

**The Map is not the Territory**



# The Map is not the Territory:

## Reconsidering Music Improvisation Education

**Michael Edmund Wallace**

*B.Mus. Hons., Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts,  
Edith Cowan University, 2002*

*M.Mus., Monash University, 2007*

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## Abstract

This paper examines contemporary theory on music improvisation learning and teaching. It highlights how music improvisation education is being reconsidered, and the implications of this reconsideration for academic practice. The aim of the research is to emancipate. In this sense the topic engages critical theory to evaluate literature so as to provide a way forward for music improvisation education. The inductive document analysis undertaken examines a variety of document forms to seek recurring themes and thematic relationships. This qualitative investigation is framed by ecological systems theory/methodology (Borgo, 2007; Clarke, 2005), which sees knowledge as *embodied, situated* and *distributed*. Music education centres on the performance of repertoire, often neglecting the creative processes of improvisation and composition. This study finds the dominant improvisation education methods which stem from jazz as limited in scope. Jazz improvisation education commonly centres on patterns and models and a harmonic imperative (chord-scale theory). Such approaches do not holistically embrace the immediacy, preparation, embodiment and social interaction of the improvisation process, which ecological systems theory seeks to acknowledge. In a broader setting, the Dalcroze, Kodály and Orff early childhood methods centre on improvisation as play, perhaps reflecting Piaget's concrete operational stage. Subsequent levels of music education, perhaps viewing play as immature, neglect the embodied, situated and distributed elements of ecological improvisation. Paynter and Schafer, through their Cagean prioritisation of critical listening, exhibit some elements of ecological systems thinking. I conclude that the educational methods utilised by free improvisers, such as Stevens, Dove, Dresser and Bennink, engage the learner holistically through embodied, situated and distributed practice. It is recommended that such educational methods, which involve community practice, be introduced into music academies to reflect the ecological nature of improvisation.

## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

Signed:  Dated: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012

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*May the spirit of freedom embraced by the art of improvisation change the world  
from one that confines to one that offers choices.*

Pauline Oliveros



*How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognize, is a function of how one conceives of culture and its aims, professed and otherwise.*

Jerome Bruner



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# 1 Introduction

THIS THESIS EXAMINES LEADING CONTEMPORARY theory on the teaching of music improvisation. It aims to highlight how music improvisation education is being reconsidered, and the implications of this reconsideration for educational practice. The fundamental goal of this research is to emancipate. Through the conceptual lens of critical theory and the guiding methodology of ecological systems theory I seek to interpret documentary evidence so as to provide a way forward for music improvisation education. This thought has its foundations in European music improvisation practices that emerged in the mid-1960s and diverged from North American stylistic conventions of jazz improvisation — a movement characterised as *die Emanzipation* (Berendt, 1977). Though the alleged emancipation led to the construction of alternative frameworks, it represented a different set of ideals that were influenced by local European counterculture and Marxism (see Watson, 2004; Villavicencio, 2008). The thesis herein seeks to free current music improvisation education from the strictures of North American derived jazz improvisation pedagogy that dominates improvisation education today — in a way reflecting *die Emanzipation*. Rather than examining maps of knowledge, as I argue, much jazz improvisation pedagogy engages in, I assert that for improvisation education to become contextually relevant and transform knowledge it must address the music in ecological terms and incorporate aspects of community practice into the academy, exploring knowledge through experience, investigating not the

map of the territory but the territory itself. While it may be apparent these educational ideas expose established roots, exhibiting the influence of the progressivism and pragmatism of Dewey and the social constructivism of Vygostky, this specific field of music improvisation education, it shall be seen, requires reconsideration. As the topic centres on the community practice of improvisation within academic environments, the constructs, community, academy and improvisation are defined below to inform and frame the research.

### **1.1 Community**

Within the bounds of this research a community is a group of people collectively and collaboratively practising music improvisation. The weight of historical usage of its derivatives — community stems from *communis* (L. common) — is acknowledged as a meaningful reason for its use. This definition therefore incorporates Marxist views of social equality and cooperation. In light of this background, the inclusion of this construct excludes music improvisation education practices that do not promote collective, collaborative practice. While all musics involve bringing people into community, the inter-musician sociomusical dynamics involved in improvisation are unique. Communities, furthermore, represent the interwoven, holistic ideals of knowledge that ecological systems theory seeks to interpret.

### **1.2 Academy**

This thesis explores improvised music within a large range of learning environments. This arena is intentionally wide in scope, as I believe the topic could provide valuable information for educational practice in a broad spectrum of learning environments, within and outside all levels of educational institutions. I have utilised the construct academy to denote in general terms such learning environments as places in which the study of specialised fields of knowledge occur. Moreover, rather than the term *institution*, which has connotations of established practice, I suggest the term academy

promotes the inclusion of practice associated with communities outside the boundaries of institutions.

### 1.3 Improvisation

The world of improvised music has been described to include a broad gamut of sociocultural backgrounds, ‘techniques, styles, aesthetic attitudes, historical antecedents and networks of cultural and social practice’ (Lewis, 2000: 78). Defining such a palette has proved difficult for many writers. A number of music improvisers, composers and writers on the subject have equated improvisation with composition (Bailey, 1992; Goia, 1988; Schoenberg, 1950). The main difference these people identify is time — improvisation is seen as ‘spontaneous composition’ and composition is seen as slowed down improvisation. In essence this factor represents a significant rift between these methods of musical creation. Improvisation is a process, composition a product. This dichotomy, however, is not clear in its depiction of either musical undertakings. Belying the Latin root of the word improvisation, *improvisus* (unforeseen or unprepared), Borgo (2007) recognises that improvisers draw upon their practice and experience to create music in the moment. When viewed from an inexperienced listener’s perspective, the Latin definition may hold truths. When seen from the improviser’s perspective, however, it could be seen as somewhat less accurate. As the preeminent jazz composer, bandleader, and pianist Duke Ellington attests, ‘Improvisation? Anyone who plays anything worth hearing knows what he’s going to play, no matter whether he prepares a day ahead or a beat ahead. It has to be with intent’ (Jewell, 1977: 465). Composers, as Borgo states, must also ‘heed their moments of inspiration even as they record a document intended to be realized at a much later date’ (Borgo, 2007: 85). Terminology found in contemporary science literature (Weick, 1999; Zack, 2000) has been put forward by Borgo to further crystallise the process of improvisation. Composition, Borgo analogises, is a *complicated system*. It is a top–down model that involves a hierarchy and delegated tasks. Improvisation, however, is a *complex system*, which involves a network of

interconnected and yet independent parts that adapt to their surroundings. Though derived from scientific literature, such analysis could have emanated from the field of critical theory as the characteristics of systems thinking symbolise the power balances inherent in the social structures of these creative musical activities. Furthermore, viewing improvisation holistically as a complex system highlights the interplay and inextricable connection between physical, sociological and psychological factors, which Australian wind improviser Jim Denley recognises in the process,

For the improviser the physicality of producing sound (the hardware) is not a separate activity to the thoughts and ideas in music (software) ... The thoughts and decisions are sustained and modified by my physical potentials and vice versa but as soon as I try and define these separately I run into problems. It is a meaningless enterprise for it is the very entanglement of levels of perception, awareness and physicality that makes improvisation. (in Bailey, 1992: 108)

To these definitions Lewis (2000), Monson (1996) and Thomson (2007), among others, add that improvisation also has unique social interactions between the musicians, alongside the relationships common to other musics such as those between the musicians and the audience. Noted improviser, composer and pedagogue Fred Frith relates the inter-musician social dynamics to social friendships,

When you do it [improvisation] with other people, then all kinds of social aspects come into play ... not dissimilar to the ones that I appreciate in my friends: being a good listener, sensitivity to your social surroundings, being there when you're needed but knowing how to step back too, knowing when to be supportive, when to be assertive, when your opinion is valuable, when to just go along with something, when to insist! Patience. Tolerance. Openness. (in Chan, 2011: 2)

This belief highlights that improvisation cannot be confined to any single genre, it is a process, an ideal that has egalitarianism at its fundament. In summary, musical improvisation is a process that uses compositional devices and involves a combination of preparation, immediacy and sociomusical interaction.

#### 1.4 Assumptions and Delimitations

The premise of this thesis is that much music improvisation education reflects a form of theory and practice of improvisation which does not embrace the ecological aspects of the process. As a consequence, the key assumption held by this researcher is that music improvisation education should mirror and involve leading theory and the professional community practice of new music improvisation. This notion suggests that pedagogues look beyond the confines of classrooms and institutions in *outreach*.

The scope of this study is primarily limited to the field of music improvisation education. Most of the literature in this field emanated from North America. I have attempted to balance, where possible, this body of work with writing from other regions of the Western world. Moreover, the environs from which this research has been undertaken has focused sections on local issues or from the perspective of local practice. The method of documentary analysis and the critical theory that frame this study seek to highlight contemporary thought, summarise developments and contribute criticism for curriculum betterment, teacher education and teaching practice. The nature and limitations of the method, methodology and theory are evaluated in the following chapter. The analysis of leading contemporary literature proceeds thereafter. Through the lens of ecological and critical theory Chapter Four examines and critiques the literature explored in Chapter Three. The final chapter aims to elucidate the conclusions reached through the research undertaken and draw implications for current practice.

## 2 Research Method and Methodology

### 2.1 Method

DRAWING FROM A WIDE SPECTRUM of approaches to learning and teaching music improvisation this investigation utilises documentary research to gain insight into the proposed research topic. The inductive analysis undertaken below examines a variety of document forms — books, journals, theses, government reports, curriculum documents, and conference papers, be they in print or electronic format — to seek recurring themes and thematic relationships. Documents are a product of the culture in which they are created and thus represent viewpoints located within particular cultural or social settings and time periods (Hodder, 1994). The constructivist epistemology (see Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) and critical theory (see Bronner, 2011) upon which this research is founded seeks, in part, to critically acknowledge the nature of documents and the limitations of documentary research. These limitations centre around two key issues, *selective deposit* and *selective survival* (see Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006: 105). Selective survival recognises that the selection of documents by the researcher is influenced by what is available and the values, perspectives and assumptions of both the researcher and those who created and made the documents accessible. Selective deposit posits that

the selection of documents is an unrepresentative sample of what exists. As Eisner (1991) has stated, however, it is the scope of the investigation and the ‘confluence of evidence’ that contributes to the veracity of the research.

## 2.2 Methodology and Theory

This paper could not have been based upon quantitative research as that method of discovering knowledge has its philosophical basis in positivism. Rather, I have sought to incorporate and evaluate the social structures in not only the generation of documents but also within the field of new music improvisation. Moreover, the method of document analysis, described above, also lead this researcher away from quantitative inquiry. The thesis is therefore a qualitative investigation. This study is framed by the ecological systems theory/methodology of Borgo (2007) and Clarke (2005), which draws knowledge from the ecological theories of psychologists James and Eleanor Gibson, Roger Barker and Urie Bronfenbrenner (see Spencer, 2006), and the scientific theory of systems thinking (see Checkland, 1999; Meadows, 2008). In opposition to the Cartesian dualism that dominates music educational thought (see Juntunen & Westerlund, 2001), ecological systems theory propounds that knowledge is *embodied*, *situated*, and *distributed*: embodied, in that the interconnected mind and body direct perception; situated, in that all knowledge is situated in a context, action, and culture; and distributed, in that knowledge is distributed between people in a physical or social environment. These ideas could be seen to relate to Vygotsky’s social–constructivist notions that learning is a social process in which the learner relies upon cultural tools to construct knowledge and relate to environments. In the domain of contemporary music improvisation education it mirrors the ideals of Frith, as he states,

As an improviser, I want to focus on being here, in this moment, in this place, with these people, and seeing what happens, what has happened, what will happen. Another moment with other people will neither have the same focus, nor the same meaning. (in Chan, 2007: 3)

Furthermore, ecological systems theory exhibits the influence of the philosophical movement of phenomenology in its examination of situated behaviour and direct perception. As it is process oriented and context sensitive I believe this theory or methodology to be most apt when discussing the creative discipline of improvisation and the learning thereof. Moreover, through examining embodied, situated, and distributed knowledge, ecological systems theory addresses the unique elements of music improvisation — its immediacy, preparation, embodiment, and sociomusical interaction.

The aim of this thesis is to emancipate — it seeks to critique existing theory and practice so as to provide a way forward for music improvisation education. In this sense the topic could be seen to engage critical theory. As Humphries aphorises, the professed aim of critical theory is ‘to understand the world *in order to change it*’ (Humphries, 1997: 26). In the realm of education this theory reverberates with the critical pedagogy of Freire ([1970] 2000), whose ideology has subsequently been assimilated into music education (Woodford, 1996; Abrahams, 2005; Regelski, 2005; Schimdt, 2005; Green, 2008). Furthermore, the Marxist or Neo-Marxist philosophical background of critical theory (see Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006: 28) mirrors the Marxist view of society that was held by many improvisers of *die Emanzipation* movement.

This study, therefore, through the method of documentary analysis, filters information through the lenses of critical theory and ecological systems theory/methodology to highlight how music improvisation education is being reconsidered, and the implications of this reconsideration for academic practice. In the subsequent chapter a gamut of documents within improvisation education literature are analysed so as to illuminate the leading theories in this field.

### 3 Analysis of Literature

FORMS OF IMPROVISATION PERMEATE ALL manifestations of music. Particularly during the coalescence and transmission of musical ideas. The manner in which improvisation is revealed or the degree to which it is undertaken varies greatly, from free improvisation through the spectrum of stylistic practices to the more directed strictures of Baroque figured bass. In perhaps the most comprehensive compendium of Western improvised music practice Ferand remarks,

... There is scarcely a single field in music that has remained unaffected by improvisation, scarcely a single musical technique or form of composition that did not originate in improvisatory practice or was not essentially influenced by it. (Ferand, [1938] 1961: 5)

Due in part to the institutionalisation of jazz music and the increasing examination of improvisation within the field of ethnomusicology, the literature on improvisation education has grown substantially since the 1960s. The body of work born out of The Chicago University Press (Berliner, 1994; Lewis, 2008; Monson, 1996) — which bears association with the community based ethnography of the Chicago School sociologists — and that conducted or collected by musicologist Bruno Nettl (1998, 2009) is noted as prominent research in this domain. The interdisciplinary, seven-year research project, *Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice* (ICASP

— *www.improvcommunity.ca/*) at the University of Guelph in Canada has further propelled contemporary improvisation and improvisation education research. While the scope of these publications mirrors the diverse practices of improvisation around the world, the following review aims to focus on and provide an overview of research pertinent to contemporary Western music improvisation learning and teaching. Music, music education and improvisation journals were mined for information that would contribute to this undertaking. Scoured also was the web of information that is the Internet. Constructs that provided a rich seam of material to analyse included: music, improvisation, education, and pedagogy. The search to understand the nature of the creative act of improvisation led most authors to undertake qualitative inquiry. Throughout much of the literature collected primary source interview data was the predominant form of information. The review of this literature below follows a thematic structure. The main themes that arose from the topic of research are: jazz improvisation education; improvisation education in a broader context; the educational practices of free improvisers; improvisation and assessment; improvisation in music education policy; improvising for musical skill development; the sociology of improvisation; and, finally the psychology of improvisation.

### **3.1 Jazz Improvisation Education**

While improvisation is seen as an important part of music education that develops creative thinking and musical ability its prominence in the curriculum is notably deficient (see Azzara, 1993; Kratus, 1989; Schmidt & Sinor, 1986; Webster, 1987a). The component of music education that touches upon improvisation is dominated by jazz improvisation learning processes. Not the learning methods that characterised the development of the jazz genre, the aural and oral learning from peers community settings (Berliner, 1994: 37–39) or the apprenticeships with experienced practitioners (Berliner, 1994: 41), for example, but the learning processes developed within the jazz academy. While it may show signs of conservatism, the spread and prominence of jazz

improvisation education in tertiary academies around the world could be seen to exemplify the desire of people to engage in musical improvisation practice. A more detailed analysis of jazz improvisation learning processes both inside and outside the academy now follows.

Jazz music emerged by interfusion of musical and sociological practices of European and African origins that were circulating around the beginning of the twentieth century in the U.S. This emergence and dissemination was established via practice-based learning processes, aurally/orally, revolving around the act of performance and more formally through composition and improvisation publication. Often subsuming elements from performers' sociomusical backgrounds the defining traits of jazz music revolve around the dialectics of freedom — convention versus individual libertarianism, composition versus improvisation — as improvisation is a fundamental aspect of its constitution. When jazz music was imported into the more rigid academic environments of university institutions — most notably in the 1940s at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Berklee School of Music and the University of North Texas (see Murphy, 1994) — a common approach to teaching materialised in literature and in practice.

In his examinations of jazz education Prouty (2004, 2005) critiques the emphasis placed on historical narratives that proclaim institutions as the birthplaces of jazz education. He sees jazz education in a broader context, constructed both within and outside institutions in academic communities. Learning processes outside the academy in the lived world of practical music making have not been recognised in institutionally derived histories, Prouty believes, aside from the common reference to oral traditions. As he states, 'Classifying pre-institutional learning strategies as an oral phenomenon provides an epistemological excuse for positioning the advent of institutionalized instruction as a significant event in the history of music education' (Prouty, 2005: 92). This may be a result of the racial prejudice of white dominated academies, Prouty suggests. It is also likely to revolve around the politics of insular academies, and related to the common practices of other fields of music education entrenched in the system.

Prouty aligns his argument with Fraser's (1983) aural-written alternative to the paradigm of oral learning often cited in literature. The practice-based alternative sees musical recordings as important learning tools for the indirect transmission of musical information, phrases, excerpts and entire improvisations, between the improviser and the listener/learner. Furthermore, the publication of transcribed improvisations, which have been readily available since the 1920s (see Berliner, 1994: 97), provided another means, for the many jazz musicians who were fluent in reading and writing musical notation, to learn practically through imitation. Indeed, these practice-based learning processes alongside the collaborative practices explored hereinafter are seen by Berliner (1994), who conducted an extensive ethnomusicological study of jazz music, as the mainstream forms through which most jazz musicians learn outside the academy. Moreover, there are a number of books and journal articles derived from institutions that provide illuminating research into these practice-based learning processes (Bailey, 1992; Monson, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Borgo, 2005). As a member of an academic institution himself, perhaps Prouty is enmeshed in the insular environment he describes. That jazz academies have employed respected practiced musicians whom contribute their experiences from the jazz community he acknowledges, however Prouty does not see a link between these people and the parochial picture of the academy he puts forward. It could be seen that such musician-educators develop into academics who do not evolve their pedagogy interlinked with community practice. Alternatively, they may not demonstrate impetus to attempt to change the flawed environs Prouty describes.

While Prouty argues that academies are insular in terms of historical education narratives he acknowledges that academic jazz education has been affected by contemporary stylistic movements developed in the jazz music community. Despite the nexus between these networks of knowledge, the current foundation of jazz education remains fixated upon the bebop style of jazz that originated in the 1940s. As Prouty highlights, 'Nearly every improvisational method on the market is comprised of concepts and/or patterns developed

directly from this style' (Prouty, 2005: 94). The codification of bebop can be seen to emanate from George Russell's venerated *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* ([1953] 2001). This theoretical work, which has been highly influential both inside and outside academic communities (see Berendt & Huesmann, [1973] 2009), linked the harmonic (vertical/chord) structures of bebop with melodic (horizontal/scale) structures. As Prouty notes,

Russell's method represents the first major statement of what can be termed a *chord-scale* theory of jazz improvisation — that each harmonic structure within a certain piece of music has a related melodic structure that can be employed as a basis for improvisation. Today this idea is at the center of formalized improvisational instruction and is also widely recognized outside the academic realm. (Prouty, 2005: 96)

This chord-scale theory has become the framework for improvisation instruction inside the academy (see Ake, 2002). Harmonic construction and theory is therefore viewed as the basis for improvisation, which can be seen, as Prouty (2004) emphasises, to be limited in focus and detrimental to the other elements of jazz improvisation.

The divide between practice-based learning processes of the jazz community and the theory-based learning processes of the jazz academy is also seen in the interviews initiated and evaluated by Berliner (1994). Musicians in Berliner's study describe the practice-based learning process not only as a solitary act, but also a collective activity which they share with like-minded musicians in the jazz community. Indeed throughout his book there are many examples of jazz learning as collaborative practice, including shared transcribing, rehearsals, jam sessions, and apprenticeships with master musicians. For example,

"New Yorkers had a way of learning from each other just as we did in Detroit", Tommy Flanagan says, "From what I heard from Arthur Taylor, Jackie McLean, and Sonny Rollins, they all used to learn from just jamming together with Bud Powell and Monk and Bird." (Berliner, 1994: 42)

The aims of these two learning processes are to understand the music, and yet they differ markedly. The impetus behind imitating improvisations and

following models is to practically understand underlying principles of the music. Whereas the theory-based learning process attempts to understand the music conceptually, to apply theory to practice. Berliner and his interviewees view both these processes as integral to learning to improvise — ‘Like their vocabulary stores, performers’ individual theoretical methods typically synthesize their personal discoveries with the most useful ideas gleaned from other players’ (Berliner, 1994: 169). Furthermore, it is illuminated that many musicians identified these processes along a developmental progression — practice-based learning leads to theory-based learning. As pianist and educator Walter Bishop Jr. aphorises, ‘It all goes from imitation to assimilation to innovation’ (in Berliner, 1994: 120), a phrase also shared by trumpeter and educator Clark Terry (in Berendt, [1973] 2009: xi). This idea radiates in the following anecdote of saxophonist Gary Bartz communicated by Berliner,

Exclusive dependence on ear knowledge eventually limits many performers, even those who acquire great skill in negotiating tunes aurally. After unsuccessful efforts at jam sessions playing “on complex tunes like ‘You Stepped Out of a Dream,’” Gary Bartz turned for assistance to trombonist Grachan Moncur, who subsequently taught him the theoretical principles of harmony and their application to jazz. (Berliner, 1994: 159)

Despite the ethnographic evidence documented by Berliner confirming that both practice-based and theory-based learning process are integral to jazz education, academies concentrate on theory-based learning processes founded in harmonic chord-scale theory, according to Ake (2002) and Prouty (2004, 2005). Such concentration could be seen to emphasise one particular musical element at perhaps the detriment of other equally important elements of music, such as loudness, duration or timbre. Though it is highly likely that jazz academies incorporate practice-based learning processes, the research of the authors above illustrates that they are neglected. The curriculum of jazz improvisation academies, which is commonly based on a sequence of compositions that increase in harmonic complexity (see Prouty, 2004), further highlights the focus on harmonic imperatives and the primal function theory-based learning processes play. Frith argues that such institutionalisation of jazz

music ‘seems to have had the effect of reducing the scope of the music as it is officially sanctioned, generally making the milieu of that music thoroughly conservative ...’ (in Chan, 2007: 2).

Another criticism of jazz improvisation education frequently emerges from the landscape of literature in this field. Many published educational methods exhibit an underlying focus upon theory-based processes and the rote teaching of patterns and models (Baker, 1971, 1988; Bergonzi, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003; Coker, 1964, 1970, 1997, 2002; Haerle, 1989; Steinel, 1995). As the authors of these études often hold positions in jazz academies the content may be required to attend a certain function within the broader curriculum. These books, however, could also be seen to promote product/outcomes based education. Fundamentally, it is the principles that underlie the patterns and models that are beneficial in transforming students’ understanding. As Berliner acknowledges,

The principles that artists derive from their studies [of patterns and models] ultimately provide them with the basis for diverse approaches to musical thinking, encouraging flexible invention in the styles of jazz that are more independent of the individual’s precise repertory of patterns. (Berliner, 1994: 146–147)

The use of patterns and models in jazz improvisation education, whether derived from transcription of performance or published exercises, is a complex dynamic which is at the heart of the genre’s musical-cultural tradition. Its inclusion in musical education outside this genre, however, is questionable. While it may be necessary to communicate some information by rote, some may overemphasise this base method of transmitting knowledge simply due to convention or the accessibility of material. Such thought often surfaces in educational literature in the field. Phrases such as those found in this book (Feldman & Contzius, 2011) on instrumental teaching methods, for example:

How does setting limits enable beginners to experiment with composition and improvisation? Why is it important to give students a musical vocabulary with which to write or improvise? In what ways can familiar styles and conventions be used to facilitate composition and improvisation? (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 53)

... this approach sets limits, which ironically makes it easier to improvise, rather than harder. (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 54)

... mainly because that style is familiar to most students and is supported by a wide range of literature and repertoire. However, recognize that improvisation appears in a variety of classical, rock, folk, and world music traditions, and the below strategies can be successfully applied to many of them. (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 54)

The fashion of basing improvisations on patterns and models is seen by Pressing (1987) as one stage on the developmental continuum of Western improvisational practice. Mapping this evolution Pressing identifies five stages of development: *embellishment*; *patterns and models*; *problem-solving*; *play-by-ear*; and, *free improvisation*. He associates these stages with musical genres and/or pedagogical approaches, hereinafter ascribed: embellishment is identified with pre-Baroque times; patterns and models are linked to Baroque figured bass, the melodic keyboard improvisation of classical music, and the jazz methods noted above; problem-solving improvisation is appropriated with the Jaques-Dalcroze method and the chord charts of jazz fake books; the imitative, self-discovery of learning jazz solos and Green's informal learning methods (2008) are linked to the play-by-ear stage; and finally, Pressing connects Schafer's teachings with free improvisation (Schafer's methods are examined in the following section). Jazz improvisation education that is based in bebop chord-scale theory and patterns and models overlaps several stages of Pressing's improvisation development, yet as several authors have noted it remains limiting in a musical and educational sense.

### **3.2 Improvisation Education in a Broader Context**

Outside the jazz arena other methods of music education emerged during the twentieth century that incorporated improvisation. While improvisation is not central to all these methods, I seek to highlight the aspects of creative freedom and the limitations of their approaches to improvisation. Like a majority of jazz institution curricula, Jaques-Dalcroze's approach involved

improvisation based upon conventional harmonic principles. Within Kodály methodology improvisation is utilised to enhance melodic and rhythmic material already learnt. Orff–Schulwerk, however, is more open in its approach, encouraging free exploration of sound. As McMillan recognises, this method ‘promotes the notion that students should be exposed to the widest variety of musical and movement experiences and that children should be encouraged to create their own sounds rather than recreate other people’s music exclusively’ (McMillan, 1992: 256). While this liberal scope could be seen as Orff–Schulwerk’s desirable feature, it is this nature that limits learners’ exposure to improvisation.

These major educational methods reflect the psychological theories of Piaget and Vygotsky — Piaget’s *concrete operational* stage and Vygotsky’s notion of socially constructed knowledge and the intervention of a more knowledgeable other — in that they engage learners in music through play. The influence of Piaget’s developmental stages may have contributed to the discontinuation of these methods after primary level education. The shifting focus away from ecological play in secondary level education to focus upon *formal operational* thinking may have led to the withdrawal of music improvisation studies. The aim of the Dalcroze, Kodály and Orff methods was to engage learners in music performance. These approaches did not seek to equally explore the creative process of improvisation. As a consequence, perhaps, music education beyond these early childhood methods has followed this tract. If learners experience these teaching methods it is often exclusively during primary level education, and, as the jazz field dominates tertiary improvisation education, there are few alternative pedagogical methods (it could be seen that secondary education attempts to lead learners into tertiary academies and therefore the available jazz methods are most probably reviewed when touching upon music improvisation in that environment). Notable exceptions at the tertiary level include the Victorian College of the Arts, Australia, its curricula being at the centre of research conducted by McMillan (1996) into developing a personal voice in musical improvisation; and the academic community at Mills College, U.S.,

which has coagulated around Professor Fred Frith (see Chan, 2008).

While some schools and methods engage in improvisation that diverges from the jazz genre, they are nonetheless uncommon. It has been suggested that this void could be linked to ‘tradition and the perpetuation of our perfectionist attitudes [which] largely dominate our thought’ (Rooke, 1990: 14). This proposition has been confirmed in survey data that illustrates instrumental music teachers prioritise technique and the interpretation of repertoire over improvisation (Ward, 2004). Coupled with the conservatoire model, and perhaps deriving from English grammar school practices (see Burke, 2005), the syllabi provided by the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) — which could be seen to preserve certain sociocultural preferences deriving from 19th century middle-class aesthetics — supports these findings. As AMEB dominates instrumental music assessment inside and outside institutions in this country, learning could be seen to be exclusively aimed at specific socioeconomic and sociocultural demographics.

Through the examination of a spectrum of literature encompassing this topic some alternative methods for learning improvisation became apparent. I shall now review, within this broader scope, the work of Schafer (1967, 1976, 1986), Paynter (1972, 1977, 1982), Kratus (1991, 1995), Hickey (2009) and Green (2001, 2008).

Arising from his studies in acoustic ecology, R. Murray Schafer developed educational methods that incorporate elements of, or share similar features with, improvisation. His writings on music education centre on processes of listening and creation and view music from the perspective of sound-as-object. For Schafer the music curriculum has two *obligations*: to keep alive music of the past, and to expand the repertoire in the creation of new work. Of these two paths he stresses the latter is disproportionately represented. His emphasis on creation and acoustic ecology could be identified with improvisation, as composition with the sounds of an environment, in that environment, is essentially improvisation. This improvisatory outlook resonates in his adoption

of *musique concrète* composer Pierre Schaeffer's adage, *on écoute avec les mains* (one listens with the hands) — 'The sounds we hear immediately compel us to respond, to reproduce them on instruments of our invention' (Schafer, 1976: 236). While this thought is central to Schafer's conceptual lens, his focus is on creating compositions with graphic notation. He acknowledges the influence of Johannes Itten's methods of art education developed at the Bauhaus:

My own approach is usually to start by allowing a class total freedom to do whatever they wish. But in art we are allowed only one free gesture; all the rest is discipline. Thus little by little I try to tax the imagination by introducing whatever rules seem to be implicit in the first free action, just as Johannes Itten did in his extraordinary Basic Course at the Bauhaus. (Schafer, 1976: 240)

Like Itten's course, Schafer asks students to investigate formal oppositions. For example, high–low; loud–soft; short–long; fast–slow. Alongside these macro elements Schafer's learners explore the detailed micro analysis of the timbral characteristics of sound objects. Working with such fundamental elements allows the learner to analyse (listen) and compose or improvise (create) music within, between or beyond the foggy bounds of genre (*n.b.*, the constrictions of genre are further discussed in the following section, 3.3 *Educational Methods Utilised by Free Improvisers*). Such freedom, I believe, is essential to empower students to create music of their own imagining.

The majority of music education methods hereinbefore reviewed place the learning of performance skills above the creative processes of improvisation and composition. The prevalence of these methods, the stagnation of the institutions in which they are taught, and the teachers who promulgate the continuation of such methods are conceivable explanations for the widespread neglect of composition and improvisation in music education settings. Schafer is amongst those who sought an alternative path that emphasised creative processes. In the U.K., Paynter (1972, 1977, 1982) was another who instigated creative music education practices. A notable common influence upon both Paynter and Schafer was John Cage, whose emphasis on sound objects and silence, or lack thereof, informed both educators' views on the importance of

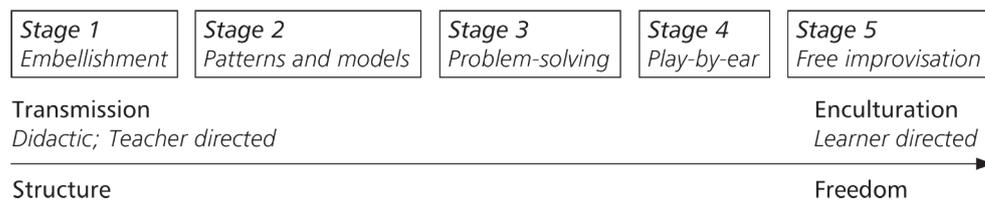
developing critical listening skills. Furthermore, by treating music as sound Paynter suggested, 'The barrier disappears and we all start at the same point. Now everyone can *read* music' [emphasis added] (Paynter, 1972: 12). Like Schafer, he believed all music learners should develop composition skills. He identified the dearth of composition in curriculum with the paucity of teachers with training or skills in composition education. In Victoria, Australia, Burke (2005) similarly perceived little development in the composition education of the majority of teachers. With the introduction of a composition stream in the VCE in 2011, perhaps creativity in music education in Victoria may increase. Though as this stream is an elective many students do not have the opportunity to develop creative skills in this area (see 3.5 *Improvisation in Music Education Policy* for further discussion on curriculum policy and the VCE).

Paynter advocated performance, composition and improvisation to be interwoven into the curriculum. Though his approach to improvisation as a means to achieve composition has been criticised by Addison (1988), his fundamental belief that creative learning should be '... inventive, original, not derivative, first-hand, individual, and independent' (Paynter, 1982: 93), resonates with what I insist improvisation education should strive to realise.

The methods of Schafer and Paynter are uncommon in music education and improvisation education literature. Representing the prevailing view in this field, Kratus (1991, 1995) outlines a developmental framework which involves a sequence of increasingly complex behaviours. The last stage, and presumably the goal of his model, encourages learners to transcend style and establish unique conventions. While this seems worthy of attainment, this stage is preceded by constricting stylistic, product-oriented boundaries. As his framework conventionally mirrors the theory-based jazz approaches, it is difficult to see how learners break free of what they have learnt. The final goal appears even more insurmountable as Kratus believes professional improvising musicians see their improvisations as products, seeking to be understood by their audience (Kratus, 1995: 28). In its dictation of material this framework reflects more the complicated system of composition rather

than the complex network structures of improvisation.

Another way of reconceptualising improvisation education is offered by Hickey (2009). Utilising Pressing's historical conceptions of improvisation as a developmental model upon which to base improvisation pedagogy, she reverses the stage sequence and contends free improvisation should be patronised and become the starting point in improvisation education. As it reflects the most recent, albeit fringe-dwelling, developments in community improvisation practice, this focus provides the opportunity for contemporaneously relevant academic practice for students. Hickey sees free improvisation in association with learner directed enculturation, in contrast to the teacher directed didactic, theory-based processes of earlier stages on Pressing's scale, as can be seen below,



*Figure 1.* Pressing's stages of improvisation and the continuum of teaching (from Hickey, 2009: 288)

Though Hickey promotes an alternative to the teacher directed methods previously described, she sees free improvisation as a disposition rather than a skill which could be developed. This acknowledges the social and/or cognitive mindset required to develop free improvisation skills, however, it fails to recognise the dynamic and complex musical skills involved. Hickey's background in music education directed at the North American elementary and middle school levels could be seen to influence her position. Considering improvisation a disposition, however, could contribute to viewing it as a community practice in an academic setting. Indeed Hickey frames her argument around the notion that learning surrounding current informal learning improvisation practices occurs through enculturation. Such enculturation education methods have been pursued in research by Green (2001, 2008),

which has, in turn, led to the development of the Musical Futures learning programme in the U.K. Green's approach is based upon research of informal learning practices of popular/rock musicians (see Green, 2001), rather than the institutional music education models criticised by Lewis (2000) and Prouty (2004, 2005). The underlying principle of the process-oriented learning approach she instigates is that students learn aurally in small groups, with little supervision, through copying recordings. She found that informal learning promoted self-efficacy and social learning, instrumental skill development, and, moreover, students were inspired to continue their participation in music education. Implemented across ten metropolitan and provincial, primary and secondary institutions, a replicated study in Victoria, Australia, yielded similarly positive responses from learners and teachers (Jeanneret, 2010). While not directly incorporating improvisation her approach reflects the Vygotskian viewpoints of Berliner (1994), Borgo (2007), Lewis (2000), and Monson (1996), and the Freirian ideals of Willox *et al.* (2011) examined below (see 3.7 *The Sociology of Music Improvisation: A Community Practice*).

Several teachers who implemented Green's informal approach communicated their reluctance to forgo control and allow learners, with little teacher intervention, to co-construct knowledge with peers. Such anxieties may also hinder the development of improvisation education that affirms an academic community practice similar to Green's informal learning approach. These observations fundamentally raise issues of authoritarianism versus liberalism, teacher versus student-centred education. Cornelius Cardew, an avant-garde composer who embraced free improvisation, viewed most music education as controlling and teacher-centred. He believed *musical innocents*, people without formal training, were more inclined to 'play music to the full capacity of their beings' (Cardew, 1971). This generalisation sees the majority of musical education following what Freire ([1970] 2000) calls the *banking* approach. In the educational systems of the lower class in Brazil, Freire saw a prevalent teaching method that centred around the teacher and expected students to memorise content by rote. He believed the banking approach

controlled thinking and action, inhibited creative power and objectified the student. The alternative Freire propounded was centred around the student and aimed to develop a critical consciousness in the learner through Socratic dialogue. This *problem-posing* or critical education can be seen to reflect the social-constructivist viewpoints of Vygotsky (see Vygotsky *et al.*, 1978), in which the learner constructs knowledge socially or with the intervention of a more knowledgeable other.

Like Cardew, Lange (2011) recognised a similar trend toward authoritarian teaching methods in improvisation education. She noted that it was common among improviser/pedagogues to present ‘improvisation philosophies and techniques to the group of attendees, who often faced the leader in a half-circle formation and absorbed the information silently’ (Lange, 2011) before attempting the techniques described. In her case study of the MECA free improvisation ensemble, a voluntary organisation for middle and high school students in Houston, Texas, she found that while traditional teaching dynamics were employed, the egalitarian ethic of free improvisation ‘changed how students crossed barriers within the city and between each other’ (Lange, 2011). The following section will proceed to examine the educational practices of free improvisers.

### 3.3 The Educational Practices of Free Improvisers

Musician and improvisation advocate Derek Bailey (1996) interviewed John Stevens and Han Bennink, two master free improvisers who, like him, were central to the *die Emanzipation* movement in Europe. These musician/pedagogues offered methods of teaching improvisation communities in academia. Working in a community music setting in the U.K., Stevens’ workshops involved learners with a wide range of musical abilities. He highlighted the importance of instilling confidence and developing empathy within the student group, or in his words, developing a *collective continuum*. Incorporating modelling, analogy and call-and-response, Stevens challenged students to work empirically by attempting ‘what they want to do *before* they

know how to do it' (Bailey, 1996: 230).

Stevens further explored the communication of improvisation ideas in his handbook of activities and concepts derived from his time as artistic director of Community Music, an organisation that provided music education for the disadvantaged. In *Search and Reflect* ([1985] 2007), he presented material aimed at developing free improvisation techniques together with fundamental music skills. Examples of improvisation activities from this collection include the Click Piece, which asks students to attempt to produce the shortest sound they possibly can (see Stevens, 2007: 63), and the Sustained Piece, which asks students to sustain a note 'which is as long as their breath length' (Stevens, 2007: 65). While directed, these activities allow for individuality. These primary tasks may be aimed at initiating music students into sound worlds beyond Western conservative genres or focusing their attention on the essential musical skill of critical listening. They could also be seen to develop the instrumental techniques of articulation and breath control. Another activity of Stevens instructs workshop leaders to challenge members to improvise unfamiliar phrases by asking them to aim for speed so as to achieve *unselfconscious* improvised material. These phrases are later assembled into an ensemble piece (see Stevens, 2007: 93–94). Many of the instructions in Stevens handbook proceed similarly, transforming free improvisation into organised improvisatory ensemble pieces. The strength of Stevens' method is that it encourages individually and collectively created improvisation. It offers concepts of organising and instigating such improvisation. These concepts achieve a balance between learning and teaching and freedom and control that should be at the heart of music improvisation education practices.

Dutch improvising drummer Han Bennink (in Bailey, 1996) offers another approach to teaching improvisation. Unlike the classes Stevens engages with Bennink reflects on teaching conservatoire trained musicians. His workshops are seemingly more structured, being divided equally into one part theory, one part analysis, and one part practice. The particulars of the theory and analysis aspects of these workshops are not revealed in Bennink's published

interview with Bailey. The information printed shows that, like Stevens, Bennink instructs in a practical way and provides students with guidelines — ‘sort of indeterminate scoring instructions’ — and stimuli from which to direct improvisation. For example,

... I’ll take a kettle with a whistle which, when it boils, produces different pitches in rather an odd, unpredictable way ... it’s just the idea — the kettle — certain tones, what’s happening with the water and why do you boil water. Is it music and what makes music and what doesn’t make music? ... You can take anything — a piece of paper, a record. (Bailey, 1996: 232)

Bailey recognises a link between the approaches of both Stevens and Bennink and the Indian tradition of learning improvisation via the practical exploration of concepts communicated by a master musician. Though their methods provide students with the opportunity to learn practically with expert improvisers, Stevens’ and Bennink’s methods differ from the rigorous formal nature of classical Indian training. Like most jazz education they centre their approaches on the examination and application of musical concepts. Unlike jazz education, however, they ignore or transcend the bounds of genre. An analogy can be drawn between jazz education and genre theory, and the criticisms thereof. Comparable to the jazz education reviewed above, ‘genres are agents of ideological closure — they limit the meaning–potential of a given text’ (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 128), and can be seen to ‘control the behaviour of producers of such texts, and the expectations of potential consumers’ (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 7). Readers (listeners) may find genres accessible as they follow commonly known parameters and simplify a spectrum of information. It is difficult, however, to restrain improvisation, as an embodied, situated and distributed act, to the bounds of any one genre. Successful jazz improvisation, it could be argued, breaks down genre barriers and transcends common practice within the jazz genre. Whereas jazz education, as has been seen above, exhibits tendencies that confine students within genre boundaries. Such confinement may provide a product that is easily digestible for listeners in societies that seek to appease expectation. I argue that this has no place

in the process of improvisation or improvisation education as it undervalues listeners as dilettantes or philistines and does not allow for creative practice. The strength of the methods employed by Stevens and Bennink is that, while they may constrain learners within the frontiers of free improvisation these environs are far more liberal and open than common jazz improvisation education approaches. Through the lens of free improvisation they also mirror the emphasis Schafer and Paynter place on environmental sound objects. Other educators teaching free improvisation share this perspective. Dresser asks students to critically analyse sound and insists, ‘The ability to perceive pitch and time can never be too fine. The more we teach our musicians to develop ears and skills, the better equipped they will be to work in an ever-changing situation’ (in Borgo, 2007: 82). In teaching the MECA improvisation ensemble, Dove emphasised listening to silence to stimulate awareness of, and to develop the intentionality behind, sound gestures (see Lange, 2011). Such focus on critical environmental listening highlights the value free improvisation may hold in a music curriculum that incorporates improvisation into its practice.

A teacher attached to the parameters which define genres may find assessing learner development in an environment with broader scope challenging. In the following section I review literature that examines the assessment of improvisation to seek tools with which to make improvisation education more accessible.

### **3.4 Improvisation and Assessment**

Melbourne saxophonist, VCA educator Rob Vincs (2002) believes improvisation should reflect the multiplicity of individual experience and expression. Borrowing from cultural and political commentator Michael Leunig, he believes improvisation practice should mirror the ‘Cartoonist’s need to be able to advocate for messy humanity ... we need the biodiversity of human beings and their approaches, not this overwhelming pressure towards conformity’ (see Vincs, 2002: i). One of the central issues surrounding the implementation of improvisation in music curricula from a pragmatic,

educational systems standpoint is summative assessment. As improvisation ideally represents a *messy humanity*, the development of assessment has likely been deferred due to the difficulty in creating criteria that suitably embrace and critique such biodiversity. Moreover, assessment criteria and traditional notions of technical excellence generally revolve around the product-oriented culture prevalent in many music institutions, perhaps deriving from the repertoire based genre of classical music and its surrounding educational methods. Despite the spread of jazz education culture, few reliable or readily available methods that assess improvisation have been developed (Smith, 2009). As improvisation is fundamentally process-oriented there is a necessity to develop new methods of assessment that are suitable for the field. Although this is acknowledged by Hickey, it is left to other authors to suggest valid alternatives. Based upon research and interviews with expert improvisers and experienced teachers McPherson (1993) developed the Test of Ability to Improvise (TAI). Acknowledging that such assessment should include dimensions such as musical *appeal*, creative thinking, musical expression and instrumental fluency, McPherson (1992, 1995) developed the following performance indicators, here summarised by Rosevear (1996):

- A. Instrumental Fluency: Ability to execute musical ideas clearly and accurately...
- B. Musical Syntax (Consistency of Style): Ability to organise musical material by adapting to the prevailing style and complementing a set criteria...
- C. Creativity: Ability to think divergently, as demonstrated in an original and imaginative product. This is evaluated through an analysis of:
  - 1. Musical Flexibility: the extent to which the improviser can manipulate musical elements (*e.g.* Pitch, rhythm, motif, accompaniment).
  - 2. Musical Originality: the extent to which the improviser can provide a musically unique or unusual response.
- D. Musical Quality (Overall Musical Appeal: Ability to perform fluently creatively conceived material to complement existing musical criteria or constraints. (Rosevear, 1996: 37)

McPherson rated students on a scale of one to five utilising the above capabilities, which he referred to as criteria, quantifying qualitative information. The TAI

assesses students' ability to improvise an appropriate answering phrase; base an improvisation off given motifs; improvise a melody with a set rhythm; stylistic improvisation; and finally, free improvisation. While these capabilities and assessment tasks seem worthy, I believe this method of assessment is fundamentally flawed for it lacks performance descriptors (criteria). As it does not accurately describe what students can do, say or make, it could be seen to be a deficit approach which focuses on what students cannot do. This deficit approach is prevalent in educational systems. Indeed it has been identified as the most common practice of assessment (Griffin, 2009). Teachers are unlikely to translate results from such assessment into meaningful ways to transform knowledge for all learners. As Griffin states, 'It is only when the numbers have a meaningful interpretation that measurement and assessment begin to merge and they build a link to curriculum' (Griffin, 2009: 189). Performance descriptors aligned to stages of increasing competence provide more accurate and transparent means for assessment, I contend. Also known as criterion-referenced assessment, this developmental approach, which has its roots in the work of Bloom (1956), Gagné (1965), Glaser (1981) and Griffin (2009), and is endorsed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria (DEECD — [www.education.vic.gov.au/proflearning/e5/using/writing.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/proflearning/e5/using/writing.htm)), focuses on assessment as a tool for learning rather than a means to rate or compare learners' work (which is a common focus of norm-referenced assessment practices). While norm-referenced assessment may measure certain musical skills or learning outcomes, I do not believe it suits improvisation. Norm-referencing can be seen to narrow the academic curriculum and the skill sets of learners. Moreover, it leads teachers from teaching for the needs of the individual to teaching to the test (see Volante, 2004). Embracing improvisation as a creative process that involves embodied, situated and distributed knowledge requires teachers and learners to focus on musical context. Though such a process is antithetical to norm-referenced assessment, criterion-referenced assessment may prove valuable in assessing and developing a learner's context sensitive improvisation skills.

An attempt at a criterion-referenced rubric has been presented by Feldman & Contzius (2011). The performance descriptors they present derive from the following indicators: tonality; rhythm; phrasing; motives, patterns and licks; arpeggios and scales; melody and ornamentation (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 119–121). There is a clear emphasis on product-driven patterns and models. The language in their descriptions is often ambiguous, for example, ‘Melody is played *effectively* over the changes along with examples of *effective* melodic ornamentation [emphases added]’ (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 121). Such language allows for a multitude of interpretations and does not accurately describe observable and measurable behaviours. Feldman & Contzius also use counts in some of the performance descriptors they have developed, such as ‘Effectively incorporates at least 3–4 of the assigned patterns or licks into the solo’ (Feldman & Contzius, 2011: 121). The counts in their criteria imply a specific number of behaviours relate to certain levels of competence. I argue that repeated behaviour does not necessarily correlate with higher order thinking and is thus not an accurate method of assessment. The rubrics outlined by McPherson and Feldman & Contzius utilise one form of assessment, which perhaps should be seen as part of a broader range of strategies that evaluate and contribute to learner development. This range may involve teacher, self and peer assessment, and encompass formative, summative, objective, subjective, formal and informal types of assessment. While valuable informal assessment should occur formatively, the development of quality summative assessment methods and rubrics for improvisation could contribute to wider successful implementation of music improvisation education.

### **3.5 Improvisation in Music Education Policy**

There has been profusion of rhetoric which seeks to redefine education around twenty-first century skills (ACARA, 2011; Cisco, 2008; MCEETYA, 2008; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning — [www.p21.org/](http://www.p21.org/)). This movement is likely to stem from globalisation and the exponential growth in information

and communication technologies, the current digital age, which some believe require skills that depart from those of the preceding industrial age. It could be seen to be driven by the corporate sector, perhaps in league with supporting political entities, as it focuses quite specifically on job skills. As such, this movement tends to neglect humanities and arts subjects such as music. Additionally, Ravitch (2009) has argued, 'skill-centred, knowledge-free education has never worked. The same ideas proposed today by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills movement were iterated and reiterated by pedagogues across the 20<sup>th</sup> century'. Here Ravitch may be referring to the educational discourse, and policies such as the National Defense Education Act (1958), which arose from the technological rivalries associated with the arms race and space exploration of the Cold War (*cf.* Burke, 2005).

In Australian curriculum documents, creative thinking is valued as a twenty-first century skill that is worthy of attention and inclusion in not only music education, but education in general (MCEETYA, 2008; ACARA, 2011; VELs, 2008). Often creativity is ambiguously defined so as to appear relevant to all subject learning areas. Within ACARA and VELs music improvisation is often grouped with composition and recognised as a creative process. The VCE Music Study Design (2010) categorises improvisation as unprepared performance and sets it alongside sight-reading as an option from which to choose. If chosen, the student improviser must then perform within a set style. While it is acknowledged in these curriculum documents, there is an apparent restraint and marginalisation of improvisation. Among possible reasons behind this current state of affairs, inadequate improvisation assessment methods may prove the catalyst. Paralleling Paynter's assessment of composition education, insufficient improvisation education amongst teachers may also be a contributing factor.

At this point in time the yet to be finalised national Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2011) sees music as a part of the arts learning area, rather than respecting music as a worthy learning area in its own right. Investigating the inclusion of music improvisation within these documents I found its

absence conspicuous. The National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) supports this analysis, stating existing curriculum documents were insufficient in regards to instrumental music, creativity, composition, and pertinently improvisation (DEST, 2005: x). It suggested national government and state school systems *initiate and lead* curriculum development focusing on improvisation, among other areas of music creation. Practising teachers, principles, and government and non-government representatives responded at the National Music Workshop (2007). While they reaffirmed the findings of the NRSME they did not discuss improvisation as a part of curriculum policy development. The participants, however, cited the inclusion of a composition requirement in the NSW curriculum as an *important element*. They also noted the NSW Young Composers' Project as a programme that involved professional musicians working with students in a *creative way*. In Victoria the development of the Music Style and Composition stream for VCE students mirrors these values. Like the role of music within the projected Australian curriculum, improvisation is relegated to an accompanying role, sidelined from an equal position within the syllabi.

A way forward in curriculum development may be sought through the reexamination of music education history. As Burke (2005) acknowledged, philosophies of music education and curriculum priorities are cyclical. Particularly pertinent to this study is the research undertaken in the U.S. by the Manhattanville Music Curriculum Program (MMCP) between 1965 and 1970. Stemming from the increased funding in education spurred by the space race, the MMCP was a major project that attempted to create an alternative curriculum for K-12 level music education. Research into the development of the curriculum was undertaken by a body consisting of musical performers, music educators and general educators. Influenced by the educational psychology of Bruner, they developed a cyclical spiral curriculum that revolved around the development of sound, rhythm, pulse, meter, duration, pitch, timbre, volume, form, texture, expression, and style. This was followed by pilot testing and revisions to the curriculum. The MMCP described the teacher as

a facilitator or stimulator for creative thinking. It was developed as a flexible guide for teachers to assist learners to 'think, create and explore music in the manner of a musician' (Thomas, 1970: 17). In this sense it mirrors the learner-centred pragmatism of Dewey and the informal learning espoused by Green. Moreover, the development of the knowledge of the underlying principles of music through creative musical assignments is the MMCP's defining feature; and could be seen to parallel the work of Schafer and Paynter. Despite the significant funding, research, pilot testing and revisions; despite these findings being finalised into a curriculum outline; and despite the teacher reeducation program; the MMCP was not widely accepted by teachers or administrators. The unfamiliar nature of the new approaches were seen by former project participants as a contributing factor. Kyung-Suk believed the emphasis on 'creativity, twentieth-century musical idioms, and the teacher's role as a guide and resource person' (Kyung-Suk, 2010: 94-95) further alienated the people asked to implement the curriculum. Furthermore, the author noted the separation of the MMCP from established organisations, such as NAFME, which might have provided support, likely effected the widespread implementation of the programme. Kyung-Suk, however, did not see that perhaps the strength of the MMCP was its capacity to act independently of such organisations. Though after independent development of the curriculum, support from educational bodies was no doubt required. Discourse between musical performers, music educators and general educators generated what they saw as an exemplary curriculum model. At the centre of the model was an emphasis on creativity that included not only composition but also improvisation. The failure of the MMCP may have discouraged the implementation of similar curriculum models in the U.S. and here in Australia. The results of that major five year programme, however, could be used to inform future curriculum development which values creative musical processes such as improvisation.

### 3.6 Improvising for Musical Skill Development

As music improvisation involves a holistic engagement with physical (sound and body), sociological and psychological (cognitive, psychomotor and affective) processes it requires the development of skills in these areas. Many existing approaches to improvisation education precede the sociomusical engagement with, or separate it from, the abstract concepts or skills — for example, the prevailing jazz education methods. A counter narrative in contemporary literature, however, posits that these skills should be developed through the practice of improvisation. As Thomson (2008) states,

the process of making collaborative music in real time ... is a fundamentally pedagogical one, in which musicians actively learn from their collaborators during performance. Thus, ongoing pedagogical engagement is a necessary trait of a responsive, responsible improviser. The nature of authority within this pedagogical model — the roles of teacher and student — resists fixity and, at its best, this authority circulates fluidly within any ensemble, a process that informs the relationships between players that are articulated and negotiated primarily through sound. (Thomson, 2008)

As initiates may not yet possess the skills required to negotiate collaborative music in real time through sound, conservative thought may criticise this approach. Nevertheless, alongside Thomson, Borgo, Bennink, Hickey and Stevens, for example, all accentuate learning improvisation through practice. The chord-scale centred thought of Baker also acknowledges ‘Improvisation can be made to serve the teaching of virtually every facet of music’ (Baker, 1980: 49), though he may well be referring to the study of these facets removed from their ecological environment.

The incorporation of improvisation into the music curriculum could be seen to support the development of musical skills. As McPherson (1993) states, ‘there is a widespread consensus that aural performance activities [later defined by the author as improvising, playing by ear and from memory] enable, strengthen and facilitate the development of musical skills and understandings’ (McPherson, 1993: 28). The results of Azzara’s (1993) case

study on the effects of improvisation on music achievement of fifth–grade level learners further supports this notion. As he concluded,

... Improvisation study contributes to the improvement of fifth–grade students' instrumental music performance achievement. While additional research is necessary, the results of this study provide preliminary evidence to suggest that improvisation skills contribute to more accurate student instrumental performances when reading from notation. (Azzara, 1993: 339)

Reconsidering improvisation education as an embodied, situated and distributed practice highlights the importance of developing listening and *audiation* skills. The term audiation was coined by Gordon ([1997] 2007), a participant of MMCP research, while developing his music–learning theory. Gordon's theory is based on the belief that music must first be audiated, that is to hear and comprehend the sound of music in the mind, whether physically present or imagined. His learning sequence stems from the view that the process of learning music is comparable to language acquisition — students learn to listen and speak a language before learning to read and write symbolic representations of language (for further discourse on music as a language see Bernstein, 1976; Bridges, 1984; Dewey, 1934; Philpott, 2001; Sloboda, 1985; Sudnow, 1978). For Gordon, improvisation is centred on the development of audiation skills. Indeed he suggested that for meaningful improvisation to occur the musical material must be audiated. While this may hold truths, his teaching of audiation is founded in the learning of harmonic and rhythmic patterns, which distances improvisation education from the ecological performance practice this study propounds.

The *sound–before–symbol* approach espoused by Gordon has also been recognised by many music education writers and researchers as an essential way for learners to develop skills associated with audiation (Azzara, 1993; Feldman & Contzius, 2011; Green, 2001, 2008; Kratus, 1991, 1995; McPherson, 1994; Musco, 2006; Priest, 1989; Rosevear, 1996). This belief is also common amongst the pedagogical methods of Dalcroze, Kodály, Orff and particularly Suzuki. Despite research (Azzara, 1993; Musco, 2006; Priest, 1989) that suggests

the sound–before–symbol approach has a positive effect on the development of musical skills, Rosevear (1996) observed limited implementation, and even disregard, of activities that promoted such an approach in Australia. Through her study into the role of playing–by–ear and improvisation in music education in South Australian secondary schools, Rosevear perceived that, ‘Many music teachers, however, are inadequately equipped to deal with these aspects as they probably have limited experience of them in their own backgrounds and because tertiary institutions rarely incorporate them’ (Rosevear, 1996: 3). This mirrors Burke’s (2005) evaluation of the inadequacy of teacher training to balance performance education with the creative process of composition. In her study of informal learning Green (2008) found that teachers were initially reluctant to allow students more agency, perhaps because outcomes were unclear or beyond their control (Green, 2008: 31–34). When teachers in Green’s case study exercised some control, intervening only when necessary, they realised their prior expectations of students was too low — students were capable of progressing without overbearing teacher intervention. The reason teachers might have been unwilling to exercise a sound–before–symbol approach could also be related to the forfeiture of control. Though as the teachers in Green’s research concluded, a leap of faith by the teacher, and/or teacher trust in learners, is required to enact new methods of music education which depart radically from the *status quo*.

Free improvisation most commonly involves musical activity without the direction of traditional Western notation or alternative forms of scoring. It tends to treat the music ecologically, as it does not focus on the improvisatory interpretation of preconceived musical forms. This approach to improvisation, therefore, has the potential to contribute to the development of audiation skills through the central position it places on sound–before–symbol. The creative pedagogical methods of Schafer and Paynter, through their embrace of Cagean ideals, highlight critical listening, which may also transform audiation ability. Facility in audiation has been seen as essential to the development of improvisation. As noted earlier, Dove (in Lange, 2011) stressed the importance

of critical listening to develop the intentional production of sound gestures. Turetzky, a contrabass improviser/educator, develops learners' audiation skills by asking them to sing a phrase and reproduce it on their instrument. He asserts, 'If you can't do it, you are depending on scales. It is not visceral. It is not integral to your being. It doesn't express anything except the tricks that you have learned' (in Borgo, 2007: 66).

Beyond contributing to the development of audiation, participation in improvisation has been seen by Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves (2009) to develop creative thinking skills. They utilised Webster's *Measure of Creative Thinking in Music* (MCTM II; Webster, 1987b, 1994) to assess the effects of improvisation on the creative thinking of six-year-olds in terms of four musical parameters: extensiveness (duration), flexibility (pitch, tempo, dynamics), originality and syntax (patterns of repetition, development, and contrast). Through Webster's lens the experimental group showed significant development of creative thinking in terms of the set parameters. The main concern of Webster's MCTM II is the creative thinking of the individual and the assessment of a creative product. As different musical qualities emerge from the intermusician dynamics of ensembles (MacDonald, Miell, & Mitchell, 2002; Wiggins, 1999), it was acknowledged by Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves that future research could involve the examination of ecological factors. Broadening such research, they recognised, to also incorporate a variety of age levels and sociocultural backgrounds could provide information on the affect of 'enculturation into different musical cultures and genres ... and whether they can promote or inhibit the development of creative thinking' (Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009). Alongside the positive affects of improvisation upon the development of creative thinking and audiation skills, a study of Australian adults by McPherson (1994: 154-162) linked playing by ear and improvisation to ongoing participation and enjoyment in music making. He found that 74% of those who had not learned to improvise discontinued their playing, while significantly less (22%) discontinued if they had learned to improvise. It was suggested by McPherson that involvement with visual, aural

and creative skills at school affected people's musical life beyond schooling.

### **3.7 The sociology of music improvisation: A community practice**

Group improvisation is based upon interaction — the interaction of sounds and the interaction that is found within the social groups that surround and are embedded in musical participation. Through ethnomusicological research based on musical transcriptions and interviews with respected jazz rhythm section musicians, Monson (1996) recognised that sound and social interaction was a fundamental feature of jazz improvisation. Moreover, the author recognised that social interaction contributed to the formation of cultural meanings and 'ideologies that inform the interpretation of jazz in American society' (Monson, 1996: 2). Addressing this theme, as it were, Borgo (2007: 63) criticises current academic approaches to improvisation pedagogy for insufficiently addressing the role social interactions play in learning.

From another standpoint, Willox *et al.* (2011), implemented musical improvisation pedagogy as a means to enact social change in a community based outreach programme. They utilised pedagogical exercises from Stevens' workshop manual *Search and Reflect* (2007), reviewed above. Their research, which emanated from ICASP, concluded that learning improvisation enhances students' self-expression, personal growth, cooperation skills, development of critical listening skills and breaking down student-teacher hierarchies. Furthermore, the authors contended that creative artistic expression could enhance personal development and develop community cohesion and growth. Willox *et al.* link the dialogic, open-ended, listening, trust and social obligation elements of improvisation to the critical pedagogical theories of Freire (2000), which stresses problem-posing and dialogic pedagogy. In the case study mentioned earlier, Lange similarly found that participation in the MECA music improvisation ensemble contributed to understanding power relations, *senses of themselves*, changed musical practice and 'their awareness and their use of the urban space' (Lange, 2011). She acknowledged the ethnic, class and age diversity, and the environments in which classes and performances were situated also

contributed to the observed transformations. This reflects Vygotsky's notions of social learning: '... activities of the mind, including creativity, cannot be separated from overt behavior, from the external materials being used, or from the social context in which the activities occur' (in Borgo, 2005: 174).

Reflecting Freire's critical pedagogy, Sawyer (2004) draws on observations and interviews with actors and directors about their rehearsal, performance and improvisation training activities so as to develop effective creative collaboration and non-musical improvisational classroom discussion. He compares the social constructivist notions of collaboration with improvisation in theatre training and theatre performance settings. Referring to his own previous research, Sawyer believes improvisation is a conversational skill that can be taught. He supports these findings with professional development programmes in the U.S. that found teachers who participated in improvisational conversation training began to focus on a 'student-centered facilitative style, and both teachers and students asked more higher-order questions' (Sawyer, 2004: 191). Though not in the field of music, his use of frameworks taken from the theatre world which guide improvisation can be seen as analogous to those implemented by musical improviser/pedagogues interviewed by Bailey (1996). Sawyer's research provides advocacy for the collaborative, exploratory nature of improvisation in a classroom setting.

Lange, Willox *et al.* and Sawyer explore perhaps one of the critical issues of education — the power balance between student and teacher. These authors saw improvisation as a 'resonant pedagogical model' that promotes student centred activity in the educational process. Moreover, improvisation, as Willox *et al.* contended, provides a way for teachers and students to commit to jointly becoming learners and knowledge producers. Through sociomusical interactions Willox *et al.* (2011) observed that improvisation could contribute to positive personal and social development. The social elements of improvisation, however, have yet to be widely incorporated into academic environments (Lewis, 2000). Lewis noted that some musicians believed improvisation could not be learnt in an academic environment

as the organisational hierarchy in such environments was seen to be in opposition to improvisation as a complex system. To overcome these criticisms of improvisation education, Lewis proposed long-term residencies for experienced improvisers in academic environments. He also suggested conferences that should involve artists outside academic circles, which would ideally 'facilitate the exchange of information, methodologies, and musical ideas among improvisors [*sic*]' (Lewis, 2000: 108). These ideas might provide inspiration for teachers to develop their pedagogy to mirror professional musical community practice.

### 3.8 The psychology of music improvisation

Music is unique among curriculum subjects in academies as it involves dynamic interplay between cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of learning. Thomas (1991: 28) suggested that the 'nature and extent of cognitive involvement' in improvisation, which in his view involves deductive, inductive and intuitive musical thought, is what distinguishes it from the majority of other musical practices. Adding to this definition of the cognition involved in music creation, Webster (1988) proposed that divergent and convergent thinking skills are integrated in the creation of a musical product. This may also hold true for the process of improvisation. Pressing (1987) reduces the mental processing associated with improvisation to '*aspects* and then into *types of analytical representation* and these into characterizing elements' (see Azzara, 2002: 174). He sees improvisation as a process that centres around event clusters which continue or interrupt the stream of elements unfolding. The complexity of improvisation is apparent in these attempts to describe the cognitive processes involved in its performance. As Denley (see Bailey, 1992: 108) highlighted, however, these processes are inextricably linked with psychomotor and affective action and thought and it is this holistic entanglement which defines improvisation. Separating each musical characteristic from such a holistic entanglement may limit the development of improvisation skills. This idea mirrors Gillman's (1986: 17) caution that

focusing on individual skills ‘... can easily result in neglect of those abilities of instinct which are within us all.’

The majority of jazz music education, perhaps the dominant improvisation pedagogy in the West, relies upon patterns and models to indoctrinate musicians in idiomatically appropriate music (Baker, 1971, 1988; Bergonzi, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003; Coker, 1964, 1970, 1997, 2002; Pressing, 1987; Berliner, 1994; Mehldau, 2003). Outside the jazz idiom Hickey (2009) identified a similar approach to improvisation pedagogy in the Music Learning Theory of Gordon (2003) and the Orff–Schulwerk method. It could be seen that reliance upon the rote teaching of patterns and models limits the creative thinking of the learner, whether unintentionally or otherwise. Antithetical to the Socratic critical pedagogy of Freire (2000), this approach could also be considered teacher–centred education that controls thinking and action. These limited approaches appear to reduce and simplify the complex system that Borgo (2007) believes improvisation to be. In effect the state of improvisation is changed to a product, or a complicated system, rather than a process. Borgo’s solution to this existing paradigm is to think of improvisation learning and teaching in ecological systems terms — of knowledge as embodied, situated, and distributed. This theory reflects the sociomusical interactions found inherent in group improvisation by Lewis (2000) and Monson (1996), and offers a way of conceptualising an improvisation education environment that recognises the social functions of the music. It could also be seen to acknowledge and encompass the holistic entanglement of cognitive, psychomotor and affective processes. Borgo acknowledged the influence of the musicologist Clarke (2005), who used ecological systems theory to examine musical meaning. The social constructivist views of Vygotsky exhibit similarities to his focus upon environmental factors. Borgo insists that descriptive models of knowledge, exemplified in much jazz pedagogy, fail to fully capture the interrelationship between perception, action and memory. The theories of embodied, situated, and distributed cognition, he believes, should be embraced alongside descriptive methods and existing working educational approaches.

The ecological way of viewing improvisation echoes Bourdieu's practice theory, which Monson (2009) extends into the world of jazz improvisation. It also finds resonance in Dalcroze's pedagogical approach, which, while generally implemented in early childhood education, also offers a way of embracing the interconnectedness of the mind and body (see Juntunen & Westerlund, 2001). Unlike Borgo however, Dalcroze embraces an embodiment centred on expression rather than perception.

## 4 Further Discussion

DEVELOPED IN THE REALM OF the jazz academy, the majority of jazz improvisation education was seen by Prouty to evolve somewhat separately from authentic real world practices. He saw the removal of jazz improvisation from the context of its origins to be detrimental to the teaching and learning of jazz improvisation in an academic environment. The prevalence of chord-scale, theory-based education was seen to limit learners' contact with situated, distributed and embodied forms of knowledge vital to the performance practice of the music. It created a divide between the academy and the jazz community at large. From discourse with master jazz improvisers who had not learnt in academic environments, Berliner found the learning of improvisation to naturally progress from practice to theory. The theory was subsequently interwoven into the practice upon which it was centred. Musicians in Berliner's study described the practice-based learning process not only as a solitary act, but also a collective activity which they share with like-minded musicians in the jazz community. Indeed throughout his research there were many examples of jazz learning as collaborative community practice, situated in an environment, distributed amongst performers/teachers and listeners/learners. Despite this knowledge Murphy (1994) and Prouty (2005) observed that these ecological forms of learning rarely occur inside the insulated environment of jazz education systems.

Through treating improvisation as a community play activity, the Dalcroze, Kodály and Orff methods were seen to focus, in part, on ecological thought. In a similar vein to jazz education, however, Dalcroze and Kodály restricted learners through patterns and models. The relegation of improvisation to the Piagetian developmental activity of play has confined these three methods to early childhood education. Hickey's embrace of free improvisation could also be seen to derive from the same terrain. While Piaget's cognitive development theories may still hold relevance in the broader field of education, they perhaps do not well suit music and particularly the holistic ideal of learning improvisation. Secondary level music education in Australia could be seen to follow Piaget's stages in its focus upon music notation or the symbolic representation of sound, which aligns with his formal operation stage. The abandonment of ecological community play mirrors Cardew's generalised critique of music education as controlling and teacher-centred. Ecological community play could perhaps be more widely incorporated at secondary level academies alongside the introduction of abstract musical theory. Furthermore, the sound-before-symbol approach, a common feature of the Dalcroze, Kodály and Orff methods, was seen to be neglected at secondary and tertiary levels, discouraging embodied, situated and distributed musical thought.

In the literature surveyed some creative approaches to music education that incorporated elements of ecological musical thought surfaced. Schafer and Paynter embraced ecological listening ideals which exhibit correspondence with improvisation. Their approaches touched upon improvisation as a means to develop compositional material. If expanded to incorporate a distinction between these creative processes, their approaches may prove valuable in developing improvisation curriculum.

The context driven improvisation education practices instigated by free improvisers such as Bennink, Dove, Dresser and Stevens were examples of teaching centred upon ecological systems thinking. Their practices could be seen to realise Hickey's call for improvisation education to begin with free improvisation, reversing Pressing's historical stages of improvisation

development and embracing the most contemporary of improvisation practices. The ecological-like ideology that drives these practices are aptly summarised by Parker, who stated,

My ideal music is played by groups of musicians who choose one another's company and who improvise freely in relation to the precise emotional, acoustic, psychological and other less tangible atmospheric conditions in effect at the time the music is played. (in Bailey, 1992: 81)

Free improvisers' radical departure from the constrictions of genre theory, endorsed by much jazz education, and their embrace of community practice could be mimicked in the academy to engage learners in the here and now of ecological systems thought. As a genre of music is a cultural system, 'a customary way of seeing the world and acting in it' (Lange, 2011), learning that genre entails becoming conversant in that system. Lange and Willox *et al.* found that the egalitarian ideals of free improvisation promoted social awareness amongst learners.

Green's informal learning approach, which mirrors free improvisation's focus on critical listening and community practice, offered a model of music education that displayed elements of ecological systems thought which could be adopted/adapted by improvisation teachers.

To support the implementation of reconsidered improvisation education practices, policy and assessment must evolve. If improvisation education is an ecological practice, as I believe it is, policy and assessment must follow ecological systems thinking. In assessment it was found that existing summative models are inadequate in their approach as they were seen to focus on products and provide little information for learner development. To reflect ecological systems thinking I argued the development of quality criterion-referenced assessment tools were necessary. Additionally, objective, subjective, formal, informal, self and peer forms of assessment could also contribute to the fundamental transformation of learner knowledge.

Policy in Australia prioritised the development of performance skills above the creative processes of improvisation and composition. While such policies acknowledged creative thinking as a skill worthy of development, overt references to improvisation and composition in secondary level music curriculum were rare. A clear definition of creative thinking skills in such documents, which could incorporate ecological systems theory, could potentially encourage the implementation of reconsidered community improvisation education practices in the academy.

## 5 Conclusions

THIS STUDY HAS ATTEMPTED TO describe, interpret and evaluate contemporary music improvisation education theory. The review of literature in this domain has revealed the need for music education to reconsider its practice. This author does not view improvisation as ideologically superior to other forms of music performance or creation. Indeed it has its place alongside all other forms of musical practice. Improvisation, I contend, is currently undervalued as an ecological community practice in academic environments. At secondary level education in Australia the creative activities of improvisation and composition have been neglected. Western music education at primary and tertiary levels worldwide commonly utilises rote methods to inculcate patterns and models of improvisation. Convention dictates the prioritisation of performance skill development, rather than an equal valuation of improvisation and composition. At early childhood levels of education music improvisation is often treated as play, which may result in its discontinuation at higher levels of education. Institutionally derived jazz education focuses extensively on harmony via the predominance of the chord-scale approach. While Schafer and Paynter offer creative alternatives to mainstream music education they treat improvisation as a means to develop material for compositions, transforming its nature from process to product. Current methods of assessment also see improvisation as a product, not taking into account the embodied, situated and distributed knowledge from which it

is created. Policy and curriculum documents illustrate a comparable picture.

The analysis of the failure of the MMCP found the support of established organisations was not required for the development of curriculum. Support, however, was necessary for the implementation of practical reforms. Despite studies that showed improvisation to be a valuable tool in the development of audiation and creative skills; in the promotion of ongoing participation in music after schooling; extrinsically, in the fostering of social awareness and personal agency; and, in the unique holistic entanglement of cognitive, psychomotor and affective psychological domains, it has yet to find an equal position in Western music education. Viewing improvisation through the lens of ecological systems theory attempts to encompass and describe the complex system that it is. The diverse physical, sociological and psychological facets of improvisatory practice, and the messy nature of humanity that Vincs sees improvisation ideally representing, constitute its strength and yet contribute to the difficulty in meaningfully transmitting and transforming knowledge in this field. The educational approaches initiated by free improvisers such as Stevens, Bennink, Dove and Dresser, offer, I believe, a way of viewing improvisation education ecologically. That most of these teachers are renowned master improvisers potentially effects their teaching abilities. Though they might intimately know improvisation processes, it is a teachers duty to engage, communicate and meaningfully transform learner understanding. The strength of the approaches of these musician–educators is the material they engage learners with. They allow for community learning, value diversity and encompass embodied, situated and distributed ways of thinking. They encourage learners to explore the boundaries of knowledge, which, I argue, is the ideal for improvisation and the ideal for learning.

At the core of this study, perhaps, is Freirian discourse about cultural transmission. The promotion of community practice in academic environments, I believe, is key to engaging learners through ecological systems thinking in the creation of improvisation knowledge. Improvisation teaching methods which support the critical awareness of learners, such as those of Stevens, Bennink,

Dove and Dresser, may prove valuable in reforming music education. A balance between transmitting knowledge and empowering learners with skills so they can transform knowledge themselves is perhaps the ideal of pedagogy. New music improvisation communities, such as the free improvisers mentioned above, could provide inspiration which could contribute to the emancipation from the existent strictures revealed in the literature hereinbefore examined. Fundamentally, this change could contribute not only to the personal, social and musical development of students and teachers, but also to the democratisation of academic institutions. For these transformations to occur, however, teacher education and curriculum development must be addressed. In the writings reviewed above little attention is given to these sectors of music education. It is perhaps from these areas, however, that substantial change is likely to stem.

### **5.1 Implications for teaching practice**

The fundamental implications of this paper for future teaching practice are that exposure to improvisation at all levels of music education could be greatly increased. When taught it should reflect its ideal nature as an embodied, situated and distributed process. This pragmatic viewpoint is intended to reflect and grow alongside the ideals of contemporary practice. It implies that when abstract concepts are confronted as part of musical discourse they are transformed through pragmatic exploration. Indeed the exploration of theories could, and perhaps should, arise from practice.

Secondary classroom music improvisation education perhaps should continue the Dalcroze, Kodály and Orff methods' incorporation of improvisation as play, as it could be seen to promote ecological systems thinking. This might occur alongside the introduction and exploration of abstract, formal operational thought. It could adapt Green's informal learning approach, which had learners form small ensembles and allowed for a degree of student autonomy. Alternatively, secondary classroom music teachers could involve all learners in an ensemble exploring methods derived from Stevens' *Search and Reflect*.

Tertiary improvisation education and jazz institutions could begin to examine a wider scope of practice reflecting the diversity of contemporary improvised music. The broader music education fields, including the popular, classical and composition domains, may also benefit from the incorporation and practical examination of ecological improvisation.

## **5.2 Implications for future research**

The inductive analysis of literature conducted above surfaced areas of improvisation education studies that require further research. A qualitative and quantitative case study of existing improvisation education practices, and the incidence thereof in Australia, could highlight current approaches so as to provide a foundation from which to evaluate and evolve teaching methods. Conducted over primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, such a study could highlight points of difference; assess the developmental progression; and might reveal practices that could be transposed between these three levels. An accompanying survey might reveal the relationship between existent practices and teacher and student attitudes toward improvisation education.

Following on from the research conducted by McPherson (1994), a study could examine the correlation between playing by ear and improvisation, which might further clarify the effect these processes have on music retention. Furthermore, such research could also consider the effect sound-before-symbol approaches and playing by ear ability have on improvisation skills development. To my knowledge there is an absence of data on the degree of implementation of sound-before-symbol approaches in music education in Australia. Findings from such a study could also support the future development of improvisation education.

Certain musical instruments may be associated with improvisation. Research in this area may highlight the need to broaden the scope of improvisation education to include all instrumental groups. For the future of improvisation education the inducement of all instrument groups to participate in the

community practice of improvisation in academies could encourage wider acceptance and practice of this creative process.

The above proposals could contribute to further understanding of improvisation and fields of knowledge that may effect future practice. Ultimately, such studies have the potential to inform and stimulate the development or reformation of a curriculum that equally values performance of repertoire, composition and ecological improvisation. The development of such a curriculum may well also benefit from knowledge generated by a focus group of practitioners in the field, such as music improvisers, composers, performers of repertoire, music educators and general educators. As was found by the MMCP, the success of a reformed curriculum requires the support of established organisations at local, state and federal levels. With such support lies the future of improvisation education.

The most wide reaching changes, however, are likely to stem from the education of teachers, future and present. Reconsidering music education practice to embrace the territory of ecological improvisation could prove fruitful for the sociological, psychological and musical transformation of learners at all levels of education.

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**Author/s:**

Wallace, Michael Edmund

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