Cobb in room.	n/a	n/a		Benchmark GM.R NL.7 I can use my words to talk about music.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE PROJECTION SHEET

Name_____ Date_____

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

Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

    1. _____

    2. _____

    Why did you feel that way?

APPENDIX F

COMPLETED STUDENT PROJECTION SHEETS

Name [redacted] Date 10-23-23

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

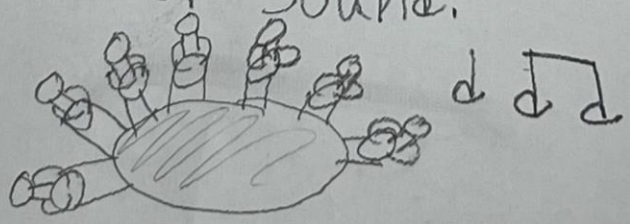
Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

1. Energized
2. Great

Why did you feel that way?

Because we made a lot of sound.



Name [redacted] Date 10/23/23

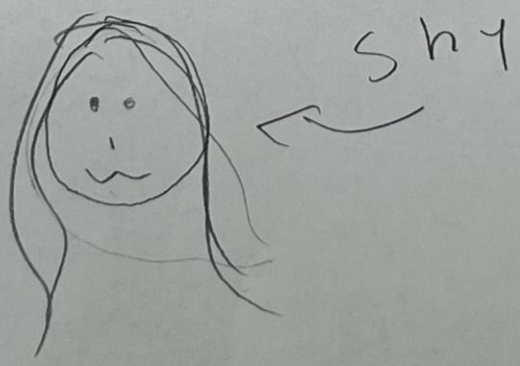
1. Circle all emotions that you felt while improvising today.

Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

1. Shy
2. calm

Why did you feel that way?



Name [redacted] Date 10/9/2023

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

Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

1. Great
2. Playful

Why did you feel that way?

I like useing the instements.

I like making music with my freinds.

Name [redacted] Date_____

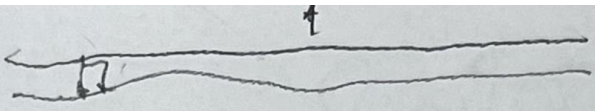
1. Circle all emotions that you felt while improvising today.

Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

1. Happy
2. Excited

Why did you feel that way?

1 

My way or the Highway

2 almost the end the day

Name [redacted] Date 10-16

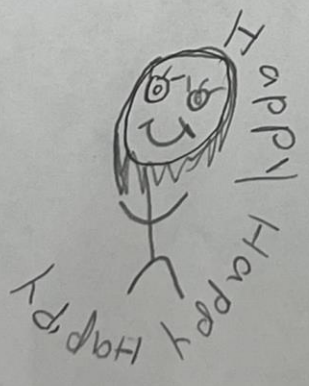
1. Circle all emotions that you felt while improvising today.

Excited	Frustrated	Happy	Curious
Confused	Playful	Comfortable	Calm
Relaxed	Sad	Weird	Cheerful
Shy	Proud	Anxious	Normal
Self-conscious	Energized	Great	Confident

2. Now, pick one or two emotions you felt the strongest while improvising today.

1. Happy
2. Self-coscious

Why did you feel that way?



music is fun I feel like i can say things

APPENDIX G

CODE BOOK

First Round Coding

In Vivo Codes:
"When…?"
"When do we improvise?"
"We improvise when…"
"How…?"
"How do you improvise?"
"How does improvising affect us?"
"How do you make choices?"
"What"+ dislike
"What"+ like
"What"+ change
"What"+ feel
"What"+ learn
"Who made improvisation?"
"Why do you improvise?"
"I think…"+ personal definition
"Making own music"
"Making new music"
"New"+ activity
"At home"
"At"+ school/subject other than music
"She can come with us!"
"I listened to the teacher."
"Talking"
"Yay!"
"My way or the highway"
"Improve"
"Secret"
"Copyright"
"Valuable"

“Famous song”
“Share”
“Education”
“Special”
“I come up with a song…”
“Routine”
“Emotions”
“Trust”
“Fun”
“Voting”
“(Mystery) bucket”
“Game”
“Confidence”
“Last minute choices”
“Boring”
“Help”

Emotion Codes:
Excited
Frustrated
Happy
Curious
Confused
Playful
Comfortable
Calm
Relaxed
Sad
Weird
Cheerful
Shy
Proud
Anxious
Normal
Self-conscious
Energized
Great
Confident

Process Codes:
Preparing for voice-recorded small-group opening discussions
Managing behavior
Packing up iPad minis (transitioning)
Improvising/making music
Defining (i.e. improvisation)
Teacher facilitating improvisatory music circle
Thinking/hesitating
Clarifying instructions
Modeling
Student facilitating improvisatory music circle
Preparing for projection sheets and voice-recorded small-group closing discussions
Adjusting data collection materials (i.e. iPads, student groups)
Connecting with music community

Second Round Coding

Pattern Codes:
Formal definition of music improvisation
Personal definition of music improvisation
Descriptions of music
Music community
Empathy
Emotional-response
Energy
Novelty
Familiarity
Extramusical skill(s)

APPENDIX H

STUDENT PROJECTION SHEET FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Circle the emotion that you are feeling right now.

2. Why are you feeling that way? Write 2-3 sentences.

3. Why did Ms. Cobb send you to the calm down corner? Write 2-3 sentences.

4. What can you do better next time? Write 2-3 sentences.

5. Is there anything Ms. Cobb should know to help you during music class?