Improvisation Within the Beginning Band Curriculum: Creating a Comprehensive Improvisational Resource for the Middle School Music Educator

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IMPROVISATION WITHIN THE BEGINNING BAND CURRICULUM:
CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVISATIONAL RESOURCE FOR THE
MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC EDUCATOR

By

Christopher R. Gagne

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
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Numerous studies and previously conducted research has contributed to a prevalent view that the study of improvisation is an integral component to a holistic music education. The MENC embraced this view of the importance of improvisational studies in 1994 when it established improvisation instruction as a core standard of music education. However, a multitude of surveys observing music educator practices conducted in the wake of this declaration by the MENC revealed improvisation as a classroom activity lagging behind the other core standards in terms of student practice and teacher emphasis. Findings from these surveys also suggest that many educators lack a requisite background in improvisational studies necessary to teach the subject effectively or make appropriately informed decisions on what improvisational methodologies to potentially reference or include within their general music curriculum. Research further suggested that this lack of improvisational instruction was particularly pronounced within the beginning band setting; a staple of music programs within a majority of school systems. The current study was conducted in an effort to provide an improvisational resource to the middle school music educator as an attempt to confront these observed obstacles to the teaching of improvisation within the beginning band context.
The current study sought to identify key strategies to beginning improvisational instruction as gathered from a comprehensive survey of research and published pedagogies. Once these primary approaches were identified, exercises were offered applying these approaches within the context of a beginning band environment. An attempt was made to identify the primary obstacles to teaching improvisation within the general music setting, and research-derived suggestions for circumventing these common concerns were provided along with example exercises. A survey of improvisational pedagogies with potential application within the middle school general music setting was provided as well as an overview of research related to the factors that influence student achievement in improvisation.

It was concluded that the six primary applications for beginning improvisation instruction, as conveyed by the research, are; (1) free improvisational exercises, (2) single pitch improvisational exercises, (3) call & response activities, (4) pentatonic improvisational exercises, (5) chord-scale improvisational instruction and, (6) blues-form improvisational exercises. Example exercises were offered applying these approaches to the beginning band setting. The two primary impediments to improvisational instruction within the classroom setting were identified through the research as, (1) a lack of instructional time and, (2) student inhibition when tasked with improvisational objectives. The research provided a series of approaches to mitigating these concerns and exercises were provided applying these approaches to the beginning band setting. Suggestions for future research are provided, including a suggestion that more research is conducted collecting improvisational models for the purpose of providing a range of options for incorporating this neglected subject into most any school music curricula and/or context.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The positive correlation between an instrumental music education and overall academic achievement has been observed both anecdotally\(^1\) as well as through a multitude of research studies\(^2, 3, 4\). These studies provide considerable evidence that involvement with an instrumental music program can be a strong predictor of student success in mathematics and other school subject matter\(^5\). The case has also been made that this relationship has a particularly significant relevance at the middle school educational level\(^6\). Instrumental band programs are a common construct of beginning to intermediate music curricula within school systems nationally\(^7\). Students traditionally begin these instrumental studies at the 4\(^{th}\) or 5\(^{th}\) grade level, although this starting point has been shown to be considerably variable\(^8\). With the theoretical benefits of an


\(^{4}\) Catterall, James, Richard Chapleau, and John Iwanaga. "Involvement in the arts and human development: General involvement and intensive involvement in music and theater arts." *The Imagination Project at the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles* (September 1999): 1-18.

\(^{5}\) Ibid.


instrumental music education extending far beyond simple technical skill attainment and carrying potential influence into a more universal realm of scholastic achievement (and acknowledging the centrality of wind ensembles within school music programs) exploring means of providing holistic and comprehensive instrumental music training through a beginning band pedagogy has potentially wide ranging and meaningful ramifications.

Improvisational instruction, as a component to a general music curriculum, has exhibited the kind of promising benefits to the comprehensive development of beginning music students that demands thoughtful consideration from educators. Research studies conducted by Azzara\textsuperscript{10}, Stringham\textsuperscript{11} and Montano\textsuperscript{12} have all demonstrated a significant correlation between improvisational studies and overall musical achievement when taught as part of a general music curriculum for beginning to intermediate students. Some researchers have extended the observed benefit of these improvisational studies to include academic achievement\textsuperscript{13} and even proposed theoretical benefits for professional achievement\textsuperscript{14, 15}. The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) codified the value

\textsuperscript{10} Azzara, Christopher David, “The effect of audiation-based improvisation techniques on the music achievement of elementary instrumental music students.” Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, 1992.

\textsuperscript{11} Stringham, David Andrew, “Improvisation and composition in a high school instrumental music curriculum.” Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music. 2010.

\textsuperscript{12} Montano, David Ricardo, “The effect of improvisation in given rhythms on rhythmic accuracy in sight reading achievement by college elementary group piano students.” DMA Essay, Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1983.


\textsuperscript{14} Weick, Karl E., “Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis.”  
of improvisational studies for the developing music student in 1994 when they established improvisation as one of the nine core National Standards of music education\textsuperscript{16}.

There are various means by which improvisation is seen to positively supplement the education of young and developing musicians. Lehman, Sloboda and Woody observed that;

The generative acts of composing and improvising serve to increase the depth of a musician's understanding of musical structure, which in turn positively benefits his musical performance and learning by enhancing the skills of sight-reading, memorization, and creativity\textsuperscript{17}.

Experimenting in an improvisational context with some regularity promotes a comprehensive understanding of music and impacts numerous components of musical performance\textsuperscript{18, 19} and cognition\textsuperscript{20}.

While a significant percentage of music educators may embrace the view that an improvisational element belongs in an ideal and comprehensive music curriculum, many struggle to find ways of incorporating these studies into their general music class and/or


\textsuperscript{17} Lehmann, Andreas C., John A. Sloboda, and Robert H. Woody. Psychology for musicians: understanding and acquiring the skills. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Ch.7, pp. 1.

\textsuperscript{18} Wilson, John H. The effects of group improvisation on the musical growth of selected high school instrumentalists. Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1970.

\textsuperscript{19} Montano, “The effect of improvisation in given rhythms on rhythmic accuracy,” 1983.

beginning band environment\textsuperscript{21}. Despite a broad acceptance of the benefit of an improvisational education and the MENC establishment of improvisation as a core component of a proper K-12 musical education, improvisation still lags behind instruction of the other standards in general music classrooms\textsuperscript{22}. Many educators utilize the *jazz ensemble* or a specialized *improvisation-class* setting to introduce improvisational instruction. The teaching of improvisational concepts are seemingly reserved for only the more advanced students or the students who go well out of their way to pursue a jazz education (or an education in another improvisational idiom) on their own time, typically after normal school hours\textsuperscript{23}.

Music educators express that a general lack of knowledge of improvisational concepts, overall time constraints and student anxiety related to public performance have all contributed to inhibit the growth of improvisational studies in more traditional or universal settings (i.e. the band rehearsal and general music classes)\textsuperscript{24}. Numerous studies were conducted in the wake of the MENC establishment of the *National Standards* of music education examining teacher preparation and practices. Many of these surveys explored the ability of music educators to accommodate these established standards within their curricula\textsuperscript{25, 26, 27, 28, 29}. Consistently, improvisation (along with composition)

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} Byo, Susan J. “General education classroom teachers' and music specialists' perceived ability to implement the National Standards for Music Education.” Thesis (Ed. D.) Florida Atlantic University, 1997.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
was observed to be the most challenging standard to incorporate into the general music curriculum.\(^{30}\)

As previously noted, the most common context for improvisational instruction at the middle school level tends to occur within the environment of a jazz ensemble rehearsal or performance. The construction of a jazz ensemble traditionally manifests as an extracurricular activity (or in other words, an activity that takes place outside the confines of a standard, in-school curriculum). Utilizing the co-curricular offering of a jazz ensemble as a means to teach improvisation to students can offer a convenient alternative for educators who are hindered by a lack of instructional time within their traditional general music curriculum. Ensemble and class offerings occurring outside of the confines of the general music curricula can afford educators an opportunity to teach a subject such as improvisation without having to compromise their other curricular priorities. Additionally, the lack of educator familiarity with improvisational concepts can sometimes be less of a concern within this extracurricular setting as occasionally an adjunct teacher with more extensive improvisational experience can be brought in to lead jazz ensembles or teach improvisation classes.

\(^{27}\) Byo, “General education classroom teachers' perceived ability to implement the National Standards,” 1997.
In the cases where a fulltime music educator (perhaps without a significant background in improvisational studies) instructs an extracurricular jazz ensemble, they can choose to lean on a broad repertory of published jazz improvisational methodologies to assist them in communicating particular concepts to these participating students. From the instructional texts of Baker,\textsuperscript{31} Coker,\textsuperscript{32} and Aebersold,\textsuperscript{33} all the way through to the more recent publications of Crook,\textsuperscript{34} Bergonzi,\textsuperscript{35} and Liebman,\textsuperscript{36} there is a vast array of established resources available to any music educator interested in teaching certain concepts of jazz improvisation to students with a demonstrated interest in learning about jazz idiomatic improvisation. In his attempt to “review as many jazz improvisation materials as possible,” Kuzmich\textsuperscript{37} evaluated 795 readily available texts dedicated to a remarkable assortment of jazz improvisational topics while acknowledging the survey was not entirely comprehensive. In the 17 years since that publication was produced, this enormous amount of improvisational resources available to the prospective music educator has assuredly grown even larger. While this multitude of published pedagogy offers a potential wealth of information for the music educator, this sea of literature could


\textsuperscript{33} Aebersold, Jamey. \textit{A new approach to jazz improvisation.} New Albany, Ind: Jamey Aebersold, 1967.


just as easily serve to overwhelm the music educator simply seeking to identify the most appropriate and practically applicable material for his or her classroom.

A majority of these aforementioned materials are well suited for private study and perhaps even directed study in small group settings, but are not particularly appropriate for application in large ensemble settings. Additionally, these are also a specialized array of resources; usually intended for an exclusive pool of students and developed to communicate a very specific idiom or improvisational concept. These materials are not traditionally designed for use within the general music setting and, more directly, it is not entirely practical to assume a music educator could fully incorporate an idiomatically appropriate jazz improvisation pedagogy into their pre-existent music curricula at the middle school level considering the time constraints and the numerous topical demands required for teaching at that particular level. This pedagogical discrepancy can serve to exacerbate the stated problem where school music programs only provide improvisational instruction to a particular subset of students rather than the majority.

Yet as Stringham states, every student (not just the ones volunteering for an extracurricular jazz ensemble) deserves to benefit from an improvisation education;

Improvisation and composition are not enrichment tasks to be reserved for advanced students, but rather, meaningful elements of a comprehensive music education. Music supervisors, principals, superintendents, school boards, and parents should insist that these behaviors occupy a central place in music curricula.38

Burnard\(^{39}\) similarly opines that;

> Our aim as music educators should be to facilitate a form of music education that focuses on genuine experiences of children *being* improvisers and composers rather than acting out a pre-defined model\(^{40}\).

Educators intent on heeding these informed recommendations are still faced with an assortment of obstacles to inserting an improvisational element into their general music curriculum. The question of how to best navigate these various impediments remains and the focus of interested educators should perhaps be to facilitate this inclusion by prioritizing flexibility and simplicity in any prospective improvisation methodology.

A primary consideration for educators when exploring means of introducing an improvisational element into their curriculum would be to separate their concept of a potential improvisational methodology from approaches that are strictly based on a jazz-idiomatic foundation. There are no studies establishing the enhanced efficacy of a jazz-oriented improvisational education as compared to non-idiomatic approaches. Specifically, the work of Azzara\(^{41}\) observes the application of an improvisational component largely unassociated with any overt specific idiom. Non-idiomatic and non-jazz improvisational approaches should theoretically offer comparable benefit to any idiomatic improvisational methodology.

It must be acknowledged that improvisation is a universal musical practice that is fundamental within a multitude of styles and genres, and that the art form of jazz performance is not particularly unique in its embrace of improvisation as a central tenet.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., pp. 21.

of practice. In his seminal work on Improvisation, Bailey\textsuperscript{42} writes separate chapters on the traditions of improvisation in Indian Music, Flamenco music, and the Baroque era of Western Art music. Sivan\textsuperscript{43} chronicled the narrative of improvisation throughout the history of Western Art music. In one notable scholarly collection, Sutton\textsuperscript{44} explores improvisation in Javanese Gamelan music, Manuel\textsuperscript{45} explores the tradition of improvisation in Latin American dance music, Racy\textsuperscript{46} explores improvisation in Arabic music, and Chan\textsuperscript{47} explores improvisation in Cantonese Opera. Even when limiting the scope to just American musical idioms, Jazz exists alongside a multitude of different musical traditions that prioritize improvisational performance skills; Blues, Rock n’ Roll, Funk, Appalachian Folk, Country, Bluegrass, Ska, R&B, as well as various fusion genres also provide numerous opportunities for the improviser.

With all of these idiomatic applications for improvisational performance, it is fair to question how jazz often seems to be the the only musical genus with an institutional support in place for teaching improvisation to young and developing musicians at the middle school and secondary level (though there are certainly isolated exceptions). Improvisation as a component of holistic musicianship, essential to the comprehensive


\textsuperscript{47} Chan, Sau Y. “Exploding the Belly: Improvisation in Cantonese Opera,” from Nettl, \textit{In the course of performance}, pp. 199-218.
development of the music student is a concept supported by the declaration from the MENC that it is a core element of a proper music education\textsuperscript{48}. However, numerous surveys and studies suggest improvisation is not being taught with this requisite universality\textsuperscript{49,50,51}. By separating improvisation education from the general music curriculum and relegating it strictly to afterschool jazz ensembles, educators are effectively sending the message to their students that improvisation is merely a specialized practice associated with a singular idiom as opposed to an essential aspect of overall musicianship.

Jazz is indeed America’s art music and its evolution over the last century tells a social and creative narrative of American culture\textsuperscript{52}. The study of jazz and jazz improvisation deserves, and perhaps even demands, a presence in our schools\textsuperscript{53}. That being established, divorcing our view of improvisation education from a strictly jazz idiomatic viewpoint could allow for more flexibility among music educators in how they could incorporate improvisational studies into their curriculum. If an improvisation curriculum is only offered to small groups of students and only offered in a specific jazz context, it is by definition being marginalized as a musical practice. Educators should be focused on bringing improvisational studies to as many students as possible, not isolating its practice for only the most advanced or dedicated students. The problem still persists of how to best accomplish this challenging goal.

\textsuperscript{48} Music Educators National Conference. 1994.
\textsuperscript{50} Byo, “General education classroom teachers’ perceived ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{53} West, “Teaching middle school jazz,” 2011.
This challenge appears to be particularly formidable within the *beginning band* setting (middle school band). At the elementary level, there has been a great deal of research conducted suggesting the benefit of Dalcroze, Orff Shulwerk and Kodaly approaches\(^{54}\). These methods manage to introduce the youngest of musicians to improvisation in effective and organic ways. At the high school level, the growth of jazz education opportunities for the American music student has been quite remarkable. In 1980 it was estimated that more than 70% of American high schools offered a jazz ensemble\(^{55}\), and that percentage has most likely grown in the past 34 years. While traditionally voluntary, these ensembles provide the music student with an opportunity to engage in improvisational activities. Unfortunately, the middle-school environment has shown itself to be a weak-link in the creative music education of developing young students\(^ {56}\), especially as it pertains to improvisational studies\(^ {57,58}\).

At the middle school level, particularly within the instrumental band programs, a significant percentage of students are receiving their first formal musical instruction and an even greater percentage are receiving their first formal *instrumental* musical instruction. The lack of an improvisational component to the music curricula at this level could serve to be potentially detrimental to the overall creative development of the student. Furthermore, neglecting to teach improvisation at this level could theoretically decrease the likelihood of the student ever participating in improvisational activities by

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stigmatizing the practice and potentially creating a greater inhibition. It is easy to see the potential of a cyclical problem inherent here as well, as educators who do not receive an improvisational element within their own musical education could theoretically become less inclined to teach the subject as part of their curricular approach due to an overall lack of familiarity. Exploring approaches on how to bring effective improvisation curriculum into the middle-school music setting is the primary concern of this research.

**Justification**

There has been substantial research correlating the study of improvisation with overall musical achievement\(^{59, \ 60, \ 61, \ 62}\) and the MENC affirmed the essential importance of an improvisational education when they established its practice as a core standard of musical study\(^{63}\). It should be the goal of the modern day music educator to promote holistic musical development through a utilization of any and all effective musical tools. With that goal in mind, the teaching of improvisation, as evidenced through various studies\(^{64, \ 65, \ 66}\), has exhibited itself to be a teaching tool warranting a greater and more


universal application by music educators. As Campbell\(^67\) eloquently states in her call for more improvisation education within school music curricula:

> Like individual freedom within the structured political system of a democracy, improvisation is the right of a well-trained musician. It provides the yin for the yang: personal interpretation, expression, and feeling as a balance to well-developed technical skills of performance and careful listening. Involved as we are in a profession that claims the place of music in the schools as an avenue for the development of the expressive and creative nature of students’ holistic selves, the teaching of improvisation and the stimulation of creative musical expression is our professional responsibility\(^68\).

Despite calls for more improvisational instruction within school music curricula, there appears to be little consensus on how to most effectively equip our educators to teach improvisation in the general music classroom setting, particularly at the middle school level.

A significant amount of research was conducted in the wake of the MENC’s establishment of the nine core standards for music surveying educator practices and exploring the ability and confidence of teachers in trying to accommodate the recommendations of the MENC. These surveys offer a glimpse into school music programs that suggests educators have generally struggled to incorporate improvisation (along with composition) into their classroom curriculum to the same degree they have accommodated the other recommended standards\(^69, 70, 71, 72, 73\). While there has been

\(^{68}\) Ibid., pp. 24.
research conducted exploring numerous factors influencing improvisational achievement\textsuperscript{74, 75, 76, 77}, there has not been a consolidation of core strategies that could allow any educator, regardless of their potential differences in background, to effectively approach teaching the topic of improvisation within their general music curriculum.

A need exists to consolidate a range of applicable improvisational approaches being used by educators and scholars along with a consideration of previously conducted research that has explored the factors that can influence improvisational achievement. Employed with this information, educators could develop a clear strategy for incorporating improvisation into their own curriculum. A need also exists for a survey of existent improvisation methods (published or unpublished) that offer insight or practical applications in regards to the middle school music or band educator. As Niknafs\textsuperscript{78} advocates in the conclusion to his study exploring improvisation practices within the Illinois school system:

\textsuperscript{70} Barkley, “Assessment of the national standards for music education,” 2006.
\textsuperscript{75} Heil, “The effects of two vocal jazz improvisation methods,” 2005.
On a practical level, music teachers might need real life models to be encouraged to teach improvisation activities... Therefore, an effort is needed to gather these models... These models and practices can be catalogued in accessible ways so that other music teachers could be motivated to incorporate more improvisation activities in their teaching.

There is a clear and established need for an accessible survey of extant improvisational pedagogy appropriate for inclusion in the beginning band environment. Music educators intending to add improvisation to their general music curriculum should have a comprehensive resource at their disposal outlining their options and offering insight regarding the potential challenges associated with introducing improvisation into the classroom setting. Ideally, with such a resource available, more educators would be equipped to supplement their curriculum with improvisational studies of one kind or another.

**Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to create an improvisational resource for the middle school music educator which will; (a) provide a survey of methodologies that hold sensible potential for application at the middle school level as well as (b) provide approaches and solutions to the common challenges facing educators attempting to

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79 Ibid., pp. 180.
introduce an improvisational component into their music curriculum. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What improvisational methodologies (published or unpublished) are available to the middle school music educator for application within a general music curriculum? Specifically, are any of these methodologies designed for application within the *beginning band* setting?

2. As demonstrated though the research, what are the factors shown to influence achievement in improvisational development?

3. Are there primary approaches to improvisation instruction designed for the beginning level instrumentalist that can be extracted from the literature? How could these approaches be applied within a *beginning band* context?

4. What challenges do music educators face when attempting to incorporate an improvisational element into their music curriculum at the middle school level? Are there approaches suggested by the literature to circumvent these observed challenges?

**Delimitations of this Study**

This study is primarily interested in developing an improvisational resource for the middle school music educator with special consideration given to applying this resource to a *beginning band* context. This resource would ideally provide universally applicable approaches to improvisational studies in the middle school classroom by offering a survey of methods and various solutions for the music educator. This scope
limits the age group being considered as well as the instrumentation involved.

Considerations for choral or choir programs at the middle school level will not be accommodated in this research even though there would be equal value in investigating curriculum designed for that particular context.

As most secondary school music programs in the United States are built around the construction of a Band (concert band or wind ensemble) and not a string orchestra\textsuperscript{80}, this research will be primarily concerned with applications intended for wind instrumentalists. That being said, applications intended for string instrumentalists as well as traditional “rhythm section” instrumentalists (electric guitar, piano/keyboard, drums/percussion, electric/upright bass) have also been considered since most improvisational approaches should have universal applications.

**Definition of Terms**

**Improvisation** - For the purposes of this study, musical improvisation will be defined through a broad and flexible scope. As stated by Chiu, “simply put, improvisation is the art of composing in real time\textsuperscript{81}.” *Composing in real time* can be alternately viewed as making musical choices in real time. In the context of this study, making content-oriented musical decisions within the immediate moment of performance will be considered improvisation. Spontaneous creative actions that fall short of this distinction in one way or another will be considered pre-improvisatory and still useful for


consideration. Berkowitz makes note of a range of constraints that are traditionally applied to definitions of improvisation, breaking them down into two main categories: stylistic and physical/physiological\textsuperscript{82}. While no stylistic constraints will be applied to the broad-scope definition of improvisation used for the purpose of this study, much of the improvisational pedagogy observed through this study will be task-oriented to one degree or another, which ultimately provides a variable constraint to the view of improvisation presented.

**Middle School** - The primary focus of this study is the age group associated with beginning band participation within school music programs. This can coincide with different grade levels in different school systems. For the purpose of this study, the terms *beginning band* and *middle school band* will effectively be interchangeable. Some beginning band programs begin at the elementary level and therefore exist within the scope of this study. Taking into account the variable starting grade level for beginning instrumental band programs, this study will loosely define middle school band programs as falling within the scope of grades 5 through 8.

**Group Improvisation** - For the purpose of the current study, group improvisation will be defined as improvisational activities that occur within a large ensemble setting during which the majority of musicians participate in the exercise collectively. This

distinction is offered to counter the construct of one soloist improvising while a majority of musicians do not actively contribute. This working definition differs from the concept of group improvisation that is rooted in a New Orleans jazz performance tradition.

**Free improvisational exercises** - For the purpose of this study, free improvisation refers to an *exploratory* level of improvisational effort as defined by Kratus in his delineation of the levels of improvisational development\(^{83}\). Free improvisation, in the context of this study, does not refer to the tradition of jazz improvisation associated with Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Cecil Taylor, and others\(^{84}\). For the purposes of this study, free improvisational exercises will generally refer to beginning activities designed to allow for creative student exploration.

**Play-a-long Recordings and Software** - A common approach to improvisational pedagogy involves the use of *play-a-long* accompaniment, which provides the student with a prerecorded harmonic/rhythmic accompaniment intended for performance practice.

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CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

Educators intent on providing a comprehensive musical education to their students have long been interested in the potential benefits of an improvisation methodology within their curriculum. Research has supported the notion that improvisation is a fundamental pillar of a holistic musical development. In 1994, the MENC adopted nine National Standards of music education, in which improvising was listed as one of the principal standards.

Incorporating improvisation methodology into the general music curriculum has been shown to be a common challenge among educators. In response to the publication of the MENC standards, research was conducted observing that improvising was one of the more difficult standards to incorporate into the music classroom. This struggle to incorporate improvisation into the general music classroom setting has forced many educators to allocate any and all improvisation curriculum into an idiomatic jazz-setting (i.e. jazz big band, jazz combos, jazz improvisation/theory classes). The students who enter these settings tend to be the more advanced music students at a particular school, or

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90 Riley, “Pre-service music educators’ perceptions of the national standards,” 2009.
the ones with some pre-disposition to pursue jazz oriented training on their own time (private studies). While participation in these settings is typically voluntary, Stringham states improvisation studies should not be reserved for the select few students, but rather offered as part of the mainstream curriculum in every music program.94

The intention of this chapter will be to examine previously conducted research regarding, (a) the benefits of an improvisation education, (b) the challenges educators encounter trying to incorporate improvisation into their curriculum, (c) the factors that have been shown to influence improvisational achievement, and (d) the methodologies currently available to an educator interested in teaching improvisation in the classroom, specifically at the middle school level. In this last section, an effort will be made to identify methodologies that do not present improvisation studies in any specific idiomatic context. This consideration will be made in accordance with the idea that separating idiom from an improvisational practicum could allow the educator the value of a greater flexibility in their teaching.

Benefits of an Improvisational Education

Louk\textsuperscript{95} researched general music teacher attitudes and practices in response to the MENC adoption of the \textit{National Standards} for music education\textsuperscript{96}. Louk’s study revealed that of the nine standards established by the MENC, improvisation “was near the bottom of every reckoning of the standards in this study. It ranked next to last in number of episodes observed and third to last in amount of time devoted to it… It was significantly lower in perceived importance than all other CSs (content standards) except for CS4/\textit{composing} and CS7/\textit{evaluating}\textsuperscript{97}.” For music educators to feel motivated towards introducing improvisation studies into their curriculum, they must first appreciate the possible benefits of such an inclusion. Echoing similar findings from Byo\textsuperscript{98} and Kirkland\textsuperscript{99}, Louk demonstrates with her research that the view of improvisation studies as an essential component of music education has yet to become a consensus opinion among educators.

John Henry Wilson researched how \textit{group-improvisation} influenced the development of high school musicians\textsuperscript{100}. Wilson divided a collection of high-school students into a control and experimental group. The experimental group took part in one “ensemble improvisation” session per week while the control group received an extra

\textsuperscript{95} Louk, “National standards for music education,” 2002.
\textsuperscript{96} Music Educators National Conference, 1994.
\textsuperscript{98} Byo, “General education classroom teachers'... perceived ability to implement the Nat'l standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{100} Wilson, John H. “The effects of group improvisation on the musical growth of selected high school instrumentalists.” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1970.
rehearsal of their normal performance literature. The improvisational practicum used by Wilson was developed by Lukas Foss and Richard Duffalo and was revised by Michael Silverman in 1962 for use in secondary schools. The participants in this study were given a sight-reading pretest and posttest, and a significant difference was found in favor of the experimental group. Wilson concludes that improvisational studies can contribute to the overall growth of the music student, especially their ability to sight-read music.

Ricardo Montano looked to extend the work of Wilson\textsuperscript{101} with his study exploring how improvisation affects the rhythmic accuracy of a performer in their ability to sight-read\textsuperscript{102}. Montano observed thirty-two undergraduate students in an elementary group piano class at the University of Denver. While all students received the same training in sight-reading, the subjects of the experimental group were given basic improvisation training in addition to their normal studies. These improvisation studies were administered once a week for only a six-week period. Yet, even with this concise training period, the experimental group scored significantly higher in their sight-reading posttest than the control group. Montano adds to the growing body of work showing a significant correlation between improvisational studies and sight-reading ability. This is a topic also explored by McPherson\textsuperscript{103} through his doctoral research a decade later.

In his study McPherson explored the interrelationships between five musical performance skills as part of a \textit{balanced} music education. McPherson identified early in

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\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} McPherson, Gary Edward. “Factors and abilities influencing the development of visual, aural and creative performance skills in music and their educational implications.” Ph.D. diss., University of Sydney (Australia), 1993.
\end{flushright}
his research that “most popular instrumental band methods for beginning instrumental instruction are characterized by visually oriented re-creative tasks and an almost total reliance on note reading.” A balanced education, in his view, would incorporate not only visual tasks (strictly reading notated music), but also aural tasks (such as improvisation and playing by ear). McPherson conducted his study with a sample size of 101 music students (clarinet and trumpet players exclusively) at the high school level in or around Sydney, Australia. While there were many conclusions drawn from the interrelationships of the five musical performance skills, the aural skills developed were essential in teaching students to “think in sound,” which was deemed essential for musical expression and understanding.

While the aforementioned studies are certainly useful in determining certain benefits of an improvisational education, they have generally dealt with age groups older than the middle school target range specific to the current research. Perhaps the most relevant study in establishing the value of improvisational studies to the musical development of middle school aged musicians would be the Christopher Azzara research conducted for his dissertation. Azzara set out to investigate the effect of improvisational studies on the musical achievement of fifth-grade instrumental students. Azzara conducted his study in two different school settings; using sixty-six students from school A and twenty-one students from school B. Each student had received one year of guided music instruction from Jump Right In: The Instrumental Series (student book one) prior to

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104 Ibid., pp. 29.
105 Ibid., pp. 323.
involvement in this study. Azzara administered the *Music Aptitude Profile*
 to each student prior to the study. In each school, Azzara established a control group of students and an experimental group. Each group would receive instruction from *Jump Right In: The Instrumental Series* each week. The experimental group would receive 10-15 min of improvisation instruction per week for the 27-week treatment period. Group lessons were conducted over the 27-week span to groups of 3-7 students at a time.

The improvisation studies in this research would take up 32-50% of the experimental group student’s lesson time each week. The improvisational lesson plans used were based on the exercises found in *Jump Right In: the Instrumental Series* and contained 16 lesson plans in all. These lesson plans contained exercises in learning *rote* songs, tonal patterns, rhythmic patterns, melodic patterns, tonal/rhythmic pattern *echoes*, and many other improvisation oriented objectives.

At the end of the treatment period, each student was asked to perform three criterion etudes in order to gauge their musical achievement. The student prepared and composed the first etude, the student also composed the second etude only this time with the help of a teacher, and the final etude was sight-read by the student. Four judges, using a performance criterion established by Azzara, adjudicated the student performances.

Azzara found significant differences in musical achievement and aptitude between the experimental group and the control group. Azzara states:

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On the basis of the data obtained in this study, it may be concluded that improvisation study improves the music achievement of elementary instrumental music students. With improvisation skill, students can express their musical thoughts spontaneously. This expression is possible when students comprehend the tonal and rhythm patterns of a musical line within a larger context. In other words, when students understand tonal and rhythm patterns and can combine and sequence them in a syntactical manner, they internalize a sense of tonality and meter\textsuperscript{110}.

Azzara went on to connect improvisation studies with an improved ability to recognize and understand harmonic progression and function. Students will also improve their performance of notated music when exposed to extensive improvisational methodology\textsuperscript{111}.

The particular methodology used by Azzara in this study is notable in that the researcher did not present the material in a way that suggested any obvious idiomatic association. Azzara made heavy use of establishing a rhythmic and melodic vocabulary that the students would use as a foundation for their improvisations. This vocabulary was not idiomatic in nature, which could have conceivably aided the students in their acquisition of the information being presented.

Azzara followed up his 1992 research with a study making greater use of audiation techniques as a means of teaching improvisation\textsuperscript{112}. Audiation, as defined by Edwin Gordon who coined the term, is “the process of assimilating and comprehending

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., pp. 69.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
(not just rehearing) music momentarily heard performed or heard sometime in the past \(^{113}\).” Audiation, in other words, is the way performers and music-listeners appropriate meaning to the sounds they are hearing. Azzara follows the same basic approach from his 1992 study, working with sixty-six total fifth-grade students and dividing them into a control and experimental group. The experimental group received the same overall instruction as the control group, only with the addition of 16 total lesson plans in improvisation skill development (over 27 weeks). Each student was tested prior to the study according to a musical aptitude test \(^{114}\) and then tested after the culmination of the 27-week study by having the students perform three different etudes (one student composed, one teacher assisted, and one sight-read). A panel of four judges using a criterion developed by Azzara adjudicated the performances of these etudes.

In this particular study, Azzara supplemented the teaching of improvisational material with an audiocassette tape intended to reinforce the instruction from the classroom lessons. The four major goals of these improvisation lesson plans were to; (a) have the students learn a selection of songs by ear, (b) guide them in developing a vocabulary of rhythmic and tonal syllables, (c) have them improvise, with both voice and instrument, over the tonic, dominant and sub-dominant using their learned vocabulary, and (d) have them improvise with their instrument and voice using macrobeat, microbeat, division, elongation, and rest/rhythm patterns \(^{115}\).


\(^{115}\) Azzara, “Audiation-based improvisation techniques and elementary... music achievement,” 1993, pp. 328.
A major characteristic that distinguishes this study from Azzara’s 1992 work is the emphasis on encouraging students to vocalize their improvisations in addition to performing them on their instruments. Azzara also uses the audiocassette supplement in this study to reaffirm the aural assimilation and retention of the skills taught in lessons. Overall, this study is more aurally-oriented in terms of how it approached the presentation of improvisational material to the students.

As in his first study116, Azzara found that the introduction of improvisational studies led to an overall improvement of the fifth-grade student’s instrumental music achievement as compared to the achievement levels of the control group. The students from the experimental group were able to more accurately perform music when reading from notation117. This particular assertion supports the findings of Wilson118, Montano119, and Azzara120. Rowlyck121 was unable to replicate the same statistical results with his study of seventh and eight grade students. Rowlyk reflects that inconsistencies in student practice and possible problems with pretest scoring (i.e. a perfect score cannot be improved upon, nor a very low score underachieved) might have led to the lack of expected variance.

The Consortium of National Arts Education Association (NAEA) released a document entitled, “National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Child Should

117 Azzara, Audiation-based improvisation techniques and elementary... music achievement,” 1993, pp. 338.
Know and Be Able To Do\textsuperscript{122},” which prescribed standards for each respective institution of art education (visual arts, theatre, music and dance). The standards proposed for music educators establish the importance of nine areas of study: (1) singing, (2) playing instruments, (3) improvising, (4) composing and arranging, (5) reading and notating music, (6) listening, analyzing, and describing music, (7) evaluating music and music performances, (8) understanding relationships between music and other subjects, and (9) relating music to history and culture\textsuperscript{123}. After the publishing of these standards, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) adopted the recommendations of the NAEA and has promoted the use of these standards\textsuperscript{124}. This recommendation by the NAEA (and the subsequent adoption of that recommendation by the MENC) that improvisation is a core standard of comprehensive musical development is perhaps the first large-scale institutional acknowledgement of the overall benefit of improvisational study at all educational levels. This adoption serves as an institutional affirmation of the body of research being examined here.

David Stringham explored the inclusion of an improvisational and compositional element to the curriculum of a high-school instrumental music program\textsuperscript{125}. Stringham used the instrumental students at a suburban Buffalo high school as his subjects. Each student was administered the Gordon music aptitude test prior to the beginning of the


\textsuperscript{123}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{125}Stringham, “Improvisation and composition in high school instrumental music curriculum,” 2010.
study\textsuperscript{126}. Over an eight-week span, students performed improvisation exercises and composed music based on the model set forth by the educational series; Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation (DMTI)\textsuperscript{127}. Students were asked to: (a) sing, play, and improvise melodies, bass lines, tonal patterns, and rhythm patterns, (b) notate melodies, bass lines, tonal patterns, and rhythm patterns, and (c) compose melodies, bass lines, tonal patterns, and rhythm patterns\textsuperscript{128}. At the end of this study, each student was judged according to their ability to perform fifteen musical tasks, which included an assortment of playing, singing and writing exercises.

Stringham collected both qualitative and quantitative data in this particular study. Stringham piloted numerous post-study interviews with students to gauge their reaction and understanding of the methodology used\textsuperscript{129}. The quantitative data in Stringham’s research suggests improvisation and composition studies contribute to the comprehensive development of the music student\textsuperscript{130}. The qualitative data in his study leads Stringham to make the conclusion that high school students are capable of engaging in meaningful improvisation (and composition) in a non-auditioned instrumental environment\textsuperscript{131}. Students had overall positive reactions to the improvisational exercises used in this study, though some expressed that they felt teaching improvisation in the large-ensemble environment wasn’t always the most practical setting\textsuperscript{132}. This positive reaction to

\textsuperscript{128} Stringham, “Improvisation and composition in high school instrumental music curriculum,” 2010, pp. 37.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., pp. 70.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., pp. 107.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., pp. 104.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., pp. 110.
improvisation studies when interjected into general music curricula correlates with the findings of Vernon, Montano, and Burnard.

The studies of Azzara, Montano, Wilson, and Stringham, among others, establish with a certain amount of clarity the benefits of an improvisation education to the developing musician. Yawen Eunice Chyu succinctly identified five primary benefits of an improvisation education; (1) improvisation helps to develop an overall comprehensive musicianship. This occurs because in order to improvise, the student must assimilate their musical studies with great understanding in order to then create their own music. (2) Improvisation promotes concentration and overall aural skills since it demands the student to listen closely to what they are playing and what is being played around them at all times. (3) Improvisation fosters a development of sight-reading skills as it helps students identify patterns and key elements of the music they are performing. (4) Improvisation offers a unique opportunity for students to express their musical identities, which can influence their motivation and overall enjoyment of the music learning.

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140 Chyu, Yawen Eunice. “Teaching improvisation to piano student of elementary to intermediate levels.” Ph.D. Diss., Ohio State University, 2004, pp. 5-7.
process. (5) Lastly, improvisation helps to cultivate and encourage the creativity of the student.\textsuperscript{141} 

In addition to this body of research establishing the benefits of improvisational studies, numerous respected music educators and psychologists have identified improvisational studies as a principal component of a rounded music education.\textsuperscript{142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147} This view of the importance of improvisational studies within the construct of a proper music education correlates with the elementary pedagogies of Dalcroze, Orff and Gordon. Some scholars have connected the study of improvisation with potential benefits beyond the music room or school classroom by linking the skills required to improvise with the skills associated with professional success.\textsuperscript{148} Improvisation, along with composition, stand together as the two intrinsically creative activities a music student can engage in. A music education devoid of either of these activities is not a creative education; it is simply an education in technical performance and notational recitation.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Azzara, “Audiation-based improvisation techniques and elementary instrumental students,” 1993.
\textsuperscript{143} Silverman, “Ensemble improvisation as a creative technique,” 1963.
\textsuperscript{144} Sarath, “Improvisation for global musicianship,” 1993.
\textsuperscript{146} Grunow, “Music learning theory: a catalyst for change in beginning... music,” 2005.
\textsuperscript{147} Reimer, \textit{A philosophy of music education}, 2003.
\textsuperscript{148} Weick, Karl E. “Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis.” \textit{Organization Science}, Vol. 9, No. 5, {Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing}, (1998): 543-555.
Survey of Teacher Attitudes in Response to the Release of the MENC Standards

In 1993 the National Association for Music Education (at the time known as the MENC) drafted and ratified nine (9) national standards for music education with funding and support from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. These standards were established as voluntary guidelines for the educator seeking to provide a comprehensive music education to their students. The creation of the standards, while part of an overall effort from the US Department of Education to define the benchmarks of art education nationally, were also seen as a means of protecting music education from being further diminished in American school systems. As the chair of the MENC music standards task force, Paul R. Lehman, stated, “In today’s educational climate, the development of standards is a prerequisite if we are to halt the marginalization of music in the curriculum and secure a firm position in the schools for the remainder of the decade and beyond.”

“Improvising melodies, variations and accompaniments” was published as the third of these MENC standards. For general music educators who had never taught improvisation as part of their curriculum before (or the other standards; such as “composing and arranging” or “evaluating music performances”) the release of these standards presented an understandable challenge. Music educators were asked to reflect

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150 Ibid.
151 Ibid., pp. 58.
on their curriculum in comparison to the standards and consider modifying their respective pedagogic approaches where there was discrepancy. These aforementioned teaching methodologies likely were constructed after a significant amount of years in teacher training and crafted over a career in teaching, so there were unsurprisingly some concerns expressed by educators upon the release of the standards\(^{153}\). Numerous surveys of music educator practices and attitudes have been conducted in the twenty years since the release of the national standards. Those previously conducted surveys will be examined in this section, particularly the studies that gathered data regarding the response of educators in regards to the establishment of improvisation as a core standard of music education.

In 1997, Susan J. Byo surveyed 244 music educators in the state of Florida (with 177 responding, for a 72.5% response rate) examining their perceived ability to implement the national standards for music education\(^{154}\). Among the survey questions presented to these 4\(^{th}\) grade educators were inquiries into their overall perceptions of the standards, their interest in teaching to the standards, their perceived responsibility to teach the standards, their prioritization of the individual standards respectively, their level of preparation to teach each standard, and their access to the necessary resources for instructing each of the standards\(^{155}\). While educators were shown to have an overall


\(^{154}\) Byo, “General education classroom teachers’... perceived ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.

\(^{155}\) Ibid., pp. 69-73.
positive opinion of the standards in a more general sense, improvisation was shown to be a problematic standard to implement\textsuperscript{156}.

Amongst Byo’s results, the findings suggested that the surveyed music educators; (1) had the lowest interest in teaching the two creative standards (improvisation and composition), (2) felt the least responsibility to teach those particular standards, (3) felt the least prepared (according to their training and ability) to implement the creative standards, (4) had the fewest available resources to implement the creative standards, and (5) cited improvisation and composition as being the lowest curricular priorities in comparison to the other standards\textsuperscript{157}. The data gathered in Byo’s research indicates that the surveyed educators, in many cases, felt they lacked the proper training and resources necessary to effectively teach improvisation in their classroom\textsuperscript{158}.

In line with the findings of the Byo study, the research of Barkley surveyed 255 elementary music educators in Michigan and found that improvisation and composition were the two least assessed of the nine MENC standards\textsuperscript{159}. A comprehensive survey of South Carolina music teachers (K-12) conducted by Adderley also revealed an insufficient preparation to teach the improvisational component of the MENC standards after undergraduate studies\textsuperscript{160}. For educators lacking a proper background in improvisation training and without access to sufficient resources in order to address the

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., pp. 86.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., pp. 86-88.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{160} Adderley, Cecil L. “Music teacher preparation in South Carolina colleges and universities relative to the National Standards: Goals 2000.” Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1996.
deficit, teaching or assessing the creative standards in the music classroom can pose a vexing predicament.

A study by Louk surveyed 4th grade music educators in Arizona and gauged their perceptions and practice of the music standards within their classroom\textsuperscript{161}. In addition to surveying close to 200 music educators, Louk also filmed 47 classes taught by four expert music educators to observe their approaches in action\textsuperscript{162}. The gathered data showed that, “improvisation was near the bottom in every reckoning of the standards in this study\textsuperscript{163}.” It was rated as the third lowest standard in perceived importance and also third lowest in time devoted to it. The videotaped lessons showed improvisation as the second lowest in observed episodes, meaning the content standard (CS) of composition was the only activity garnering less time in the recorded lessons\textsuperscript{164}. The improvisational activities observed in the videotaped lessons included; (1) watching a video on jazz improvisation in class, (2) using Orff instruments to playback a teacher inspired chant and then improvising over the chant using any two pitches of the pentatonic scale, and (3) improvising a melody using a teacher supplied rhythm\textsuperscript{165}.

The research of Louk produced similar findings to the work of Kirkland\textsuperscript{166}, Bell\textsuperscript{167}, Orman\textsuperscript{168} and Riley\textsuperscript{169}. Kirkland surveyed South Carolinian music educators to

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., pp. 56.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., pp. 59.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., pp. 59-60.
\textsuperscript{166} Kirkland, Norma J. “South Carolina schools and goals 2000: National standards in music.” Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1996.
\textsuperscript{168} Orman, Evelyn K. “Comparison of the national standards for music education and
find improvisation and composition rated as the two lowest priorities in terms of their goals for student achievement. Orman observed videotaped lessons conducted by 30 elementary music educators (defined as Grade 1-6 in the study) to observe the amount of class time spent on each standard. Orman found that the least amount of class time was spent on the creative content standards (improvisation, composition and evaluating music and performances). Additionally, the data gathered by Orman showed a significant decline in class time spent on improvisation as grade level increased, with no observed time being spent on the subject in the recorded classes from the 4th, 5th and 6th grades.

Bell surveyed a class of fourteen (14) graduate level music education students after they practiced teaching each of the content standards and found that teaching improvisation was perceived to present the greatest instructional challenge (tied with “singing alone”). In a survey gauging the perception of fifty-three (53) pre-service music educators in regards to the content standards, Riley found that improvisation received the third least favorable response overall. This response metric factored in how prepared these future educators felt in teaching each respective content standard, how interested they were in teaching each standard, how much responsibility they felt to


172 Ibid., pp. 162.

173 Ibid.


175 Riley, “Pre-service music educators’ perceptions of the national standards for music education,” 2009, pp. 11.
teach each standard and whether they had the adequate resources available to properly teach each respective standard\textsuperscript{176}.

In 2005, Whitcomb surveyed 138 elementary music educators in the state of Illinois about their practices and approaches to teaching improvisation in the general music classroom\textsuperscript{177}. Among the findings from her study, Whitcomb discovered that while improvisation was the second least practiced of the MENC content standards (above only composition), 87\% of responders had at least attempted to include improvisation into their curriculum\textsuperscript{178}. Of the responding educators who had taught improvisation within their general music curriculum, 96\% had used 5 or more of the specified improvisational activities Whitcomb included in the questionnaire\textsuperscript{179}. Among the most practiced of the instrumental improvisation activities were; (1) improvising on unpitched percussion instruments, (2) improvising rhythmic patterns using instruments, (3) improvising on pitched percussion instruments, (4) improvising sound accompaniment to a story or poem, (5) call and response, or question and answer using instruments, and (6) improvising on a pitched instrument over an ostinato\textsuperscript{180}.

Whitcomb found that the among the most common factors inhibiting improvisational teaching in the elementary classroom were, in order of significance, (1) lack of teaching time, (2) lack of improvisational experience as a performing musician, (3) lack of training for the instruction of improvisation, and (4) lack of funding for the

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., pp. 6.
\textsuperscript{177} Whitcomb, Rachel L. “A description of improvisational activities in elementary general music classrooms in the state of Illinois.” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., pp. 100.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., pp. 97.
purchase of improvisational materials to use in the classroom. Among the factors found to most greatly assist in the teaching of improvisation within the elementary music classroom were, listed in order of significance; (1) teaching demonstrations by other educators well versed in improvisation, (2) more time scheduled for music instruction, (3) in-service teacher training on the topic, and (4) professional conferences. Comparable to the findings of the Byo study, Whitcomb’s results suggested a meaningful correlation between an educator’s background with improvisational studies and their confidence in teaching it to their classes.

Whitcomb also explored the resources educators used to supplement their improvisational teaching and found that professional journal articles were utilized more than published books, educational software or self-constructed materials. Whitcomb’s survey of improvisational resources showed only a marginal lean towards journal articles as a supplement to classroom teaching, and led Whitcomb to state; “these findings suggest there is no specific book, software program or professional journal that serves as a foundation for teachers and researchers to share ideas regarding improvisation in the classroom.” Among the published improvisational materials Whitcomb listed in the questionnaire sent to educators were the *Music for Children* series (Orff), the MENC.

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181 Ibid., 106.
182 Ibid., 105.
184 Ibid., 121.
185 Ibid., 120.
186 Ibid.
Strategies for Teaching series\textsuperscript{188}, the Chop-Monster Jr. book\textsuperscript{189}, the Do It! Improvise CD and booklet\textsuperscript{190}, and the curriculum entitled, Music Improvisation as a Classroom Method\textsuperscript{191}.

Whitcomb’s findings also revealed that 53\% of the educators who used supplemental resources to teach improvisation had in fact created their own instructional materials\textsuperscript{192}. Whitcomb suggested this percentage reflected a reality that some educators were either unaware of appropriate published improvisational materials or felt existing material was inadequate for their classroom goals\textsuperscript{193}. If many educators are potentially creating their own improvisational materials due to a scarcity of appropriate published resources as Whitcomb suggests, it would call into question how an educator without a background in improvisation could compensate if they perceived the available resources to be insufficient?

Similar to the Whitcomb study, research conducted by Bitz\textsuperscript{194} showed that teachers who were highly respected for their improvisational teaching did not in fact use any particular method or resource; instead they were found to use their own methodologies which were unique to their educational background and experiences\textsuperscript{195}.

\textsuperscript{192} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 120.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., pp. 41 & 43.
One of the esteemed music educators Bitz interviewed said in regards to available improvisational resources that, “I use the things that I have developed over the years. I’m not saying this because of my big ego, but nothing matches up to the things I have invented. These work best for me.” Another interviewed educator remarked that, “I don’t subscribe to one method or another because no one of them has everything I need. I mix and match depending on who is in my class.” That being said, one of the interviewed educators acknowledged using the Jamey Aebersold play-a-long series in class as a way to provide rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment to student improvisations.

In 2006, Schopp conducted a three-part study investigating high school music educators in New York State and their approaches to teaching the MENC content standards 3 and 4 (improvisation and composition). In the first phase of the study, New York music educators (N=243) were surveyed to collect data about improvisational and compositional activities within high school music programs. In the second phase several respected programs were examined in detail to ascertain what kind of creative activities were taking place and, in the third phase, all collected data was analyzed in attempt to establish core strategies for teaching improvisation and composition in high school music education.

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196 Ibid., pp. 41.
197 Ibid.
programs nationally\textsuperscript{201}. The initial survey of music educators in New York State showed that less than half of the teachers (44.4\%) taught improvisation to their students\textsuperscript{202}. A deeper consideration of this number is even starker when considering that those teachers who answered affirmatively may only have actually been teaching improvisation to a percentage of their students, not all of their students. Educators reported moderate confidence that teaching improvisation was an attainable goal in their schools\textsuperscript{203}.

No specific improvisational activity was found to be used with regularity throughout the various music programs surveyed, however listening to “recorded models of improvisation with my band students,” was the most commonly used of the specified approaches\textsuperscript{204}. While using warm-up time of a band rehearsal to introduce improvisational concepts was seen to be a common approach in the reviewed literature, Schopp found that only 16.7\% of respondents used this method “always or often,” and only 33.9\% used it when “sometimes” was an added parameter\textsuperscript{205}. That being said, Schopp observed several band directors using the warm-up segment of rehearsals effectively as a platform to introduce improvisational activities during the second phase of the conducted research\textsuperscript{206}.

According to Schopp, one of the major challenges impacting music educators who teach improvisation was the student anxiety generated from improvisational tasks, particularly when they were attempted in large ensemble settings (i.e. concert band

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., pp. 54.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., pp. 100.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., pp. 101.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., pp. 112.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., pp. 114.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., pp. 152.
rehearsals, large general music classes). Schopp succinctly states the importance of establishing a supportive environment for beginning improvisers:

All of the (observed) teachers emphasized the importance of creating a comfortable, non-threatening environment when students improvise. They do this through group improvisation, frequent practice during warm-up exercises and fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and lack of criticism.

Schopp cited student anxiety, along with an overall lack of teaching time, as the two major impediments to improvisational instruction at the high school level. Schopp concludes his study with four primary observations from educators who successfully installed an improvisational component to their music curricula; (1) Simplicity – educators kept the initial tasks as simple as possible to allow students to build confidence in the learning process, (2) create a safe environment – student anxiety was shown to be a major issue, so a supportive atmosphere was an essential component for student progress, (3) flexibility – observed educators had to be flexible in how they approached improvisation due to time constraints and varying ensemble settings, and (4) Improvisation at all concerts – observed educators prioritized improvisation by including it in all major concert programs. This last approach acknowledges that it can be difficult to teach any topic in the shadow of concert preparation, therefore incorporating a subject

\[207\] Ibid., pp. 124, 147, 154.
\[208\] Ibid., pp. 148.
\[209\] Ibid., pp. 170.
into that preparation may be the only way to ensure its study\textsuperscript{210}. While Schopp’s survey and subsequent research was conducted at the high school level, the above suggestions would seem to also hold some value for middle school educators as the improvisers in this study were largely at a beginning stage of development.

One of the few studies surveying teacher practices in regards to improvisation at the middle school level was the research conducted by Niknafs examining K-8 music educators in the state of Illinois\textsuperscript{211}. Part of the reason Niknafs chose to focus the study on strictly K-8 educators and not expand the sample size to account for grades 9-12 was due to the fact that at the high school level most improvisation activities were thought to be occurring in jazz band settings, which could distort the findings\textsuperscript{212}. Niknafs was interested in exploring “all improvisational activities in general music classrooms including Orff practices, blues, jazz, free improvisation, raga in traditional Indian music, and radif in traditional Persian music are all considered to be improvisation in the current study\textsuperscript{213}.”

In the first phase of the Niknafs study, a 22-item survey was sent to just under 1,000 music educators in Illinois getting 199 responses (a 21% response rate)\textsuperscript{214}. Given the nature of the survey (exploring improvisational practices in the general music classroom), and the 21% response rate, the results could theoretically be skewed towards teachers actively using improvisation within their curricula as the educators who do not

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., pp. 172-173.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., pp. 85.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., pp. 101.
teach the subject might have been inclined to refrain from taking part in this research. That being said, a promising 87% of respondents reported teaching some amount of improvisational content within their music curriculum\textsuperscript{215}. Of the 173 responding educators who acknowledged teaching improvisation in some capacity, a vast majority (about 77%) stated they teach the topic less than 20% of the time\textsuperscript{216}. As Niknafs observed, the 87% of responding educators who employed some kind of improvisational activities in their classroom matched the exact percentage Whitcomb found in her survey of Illinois elementary music educators\textsuperscript{217, 218}.

Niknafs also found that of the responding educators, over half (52.26%) had never taken a jazz or improvisation course as part of their undergraduate teacher training\textsuperscript{219}. Additionally, 37.19% of the responding educators had either never improvised or were not comfortable improvising themselves\textsuperscript{220}. Similar to the findings of Whitcomb\textsuperscript{221}, Niknafs’ research revealed the more comfortable an educator is with improvisation (taking undergraduate improvisation courses, undertaking an Orff certification program, or regularly partaking in improvisational performance) the more likely they are to include improvisation into their general music curriculum\textsuperscript{222}. This observed correlation between an educator’s background in improvisational studies (through teacher-training) and their

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., pp. 108.
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., pp. 167.
\textsuperscript{218} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 100.
\textsuperscript{219} Niknafs, “The use of improvisation by k-8... music teachers,” 2013, pp. 107.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{221} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 106.
\textsuperscript{222} Niknafs, “The use of improvisation by k-8... music teachers,” 2013, pp. 182.
confidence in teaching the subject to their own students was also made by Bernhard and Riveire.

The second phase of this research involved further observation of a handful of the surveyed educators. In a pre-observation interview, one of the observed teachers succinctly states the challenge of trying to teach improvisation without adequate training on the subject:

I think it has something to do with myself. I think that I’m a little too nervous about it, and I’m not really sure how to do it (improvisation). I don’t really know how to teach it (improvisation)…if I’m not comfortable doing it, I’m not going to get up in front of 30 kids and do it if I’m not exactly sure what I’m doing.

Unlike the findings of Schopp and Whitcomb, Niknafs did not find that educators were overly concerned with a lack of teaching time as an obstacle to improvisation education in this particular study. Niknafs concludes by suggesting, among other things, that (a) teacher-training programs do an overall better job of preparing educators to improvise as well as (b) there is a need to gather together “real life models” for

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225 Ibid., pp. 148.
228 Niknafs, “The use of improvisation by k-8... music teachers,” 2013, pp. 170.
improvisation activities and instructional strategies so as to aid the music educator without a background in improvisational studies\textsuperscript{229}.

Cumulatively, the conducted surveys gauging the practices and attitudes of music educators in regards to the release of the MENC standards reveal a challenging portrait for teachers trying to implement the improvisational component of the standards. Improvisation was found to be rated in the bottom third among the standards in numerous studies in regards to time spent teaching\textsuperscript{230, 231, 232, 233}, perceived importance\textsuperscript{234, 235}, confidence in teaching\textsuperscript{236, 237} and perceived preparation of the educators to teach the improvisational component\textsuperscript{238, 239, 240}. Schopp found through a survey of music educators that creating a safe, non-threatening environment was essential to teaching improvisation effectively\textsuperscript{241}. Whitcomb\textsuperscript{242} and Bitz\textsuperscript{243} revealed a distinct lack of consensus in terms of resources used to teach improvisation in the music classroom; in fact both researchers found that teacher-created material was used as much if not more than available

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 180-181.
\textsuperscript{230} Byo, “General education classroom teachers’... perceived ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{232} Orman, “Comparison of the national standards for music education,” 2002.
\textsuperscript{234} Byo, “General education classroom teachers’... perceived ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{235} Kirkland, “South Carolina schools and goals 2000,” 1996.
\textsuperscript{236} Bell, “Beginning the dialogue,” 2003.
\textsuperscript{237} Riley, “Pre-service music educators’ perceptions of the national standards,” 2009.
\textsuperscript{238} Byo, “General education classroom teachers’... perceived ability to implement the national standards,” 1996.
\textsuperscript{239} Adderley, “Music teacher preparation in South Carolina... relative to the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{240} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005.
\textsuperscript{243} Bitz, “A description and investigation of strategies for teaching... improvisation,” 1998.
Factors Influencing Achievement in Improvisation

For the music educator interested in adding an improvisational component to their curriculum, having a sense of what factors may influence student achievement in improvisation is essential. There has been considerable research conducted on this particular topic, and while not all of it is necessarily conclusive, there is enough to inform the concerned educator. The educator should have an awareness of these influencing factors as a means to not only inform certain curriculum decisions they might make in regards to teaching improvisation, but also as a way to troubleshoot issues they might encounter while instructing beginning music students in their earliest improvisational efforts.

The research of Lissa Fleming May set out to examine how a range of factors influenced achievement in jazz improvisation. The specific factors May observed in this study were; (1) knowledge of jazz theory, (2) aural skills, (3) aural imitation, and (4) other selected background variables (such as listening habits and experience in a jazz ensemble setting). May observed 85 wind players enrolled in college jazz ensembles as the sample for this study and a complete data set was collected from 73 of these subjects.

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\(^{244}\) Niknafs, “The use of improvisation by k-8... music teachers,” 2013.


\(^{246}\) Ibid., pp. 247.
all of them undergraduate musicians\textsuperscript{247}. Subject improvisations were rated by a panel of three experienced judges using the Instrumental Jazz Improvisation Evaluation Measure (IJIEM) developed by May through a pilot study and informed by the research of Burnsed and Price\textsuperscript{248}. Subjects took an ear-training test establishing their capacity to recognize intervals, chords, scales, chord patterns, melodic motives and rhythmic motives. They were also tested for their aural imitation aptitude by playing back melodic fragments after hearing a sample played twice on a researcher provided recording. A jazz theory exam was administered and a student experience survey was given to each participant to gather background information (year in school, instrument, jazz listening experience, etc…) Students were also asked to rate their own improvisational level on a three-point scale (1 = beginner, 2 = moderate ability and 3 = advanced)\textsuperscript{249}.

Each subject improvised on the chord progressions to an “F Blues” and the jazz standard, “Satin Doll” and had their improvisations graded according to the IJIEM rubric. Results from all the recorded criteria were cross-referenced to find significant correlations between the different factors that relate to improvisation achievement. The data gathered revealed that, in this study, self-evaluation by the subjects was shown to be the strongest predictor of improvisational achievement. Aural imitation ability rated as the second highest predictor while “improvisation-class experience” factored as the third

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{249} May, “Factors and abilities influencing achievement in instrumental jazz improvisation,” 2003, pp. 248-249.
highest. Jazz theory achievement and overall aural skills did not show any significant correlation to improvisation achievement\textsuperscript{250}.

Using these findings as guide, an educator should seek to identify ways to incorporate self-evaluation into their improvisation curriculum. Recording student improvisations and having the students listen back and comment could be one way of accomplishing this goal. Developing student aural imitation proficiency could also be a way to improve improvisation achievement; therefore call-and-response style exercises would certainly seem to have a place in any improvisational curriculum. It would be perhaps more informative for the middle school band director to have a study like this one conducted with intermediate band students as subjects, so these results have to be viewed in the proper context.

Patrice Dawn Madura conducted a study in the fall of 1991 involving 101 collegiate jazz vocalists (96 undergraduate and 5 graduate; 61 female and 40 male) enrolled in seven different college music programs from the East, West, and Midwest\textsuperscript{251}. The improvisation achievement of the jazz vocalists was judged using a researcher-developed criterion based on the jazz adjudication measure established by David Baker\textsuperscript{252}. Subjects were recorded improvising for one minute over a blues progression and for one minute over a ii-V7-I progression, both with a pre-recorded accompaniment. Three doctoral students using the aforementioned criterion judged the recordings after

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{250} Ibid., pp. 253.
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listening to each improvisation three times, focusing on a different element on each listen (tonal items, rhythm items and expression items)\(^{253}\).

The four factors Madura examined as affecting the improvisation achievement of the participating subjects were; imitative ability, jazz theory knowledge, jazz experience and general creativity\(^{254}\). The imitative ability of the subjects was gauged by recording their attempts to instantly emulate short melodies off of a pre-recording. The accuracy of these attempts was graded on a scale of 1-5 (5 being perfectly accurate)\(^{255}\). A jazz theory test was administered measuring both written and aural knowledge of a range of melodic and harmonic components. A questionnaire was competed by each participant establishing the specifics of their history of jazz experiences, most specifically in regards to their jazz educational history and their listening habits and practices. Finally, the general creativity of the subjects was tested using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT)\(^{256}\), which was used to measure creative fluency, flexibility and originality\(^{257}\).

Madura found that three factors showed themselves to be significant predictors of vocal improvisation achievement; (1) jazz theory knowledge, (2) imitative ability, and (3) jazz experience. There was no significant relationship found between improvisational achievement and instrumental lessons, voice lessons, general creativity and gender\(^{258}\). The finding in this study that jazz theory knowledge is a strong predictor of

\(^{254}\) Ibid., pp. 255.
\(^{255}\) Ibid.
\(^{258}\) Ibid., pp. 264.
improvisational achievement differs from the results of the May\textsuperscript{259} research. Perhaps critical differences in the jazz theory test administered in the two studies contributed to this disagreement in findings. The research conducted by both Madura and May suggest imitative ability is a strong predictor of improvisational achievement. More elaboration on the specific elements of a jazz experience that can be considered strong predictors of achievement would be helpful. However, the general view that the more experience a student gathers in an improvisational environment, the better their improvisational skill will become seems to be a logical assertion. As in the Lissa May study, the context of this research (i.e. collegiate jazz vocalists) should be kept in mind for any intermediate instrumental educator looking to apply the findings presented to their own pedagogical approach.

A previously cited research-study conducted by Bitz involved a second phase that examined the effect of modeling on student improvisational achievement\textsuperscript{260}. A group of twenty-four (24) middle school and high school bassists were separated into an experimental and control group\textsuperscript{261}. Both groups received the same improvisational task, however, the experimental group received a performance model (aurally) of what was expected while the control group did not receive a performance model of the expected task\textsuperscript{262}. The students who received modeled guidance before completing their improvisational task scored significantly higher through assessment from a panel of

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\item \textsuperscript{259} May, “Factors and abilities influencing achievement in instrumental jazz improvisation,” 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{260} Bitz, “A description and investigation of strategies for teaching... improvisation,” 1998.
\item \textsuperscript{261} Ibid., pp. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Ibid., pp. 52-53.
\end{itemize}
professional musicians\textsuperscript{263}. Bitz suggests that this finding should inform music educators in how they approach improvisational instruction and that modeling should form a key component of their approach\textsuperscript{264}.

Research from Charles Robert Ciorba was dedicated to developing a model to predict jazz improvisational achievement\textsuperscript{265}. Ciorba examined previously conducted research and decided to explore the following factors in terms of how they influence improvisational achievement: self-assessment, self-efficacy, motivation, knowledge of jazz theory, music aptitude, sight-reading ability, time spent practicing and listening experience\textsuperscript{266}. Of the factors explored in this research that were not investigated by Madura or May, self-efficacy and motivation stand out as two elements requiring some added explanation. According to Bandura who essentially coined the term, self-efficacy relates to a student’s ability to control their own behavior and their persistence in overcoming challenges and difficulty in their studies\textsuperscript{267}. According to previous research, motivation has been show to play a significant role in academic and music achievement\textsuperscript{268}.

Ciorba’s study took place during the spring of 2006 and involved 102 participants from three different high schools in South Florida and four high schools in Southeast

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., pp. 77.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., pp. 83.
\textsuperscript{265} Ciorba, Charles Robert. “The creation of a model to predict jazz improvisation achievement.” Ph.D. diss., Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, 2006.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., pp. 3.
Michigan\textsuperscript{269}. The students participating in the study were divided fairly evenly through the four high school grade levels and were all members of their respective high school jazz bands. Each participant in the study was given a two-week period to prepare to improvise over a Bb blues and the chord progression to the jazz standard, “Satin Doll” and they were asked to keep a practice-log detailing the time spent practicing during this timeframe. After the two-week preparation period, the researcher visited each student during his or her regularly scheduled band rehearsal period. Each student was initially administered a jazz theory knowledge test, an audiation test, a magnitude of motivation assessment and a questionnaire establishing the average amount of music listening each student engaged in on a weekly basis\textsuperscript{270}. Each student then met with the researcher for a private session where their self-efficacy was determined using two measures. The participants were then recorded performing over the prepared improvisation material, which they immediately listened to in order to provide a self-assessment of their performance\textsuperscript{271}. A sight-reading test was then administered and, following all the aforementioned testing, the researcher contacted the respective school districts to access each students standardized test scores to determine their academic achievement levels.

With all the data gathered and put through multiple regression analysis, only two factors were shown to have a significant correlation with improvisation achievement: self-assessment and jazz theory knowledge\textsuperscript{272}. The model used by Ciorba also found that some other factors influenced improvisation achievement through indirect means rather

\textsuperscript{269} Ciorba, “The creation of a model to predict jazz improvisation achievement”, 2006, pp. 49.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., pp. 57.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., pp. 58.
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., pp. 76.
than by direct means. For example, self-efficacy was found to have a significant indirect
affect on improvisation achievement through its impact on jazz theory knowledge and
self-assessment. While not large enough to be considered a significant result, sight-
reading ability and listening experience were both shown to have a meaningful influence
on improvisation achievement.

Ciorba’s finding that self-assessment is a significant predictor of improvisation
achievement supports the results of the May study. This would suggest that educators
interested in an improvisation curriculum should seriously consider incorporating self-
assessment conditions into their pedagogy. While there is agreement between the Ciorba
study and the May study on the influence of self-assessment, there is disagreement on the
impact jazz theory knowledge has on improvisation achievement. As suggested in
response to the Madura study, different theory tests administered in these studies could
very well have led to the inconsistent findings. Ciorba found that academic achievement
had no discernable affect on the achievement levels for any of the other criteria. In his
final recommendation, Ciorba cites the findings of this study to suggest educators
interested in teaching improvisation should make jazz theory studies a part of their
curriculum as well as regular recording and self-assessment opportunities for the students
to review their improvisational work. The context of this study was a high school
setting, and like the Madura and May research, improvisation was presented strictly
within a jazz idiomatic framework.

\[273\] Ibid., pp. 79.
\[274\] Ibid., pp. 86.
\[275\] Ibid., pp. 94.
Multiple studies have been conducted comparing the effectiveness of a notated improvisation education versus an aural improvisation education with differing results. Laughlin found that beginning high school improvisers received a significant benefit from an all-aural improvisation education when compared to a strictly notated one\textsuperscript{276}. The research of Watson also showed greater gains for students studying an aural-centric curriculum as opposed a strictly notated one\textsuperscript{277}. However, in the Watson study, both groups made significant gains in improvisation achievement throughout the study, suggesting that both approaches to improvisation education are effective. Davison’s research showed no significant difference between an aural and an aural/notated improvisation methodology\textsuperscript{278}. If any conclusion is going to be drawn from these divergent studies it is that an aural approach to improvisation is usually significantly beneficial to the improvisation achievement of a student. At worst, an aural approach simply matches the resulting benefits of a notated improvisational approach. Educators seeking to implement an improvisational element to their curriculum should certainly consider devoting a significant portion of that time to aurally-oriented improvisational exercises.

\textsuperscript{276} Laughlin, J. E. “The use of notated and aural exercises as pedagogical procedures as intended to develop harmonic accuracy among beginning improvisers.” Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 2002.


Beitler investigated the benefits of collaborative improvisational exercises and their effect on overall improvisational achievement\(^{279}\). Results suggested that, overall, collaborative studies were beneficial to improvisational achievement\(^{280}\). A closer look, however, shows that the results are a little less conclusive. While woodwind players saw significant gains from collaborative reflection as an element of an improvisational education, brass players benefitted more from *maintenance* practice than from collaborative practice sessions\(^{281}\). Ultimately the results from this study indicate that educators could find some success using collaborative approaches like *call and response* exercises as well as *echoing* activities as part of their improvisation curriculum. Lastly, Guibalt explored the impact of root-melody accompaniment on the improvisations of elementary students\(^{282}\). The findings of this study showed significant benefit to providing a harmonic accompaniment to student improvisations\(^{283}\).

The body of research exploring factors that influence achievement in improvisation offers some valuable insight for the music educator. As Ciorba states, when one understands the factors influencing improvisational achievement, “one can diagnose typical problems experienced by beginning improvisers with the intention of creating appropriate solutions\(^{284}\).” Self-assessment\(^{285}\), imitative ability\(^{286}\) and *jazz*
experience\textsuperscript{287} were shown to be significant predictors of improvisational achievement. Collaborative exercises\textsuperscript{288} and harmonic accompaniment\textsuperscript{289} were also shown to positively impact student achievement. With this research providing a framework, educators can inform their own improvisational teaching as well as inform their decisions in selecting improvisational methodologies for their classroom.

**Kratus’ 7 Levels of Improvisational Development**

When considering the ways in which beginning musicians might interact with improvisational tasks, it can be instructive for the educator to appreciate the varying levels of improvisational development. The work of Pond and Morehead\textsuperscript{290}, as well as the research of ensuing scholars\textsuperscript{291, 292}, supports the notion that children and beginning musicians can interact with improvisational activities in meaningful ways. Kratus\textsuperscript{293}, building from this supposition, examined what he considered to be the seven different levels of improvisational development for musicians. Kratus’ work has proven to be instructive to researchers when considering the ways in which music students acquire

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., pp. 95.
\textsuperscript{286} May, “Factors and abilities influencing achievement in... improvisation,” 2003.
\textsuperscript{287} Madura, “Relationships among vocal jazz improvisation achievement,” 1996.
improvisational skill and achieve greater levels of meaning through their improvisation\textsuperscript{294, 295, 296}.

Kratus first formulates that in order to distinguish between the improvisations of beginners and those of experts, it is essential to first establish what all improvisations have in common\textsuperscript{297}. Kratus states that; “All improvisations from the simplest to the most sophisticated share these three characteristics: purposeful sounds through time, no intention for revision or replication, and freedom to make melodic and rhythmic decisions within certain constraints\textsuperscript{298}.” From this working definition of what connects all levels of improvisation, Kratus then sets out to investigate what separates the different stages of improvisational development\textsuperscript{299}. The seven different levels of improvisational development are thus described as\textsuperscript{300}:

1) Exploration
2) Process-oriented improvisation
3) Product-oriented improvisation
4) Fluid improvisation
5) Structural improvisation
6) Stylistic improvisation
7) Personal improvisation

\textsuperscript{297} Kratus, “A developmental approach to teaching... improvisation,” 1995, pp. 27.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., pp. 28.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid., pp. 28-36.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
For the purposes of the current research, only the first three stages of development will be discussed, as they constitute the levels most relevant to the concerns of the middle school music educator.

While Kratus defines exploration as the first stage of improvisational development, he actually considers it to be a “pre-improvisatory activity, because exploration lacks the purposefulness and structural constraints of improvisation.” A student engaging in exploratory improvisation is merely experimenting with sounds over time and space, they are not trying to make musical statements nor are they attempting to audiate what they play before they play it. Kratus compares this level of improvisation to the pre-verbal babbling of infants, and like pre-verbal babbling, exploratory improvisation serves as an important step in the developmental process. This nascent experimentation with sound production is common for students when they pick up a new instrument and instead of considering it a throwaway activity, it could instead be thought of as the groundwork for intentioned future improvisation. Kratus suggests the educator emphasize attempted audiation to the students as means to move to the next level of improvisational development, and this can occur more easily when the allowable pitch-set is limited.

As the student begins to control their improvisatory music in a “rudimentary way,” their efforts begin to fall into the category of process-oriented improvisation. Kratus characterizes the improvisation at this level to possess “moments of structure”

301 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
302 Ibid., pp. 31.
303 Ibid., pp. 32.
304 Ibid.
which could be created by short repetitions of patterns or the brief articulation of tonality. However, the improvisation at this level still lacks the elements of musical organization (tempo and tonality) necessary for the effort to sound entirely purposeful\(^\text{305}\). As Kratus states, “It can be said that a process-oriented improvisation has some micro-structures but no macro-structure\(^\text{306}\).” Kratus surmises from his experiences that most improvisation at the elementary level occurs at either the exploratory or process-oriented level\(^\text{307}\). It is also emphasized that the student needs individual guidance and instruction at these early stages to aid them in making a progress towards audiation as a component of their improvisational attempts\(^\text{308}\).

The evolution from process-oriented to product-oriented improvisation is a significant one according to the distinction Kratus offers. It is at the product-oriented level that student improvisations begin to exhibit consistent characteristics of tonality and/or pulse throughout\(^\text{309}\). Logical and musical phrasing may be exhibited as well as melodic or rhythmic references to other musical pieces within the student improvisations at this level\(^\text{310}\). Not all of the aforementioned characteristics need to be present in every improvisation for an educator to consider it to be on the product-oriented level; in fact Kratus suggests that only one of these components is necessary throughout an improvisation for it to exhibit a greater “syntactic structure\(^\text{311}\).” There is a certain musical self-awareness and contextual awareness that occurs at this level for the developing

\(^{305}\) Ibid.
\(^{306}\) Ibid.
\(^{307}\) Ibid.
\(^{308}\) Ibid., pp. 33.
\(^{309}\) Ibid.
\(^{310}\) Ibid.
\(^{311}\) Ibid.
student as they begin to appreciate the fact that music carries value and can be shared amongst other people\textsuperscript{312}.

The next level of development, fluid-improvisation, is likely beyond the scope of what could be expected of most middle school music students. While there certainly might exist a number of advanced music students who can achieve a high level of proficiency at a very young age, the majority of middle school students will not possess the technical skill necessary to perform without giving conscious thought to the mechanics of playing their instrument; which is a required condition for fluid-improvisation\textsuperscript{313}. With that in mind, any middle school music educator interested in adding an improvisational component to their curriculum would be well served to familiarize themselves with the first three stages of improvisational development as established by Kratus. The transition from process-oriented to product-oriented improvisation is especially significant for the educator to identify since it marks the formative start of a student's ability to construct an improvisation with some amount of structure and musical awareness.

An Overview of Beginning Improvisational Curricula

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of an improvisation education as part of a comprehensive intermediate music education\textsuperscript{314, 315, 316}. While institutions like the

\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., pp. 34.
\textsuperscript{315} Wilson, “The effects of group improvisation,” 1970.
MENC\textsuperscript{317} and respected scholars\textsuperscript{318} have advocated the inclusion of improvisation as part of a universal music education, many educators lack a familiarity with improvisational concepts and methodologies\textsuperscript{319}. This lack of familiarity has led to a scarcity of improvisation studies within the middle school band setting\textsuperscript{320}. Instead, improvisation studies are typically relegated to idiomatic settings (such as a jazz ensemble or big band), which are usually voluntary and/or selective in nature and thus not inclusive of a majority of middle school music students.

There appears to be little shortage of creative performance methodologies and/or practicums available for use in the music education programs at the elementary school level throughout the country. However, at the middle school level these creative opportunities can be few and far between. As Duke states:

When band instruction begins, with its emphasis upon reading notes, learning fingerings, and playing symbols – all prescribed in a programmed, visual-method, this often marks the end to creativity, improvisation, experimentation and listening\textsuperscript{321}.

It is essential that middle school music educators strive to find ways to keep creativity alive in their classroom. Improvisation pedagogies designed for the middle school classroom offer an effective module for the educator to break their students away from the notated page and into a more creative sphere of learning. In an effort to inform

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Montano, “The effect of improvisation... on rhythmic accuracy in sight-reading achievement,” 1983.
  \item \textsuperscript{317} Music Educators National Conference, 1994.
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Lehman, Sloboda & Woody, \textit{Psychology for musicians}, 2007.
  \item \textsuperscript{319} Niknafs, “The use of improvisation by k-8 general music teachers,” 2013.
  \item \textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
educators who may be interested in incorporating some improvisation methodologies into their intermediate band curriculum but are not sure where to begin, an overview of existent literature appropriate for that particular setting will be provided here. Research studies attempting to address the lack of improvisation at the middle school level by developing an improvisational curriculum will be observed first, followed by a survey of published resources designed with the same purpose.

Case studies aimed at creating an improvisational curriculum at the middle school level. Charles Vernon Burnsed attempted to develop and implement an improvisational sequence for application within the intermediate band curriculum in the fall of 1977\textsuperscript{322}. Through a pilot study conducted the year before, Burnsed constructed an improvisation sequence for intermediate band students\textsuperscript{323} based primarily on using blues forms, pentatonic scales and other activities recommended by famed jazz educator, Jerry Coker\textsuperscript{324}. Of the ten practices recommended by Coker for improvisational development, Burnsed only felt six were practical for the intermediate band setting: (1) Chord-scales applied to instrument, (2) chord-scale patterning, (3) melodic development, (4) application of melodic patterns to progressions, (5) playing experience with accompaniment, and (6) listening\textsuperscript{325}.


\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., pp. 41.


\textsuperscript{325} Burnsed, “The development... of an introductory jazz improvisation sequence,” 1978, pp. 42.
Three minor pentatonic scales outlining *blues-scale* embellishments for the tonalities of the I – IV and V chords in the key of C Major were chosen for chord scale study (C minor pentatonic, F minor pentatonic, and G minor pentatonic). Patterns employing the aforementioned pentatonic scales gave students the opportunity to apply chord scales to their instruments and introduced the concept of *patterning*. A demonstration solo emphasizing rhythmic repetition and melodic imitation helped to convey the concept of melodic development and application of melodic patterns to progressions. Eight-measure recorded accompaniments were provided, offering the opportunity to play with accompaniment and also *listen* during call & response exercises with other students. Participants would practice improvising in each of the three key areas separately before combining the tonalities together and improvising over a 12 bar *blues*.

After establishing this improvisational sequence through the pilot study, Burnsed felt it proved to be a feasible course of study to incorporate into an intermediate band environment on a larger scale. Burnsed brought the sequence to two neighboring school programs in Southern Georgia where he created an experimental group (*n*=114) and two control groups (combined *n*=121) using an assortment of 7th, 8th and 9th graders. The experimental group received the improvisational sequence for 20 minutes of daily instruction during band class for five weeks. Evaluation of the sequence was gauged by pretests and posttests measuring attitude of band members, sight-reading achievement and improvisation skill.

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326 Ibid., pp. 43.
327 Ibid.
328 Ibid., pp. 75.
329 Ibid., pp. 69.
The band directors implementing this study reported that many of the students were initially very inhibited to improvise alone in front of the rest of the band. To help overcome this issue, students were encouraged to improvise in groups of three to five at the same time in order to mitigate any initial fears. Pretest and posttest scores suggest an above average improvement in sight-reading achievement within the experimental group. This finding was not consistent enough through all grade levels to be identified as a significant result. The results did show significant improvement in improvisational skill amongst the eighth and ninth grade students from the experimental group, this result was not found with the seventh grade participants. While the attitudes of music students towards band were found to be higher posttest among the experimental group, Burnsed was not willing to attribute this entirely to just the improvisation sequence. Burnsed was willing to go so far as to say there were no negative effects discernable from introducing the improvisation sequence, and most students really enjoyed the activities and felt they were benefiting from the study overall.

Burnsed feels this study should encourage more educators to implement improvisation studies into their curriculum. He went on to say;

Band directors should not fear adverse effects on the instrumental skills of their students from broadening the range of experiences in their rehearsals. On the contrary, the experimental students in this study continued to improve in sight-reading skill, and they

\[330\] Ibid., pp. 70.
\[331\] Ibid., pp. 81.
\[332\] Ibid., pp. 83.
\[333\] Ibid., pp. 101.
\[334\] Ibid., pp. 103.
exhibited higher attitudes toward band than their counterparts in the control groups.\(^{335}\)

This study, by only exposing students to improvisational content for five weeks, can only reveal so much in regards to the sustainability of this particular improvisational construct in an intermediate band environment. A great strength of this approach would be the practicality of the 20-minute practice units, which would allow the band director to fit the sequence into an already established music curriculum. This sequence is very idiomatically aligned with a jazz improvisational approach, taking its inspiration from the teaching of Jerry Coker, the renowned jazz educator. For educators interested in a non-idiomatic approach to improvisational instruction, this sequence would not be appropriate.

David Alan Coy\(^{336}\) identified a lack of creative music curriculum in middle school band programs bemoaning the “mundane process of repetitious rehearsals and developing music for the year’s calendar of seasonal concerts and band festivals,” that takes place in most middle school band rooms. Coy notes that with the widespread acceptance of Orff, Kodaly and Dalcroze in elementary music settings it is particularly glaring how middle school band programs lack any such common creative methodology.\(^{338}\) In an attempt to address this shortcoming, Coy constructed a multisensory approach to teaching jazz improvisation in the middle school band room specifically for students with two years of previous instrumental studies (grades 7-8).

\(^{335}\) Ibid., pp. 104.
\(^{337}\) Ibid., pp. 9.
\(^{338}\) Ibid., pp. 8.
Coy created his sample groups from two advanced band programs near Eugene, Oregon and used students from these programs to construct a 30 person control group and a 30 person experimental group. The material presented to the students in the experimental group was informed by a Dalcroze approach. Ten one measure rhythms commonly found in jazz improvisations were placed on index cards, many cards also showed accompanying vocal articulations reminiscent of a vocal jazz idiom. The tonal material presented to the experimental group consisted of three blues scales (F, B♭ and E♭). These rhythmic and tonal materials were applied to a 12-bar blues form in a swing style\textsuperscript{339}. A performance-practice tape was included with the improvisation materials. Side-one of the tape serves as a play-a-long for blues progression in the aforementioned three keys and side-two featured listening examples of famous big bands and jazz solo artists.

The experimental group, just as in the Burnsed research, received 20 minutes of improvisational instruction at the beginning of each band practice. These twenty minutes would be fast-paced and the students would work through their rhythm card and instruction material systematically. Working with the rhythm cards, the students would sing, tap, clap or use body movements to internalize the rhythmic material. The material would then be worked into verbal syllable patterns and once progress was satisfactory, the students would transfer the rhythmic information to their instruments\textsuperscript{340}. The melodic portion of the practice period would start with the performance of single-pitch rhythmic patterns, and these were taught with an emphasis on appropriate articulations and feel.

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid., pp. 34.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., pp. 38.
Gradually notes would be added to make the rhythmic material into melodic material\textsuperscript{341}. Each daily instruction period would also include a performance portion where selected students would perform in front of the band accompanied by the performance-practice tape (or by the instructor). The performance section of the routine was a highly emphasized aspect of the learning process where students were called upon to incorporate all the learned information from their practice sessions\textsuperscript{342}. The control group received similar instruction, just without the rhythm cards. Instead they received the rhythmic patterns in a packet without the verbal syllables\textsuperscript{343}. This study lasted for a six-week period and there was an administered pretest and posttest assessing rhythmic skill and overall attitude.

Coy found that student learning levels increased significantly with the multisensory approach used with the experimental group. The study proved to be accessible to the students due in large part to its sequential structure that consistently limited the amount of information presented to students at any given time. The rhythmic card system was judged to be an effective teaching tool for introducing rhythmic concepts to the participating students and the blues progression was deemed to be an efficient module for using the acquired motive skills\textsuperscript{344}. The attitude survey did not show any significant differences between the control and experimental group.

This study offers interesting options for the music educator seeking a methodology to incorporate into their classroom, especially the educator familiar with

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., pp. 40.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{343} Ibid., pp. 41.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid., pp. 83.
certain Dalcroze approaches. The sample sizes for the experimental group and control group were small, as was the timeframe for testing the developed curriculum. The systematic and sequential nature of this method, however, proved to be a very effective approach with intermediate band students. Starting the learning process with simple rhythmic acquisition exercises, adding stylistic verbiage, adding pitch, adding melody and then performing all the material over a blues progression is a well-ordered approach that would hold promise in most intermediate settings.

Steven Lee Bingham set out to develop an improvisational curriculum for middle school band programs after ascertaining that while there was an abundance of improvisational teaching materials available to the individual beginning instrumentalist, there was a dearth of options available for the beginning band educator. Bingham sought to develop a module intended to supplement most middle school band curricula, specifically in the second semester of the sixth grade year of a band program. The module presents 7 units, the first six of which are built around melodies common in most beginning band curriculum. Bingham used these practical songs to introduce students to different musical styles and eventually chord-scale improvisation. Each of the simple melodies is paired with a recorded style-model accompaniment to further immerse the students with the musical style being studied. Examples of these melody and style-model pairings would be *Hot Cross Buns* performed as a bossa-nova with the *Girl From Impanema* presented as a style-model and *Kum Ba Ya* performed as a folk song with Bob

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346 Ibid., pp. 58.
347 Ibid., pp. 62.
Dylan’s *Mr. Tambourine Man* presented as the style-model\(^\text{348}\). The teacher was provided with a lesson plan for each unit describing the appropriate articulations and stylistic nuances of each musical style. The seventh unit was designed as a review of the previous units.

The sample used in the Bingham study was drawn from two middle school band programs, one rural and one urban in Northern Florida. A combined pool of students from the two programs provided seventy-two volunteers for the study, of which thirty-four were selected for analysis. Only one pretest was conducted gauging student ability to perform the melodies in the module. There was a posttest conducted on the performance of the same melodies, a posttest testing the student’s ability to perform the harmonic structures from the module melodies, and a posttest measuring their ability to improvise on the melodies from the module\(^\text{349}\). The researcher concluded that the module succeeded in acquainting the subjects with fundamental concepts of improvisation\(^\text{350}\). An overall positive student reaction was gathered from the subjects of the study and the researcher found that all students were able to improvise on the melodies on an above average to high ability level\(^\text{351}\).

Exit interviews with the two educators overseeing the implementation of this study revealed that both teachers felt there was a serious lack of time available to

\[^{348}\text{Ibid., pp. 83.}
^{349}\text{Ibid., pp. 86.}
^{350}\text{Ibid., pp. 118.}
^{351}\text{Ibid., pp. 110.}\]
incorporate the module into their existent curriculum. Educator A expressed a concern common to many music educators:

There is so much you are trying to get done in that first year, that it’s awful hard to get it (improvisation) squeezed in without cutting something else in the curriculum.

So while student reaction to the material was overall very positive, the improvisation module created a stress on the educators looking to keep up with all of the obligations of a first year beginning band curriculum. That being said, using the common melodies chosen by this researcher to bridge the beginning student experience into introductory improvisation exercises proved to be a promising approach. The added element of introducing numerous musical styles as part of these studies, while probably fun for the student, may occupy more time than what an average music educator can afford to provide within a supplemental module.

In another research study conducted by Caslor, multiple instrumental ensembles from different settings were asked to engage in a series of spontaneous improvisation activities. These activities, many of which were inspired or adopted from the improvisational book by Agrell, were primarily presented as improvisational games to the students. There were no means of assessment instituted throughout the research as

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352 Ibid., pp. 96 and 98.
351 Ibid., pp. 96.
354 Ibid., pp. 116.
Caslor was primarily interested in observing student reactions to the various improvisational prompts. Caslor documents his interactions with students in various instrumental ensemble settings and ultimately concluded that while it was a challenge achieving true spontaneity in the ensemble setting, finding an appropriate balance between structure and freedom within each improvisational exercise is the most effective means of creating a spontaneous environment\(^\text{358}\). Caslor states that,

The most successful exercises, both in terms of process and product, were those that incorporated a pre-determined structure within which the performers had the opportunity to interact with each other while exploring the possibilities of their instrument through improvisation\(^\text{359}\).

This could serve as an instructive takeaway for music educators interested in constructing improvisational exercises for their classrooms.

Caslor was also able to observe through his classroom interactions that *playing too much* was a common issue for students when presented with improvisational tasks\(^\text{360}\). Finding ways to encourage students to leave more space in order to listen to their musical surroundings was cited as a challenge by the researcher\(^\text{361}\). Lastly, Caslor cited the importance of duration as a consideration for improvisational activities, observing that exercises lasting more than a minute would tend to lose the attention of students\(^\text{362}\). The improvisational game approach used by Caslor in this study and written about by Agrell\(^\text{363}\) offers a flexible and relatively non-threatening approach to incorporating

\(^{358}\) Ibid., pp. 100.
\(^{359}\) Ibid.
\(^{360}\) Ibid., 101.
\(^{361}\) Ibid.
\(^{362}\) Ibid., pp. 103.
\(^{363}\) Agrell, 2008.
improvisation into the classroom, providing a encouraging alternative methodology for educators.

Yawn Eunice Chyu\textsuperscript{364} proposed an approach to teaching improvisation to elementary and intermediate piano students by modifying and adapting the\emph{ Robert Pace Piano Method}\textsuperscript{365} while also incorporating elements from a Dalcroze Eurhythmics background. Although this methodology isn’t designed for use in the middle school band setting, some of the approaches suggested by Chyu could certainly be modified to fit into that context. The Pace method being used in this study encourages students to improvise on existing repertoire as a means of internalizing and mastering concepts presented by the material. Pace sees this as an effective way to promote comprehensive musicianship\textsuperscript{366}. This approach uses improvisation not simply as an exercise unto itself, but rather as a conduit for assimilation of other musical topics, a tool for comprehensive learning\textsuperscript{367}.

Similar to the Bingham study, the Pace approach used by Chyu in this method encourages students to master particular songs or melodies and then attempt to experiment with the learned material. Some approaches suggested by Chyu include pentatonic improvisation as a starting point (with teacher accompaniment), potentially using common songs built with pentatonic melodies like “Amazing Grace,” and “Old McDonald” as jumping off themes\textsuperscript{368}. The pentatonic scale is seen as a good starting point for beginning improvisers as it contains no leading-tone which can afford students

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{364} Chyu, “Teaching improvisation to piano students,” 2004.
\item \textsuperscript{366} Chyu, “Teaching improvisation to piano students,” 2004, pp. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{367} Ibid., pp. 19.
\item \textsuperscript{368} Ibid., pp. 26.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the freedom to improvise without having to worry about dissonances. Chyu also thinks to use improvisation as the conduit to teach the concept of modes by having students improvise using, for example, the dorian scale\textsuperscript{369} (with teacher accompaniment) and going so far as to use improvisation to teach the whole-tone scale\textsuperscript{370} and even tone-rows\textsuperscript{371} for more advanced students.

While most of the exercises discussed by Chyu might apply too specifically to her intended target (private piano teachers) the fundamental concept forwarded here of using improvisation as something other than an end study unto itself and rather as a means to a deeper learning of other musical content is an important one. Chyu’s approach suggests that educators should not necessarily get bogged down in trying to find ways to teach improvisation as an isolated skill unto itself, but rather they should find ways to use improvisation as a learning tool for other topics or areas of study. Additionally, while most improvisation methodologies designed for the middle school band-room are idiomatically based in a jazz context, Chyu presents a malleable approach that could be applied to most any musical style.

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., pp. 102.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., pp. 33.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., pp. 128.
Published improvisational curricula with potential for middle school application. Although there exists a vast assortment of published resources available for the individual or advanced music student seeking to develop improvisation ability\(^{372}\), the middle school music classroom remains an environment largely lacking in applicable improvisational resources\(^{373, 374}\). The research studies conducted by Burnsed\(^ {375} \), Coy\(^ {376} \) and Bingham\(^ {377} \) provide valuable insight into what can realistically be taught in the intermediate band setting, however access to these experimental curricula is largely limited. Examined here are the available published resources designed to provide improvisational opportunities to the developing beginning band student. Some of the observed resources are singular publications designed for the educator to read and then apply to their own curriculum. Other resources are fully designed curriculum unto themselves, and therefore involving multiple publications for varied instrumentation and teacher editions.

*Music Improvisation as a Classroom Method: a new approach to teaching music.* Bert Konowitz published an approach to classroom improvisational pedagogy that is primarily structured around activities involving the voice, body movements, keyboard exercises, and instrumental events (percussion instruments as well as traditional band

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instruments are viable to use with this methodology). Konowitz puts forward a sequential approach that foreshadows the stages of improvisational development authored by Kratus, which would come some years later. As in the work of Kratus, Konowitz devotes the first section of his methodology to exploratory activities followed by what he calls experimental activities and then developmental involvement. Each of the three aforementioned phases is sequentially divided into enrichment activities for voice, instrument and keyboard. Much of the material presented in the book is expressed in the voice of a teacher speaking to a class of music students, therefore assisting the potential educator by suggesting feasible approaches to introduce improvisational activities with age appropriate dialogue and direction.

Similar to how other researchers have identified the importance of a safe and non-threatening environment as a prerequisite for improvisational activities, Konowitz addresses early on the ways in which an educator can create such an atmosphere. Konowitz suggests that at the beginning improvisational stages, educators should involve the entire class in all activities since isolating individuals can lead to inhibition and fear. Konowitz also discusses creating a positive environment by trying to receive any individual contribution from a student without critique or evaluation; all creative acts should be met with positive reinforcement. Lastly, Konowitz emphasizes specificity.

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380 Ibid., pp. 5, 25, 45.
383 Ibid., pp. 5.
384 Ibid.
and clarity in all interactions with students regarding improvisation\textsuperscript{385}. Ambiguity on the part of the educator can lead to students feeling confused or inhibited which can then turn very easily into frustration.

Taken as a whole, the text provided by Konowitz offers a succinct approach to introducing improvisation into the general music class setting. While some of the activities are most appropriate for an elementary level classroom, others could certainly be modified for the middle school setting. The educator would also have to consider modifying most of the activities presented in this book if they wanted to use these approaches in the band rehearsal setting, as this text is presented primarily as a classroom methodology. The book functions as a teachers manual to teaching improvisation, as such there are no companion books for students or class-ready materials provided. However, clear examples are provided for each activity and the educator could either draw up their own materials based on the suggestions from Konowitz or simply instruct their activities solely through giving aural directions as they are presented in the text.

\textit{Chop-Monster Jr.} Another curriculum intended for the elementary level general music classroom, but offering potential value to prospective music educators at the middle school grade level as well, is the \textit{Chop-Monster Jr.} jazz handbook by Fitzgerald, McCord and Berg\textsuperscript{386}. Conceived as a jazz language tutor for elementary students, \textit{Chop-Monster Jr.} is a sequential and multimedia curriculum that introduces students to jazz-

\textsuperscript{385} Ibid.
oriented styles, rhythms and history. As researchers have noted\textsuperscript{387}, effectively applying a jazz pedagogy at the elementary level is quite a challenge, however this text attempts to bridge that pedagogical gap.

The *Chop-Monster Jr.* handbook weaves jazz history lessons and recorded model listening (via accompanying CDs) into a sequential curriculum that starts with rhythmic motif acquisition, introduces melodic content though vocal and scat exercises, and applies that learned content to playback on various Orff instruments. The improvisational progression laid out in the curriculum roughly begins with single-note scatting followed by single-note instrumental improvisation, two-note scatting followed by two-note instrumental improvisation, three-note scatting followed by three-note instrumental improvisation and culminating with students scatting and then instrumentally improvising using major and minor chord structures\textsuperscript{388}. This systematic, one-step-at-a-time approach to melodic improvisation informed by initial rhythmic training represents a model that could conceivably be replicated at a later stage of music learning, including at the middle school level.

Orff instruments are used throughout this curriculum and accompaniment is either provided through the supplementary compact discs, or by arranged student accompaniment (with Orff instrumentation). The *Chop-Monster Jr.* handbook is a comprehensive text that provides the educator with pre-made worksheets, tips on ensemble set-up for “jam sessions,” advice on teaching the concepts presented and external links to informative websites that supplement the curriculum. Used as a

\textsuperscript{387} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 64.
component to an elementary general music curriculum, Chop-Monster Jr. provides ample opportunities for student improvisation while conveying a jazz-oriented historical perspective through the curriculum. For educators at the middle school level, this text provides effective improvisational approaches that could conceivably be modified for the middle school setting in group lessons or smaller ensemble contexts. This curriculum leads quite seamlessly into a more advanced course of study developed by Berg and designed for use in the big-band jazz ensemble setting, simply entitled; Chop-Monster (vol. 1 & 2)\textsuperscript{389, 390}. This curriculum will be overviewed later in the current research.

**Free to be Musical: Group Improvisation in Music.** In 2010, Higgins and Campbell released a succinct compilation of group improvisational activities entitled *Free to be Musical: Group Improvisation in Music*\textsuperscript{391}. The exercises (or *events* as they are referred to in the text) detailed within the book pull inspiration from numerous creative sources including the pedagogies of Orff and Dalcroze as well as the conducted-improvisational approaches (or *conduction*) of American jazz conductor/composer, Laurence “Butch” Morris\textsuperscript{392}. Designed for use by music educators and music therapists alike, *Free to be Musical* provides examples of improvisational games and activities that range from traditional approaches like pentatonic\textsuperscript{393} and blues-form improvisation

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid., pp. 3.
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., pp. 69.
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exercises\textsuperscript{394}, to art and poetry inspired improvisational tasks involving creative musical responses to presented visual art or literature\textsuperscript{395}. After presenting a series of improvisational \textit{events} in an alphabetical order, Higgins and Campbell offer a sequence of \textit{connectives} at the end of the book which link together multiple events to create a realistic extended lesson plan for the prospective educator.

The \textit{Free to be Musical} text emphasizes the importance of creating a safe space for improvisational activities throughout\textsuperscript{396}, which was a chief consideration presented in the related research\textsuperscript{397, 398}. Higgins and Campbell go so far as to offer helpful exercises built with the purpose of establishing an appropriate musical environment conducive for creative practice\textsuperscript{399}. The improvisational activities presented are well suited for students at the elementary to early middle school level. Most activities also appear to be most appropriate for relatively small groups of students, making the exercises practical in a group lesson setting but less realistic in a large band rehearsal context. Higgins and Campbell intend for the activities to be viewed as “departure points” from which any educator could structure their own approaches for improvisational events within the classroom setting\textsuperscript{400}. With that view in mind, \textit{Free to be Musical} provides a fertile offering of departure points for the middle school music educator intent on incorporating improvisation into their classroom setting.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{394} Ibid., pp. 27.
\item \textsuperscript{395} Ibid., pp. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{396} Ibid., pp. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{397} Schopp, “A study of the effects of the national standards for music education,” 2006, pp. 124, 147, 154.
\item \textsuperscript{398} Stringham, “Improvisation... in high school... music curriculum,” 2010, pp. 110-111.
\item \textsuperscript{399} Higgins and Campbell, \textit{Free to be Musical}, 2010, pp. 55.
\item \textsuperscript{400} Ibid., pp. 15.
\end{itemize}
**Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians.** Similar to the approach put forth in the *Free to be Musical* text, *Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians*\(^{401}\) provides an exhaustive list of improvisational activities constructed in the form of improvisation games. The games used within this text utilize improvisation as a means to execute particular objectives or goals as articulated within each prescribed exercise. As the title denotes, this text was conceived as an attempt to introduce improvisation to classically trained musicians. However, the potential applications of this text go far beyond that specified scope. Agrell details ways in which music educators could apply these exercises within numerous settings (including the band ensemble setting\(^{402}\)), however the author also notes that most of the contained exercises are well-suited for 8-12 players at a time, with 16 players being a relative maximum for most of the included exercises\(^{403}\). This limitation would ostensibly make most of the exercises included as part of the text inapplicable within the beginning band setting, however the constructs presented could be modified by the educator for various applications.

Using the multitude of improvisational game constructs provided in this method as an inspiration (over 500 exercises are included), the music educator could design exercises for the beginning band setting that introduce improvisation through a fun and non-stressful approach. Improvisation game exercises offer an interesting alternative for the music educator concerned about including more improvisation in their curriculum while also desiring that these efforts be inclusive and applicable for the beginning level music student. Taking inspiration and guidance from this particular method, Caslor

\(^{402}\) Ibid., pp. 6.
\(^{403}\) Ibid., pp. 7.
explored using improvisational game approaches within a beginning band setting\textsuperscript{404}, which suggests it is a viable approach that deserves a greater consideration from educators.

\textit{Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation; Volume 1-3.} Prominent music education scholars Azzara and Grunow teamed up to release an improvisation curriculum designed to supplement the general music studies of beginning music students\textsuperscript{405}. The core approach of the \textit{Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation} (DTMI) curriculum is structured around the acquisition of musicianship skills through a comprehensive study of basic song repertoire. The sequential structure of the curriculum first familiarizes the student with a song performance, typically a song common to beginning band methodologies (i.e. “Mary Ann,” “Simple Gifts,” etc…)\textsuperscript{406}. Students listen to a presentation of the song through a teacher performance or from the accompaniment CD and then are asked to sing along with the melody and bass line using wordless vocal syllables. Students then perform the melody and bass line on their instrument by ear. After the melody and bass line of the song has been assimilated through aural immersion, students engage with a variety of improvisational exercises in an attempt to develop their rhythmic and harmonic comprehension.

\textsuperscript{404} Caslor, “Spontaneous improvisation,” 2010.
\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., pp. 1 & 51.
The DMTI curriculum has been constructed in such a way so as to mimic the learning process that occurs as a child develops linguistic skills. This process emphasizes imitation over rote-memorization or strict notational recitation and ultimately aims to equip students with the necessary musical vocabulary to create their own melodies inspired from the learned context (or, in other words, the repertoire). For each song taught through the curriculum, students are presented with eight rhythmic patterns (ranging from 1 to 4 measures long), which are learned through vocal echoing and subsequently performed on respective instruments. Once students develop comfort with the presented rhythmic patterns, they improvise responses to these rhythmic models (presented via the companion CD) with vocalized syllables and then on their instruments in the style of the learned song.

The learning process continues with students singing (first with a constant syllable, then with variable solfège) and performing a series of tonal patterns that align with the harmonic progression of the studied song. Students use this same chronological sequence (1. sing with a consistent neutral syllable, 2) sing with solfège and 3) perform exercise on respective instrument) with subsequent echoing and improvisation drills using the learned tonal patterns over fragments of the harmonic progression. Students ultimately apply all of their acquired skills to exercises based on developing the seven improvisational skills set forth by the curriculum. These seven skills are listed as; (1) improvising rhythm patterns to the bass line of learned song, (2) perform the chord tones of the reduced harmonic progression (harmonic movement of song is condensed into a short progression; i.e. tonic – dominant – tonic), (3) learn the full harmonic rhythm of the

407 Ibid., pp. iv.
408 Ibid., pp. 9-13.
studied song, (4) improvise utilizing learned rhythm patterns with specified chord tone combinations through the harmonic progression of the song, (5) improvise using tonal patterns over the harmonic progression of the song, (6) improvise using a combination of the learned rhythm and tonal patterns over the harmonic progression of the song, and (7) performer improvises by developing the material used in #6$^{409}$. Each of the aforementioned tasks are sung first, and then performed on respective instruments.

At the end of each unit (all based on a different song), the student will compose their own rhythmic and tonal material as well as transcribe an improvised solo provided on the accompaniment CD. This is done in an effort to expand the students vocabulary as well encourage each student to think about what makes for more meaningful improvisations$^{410}$. The companion CD is used throughout the curriculum to model all songs as well as the rhythmic and tonal patterns for the students, however the instructor could also model content for the students to provide a more interactive prototype. The DMTI curriculum comes in editions for C (treble clef & bass clef) instruments, B$^b$ instruments, F instruments, and E$^b$ instruments as well as a workbook for vocalists. The curriculum is presented in three different volumes that progressively introduce the student to more challenging song material.

The DMTI curriculum is thorough, logically presented and builds from an elementary foundation making it a remarkably appropriate curriculum for the middle school level. Book 2 of the curriculum introduces students to songs like “When the Saints

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$^{409}$ Ibid.
$^{410}$ Ibid., pp. 16.
Go Marching In\textsuperscript{411},” and book 3 presents blues and “rhythm-changes” progressions\textsuperscript{412}, all
of which are considered to be traditional jazz vehicles for improvisation. Therefore, while
the first book of the series is largely devoid of overt stylistic associations and uses song
literature common to most beginning band pedagogy\textsuperscript{413, 414, 415, 416, 417}, the second and
third installments of the curriculum begin to introduce students to a slightly more jazz-
oriented stylistic approach which lends itself well for students who intend to eventually
participate in jazz ensembles. Educators could conceivably go at their own pace with this
curriculum, taking as much time on each unit (or song) as they deem necessary making it
a relatively flexible methodology for music teachers.

While it stands as an impressive module for improvisation studies, the DTMI
curriculum is designed as a supplement to a general music program. Educators interested
in using this module would need to find time in a group lesson setting or rehearsal setting
to incorporate the sizable DMTI curriculum. Being that time constraints are a common
concern of music educators attempting to include improvisation studies into their
curriculum\textsuperscript{418, 419}, the scope of DMTI could pose a formidable challenge. Lack of funding
to purchase improvisational resources is also a cited challenge for music educators\textsubscript{420}, presenting another consideration for the educator interested in the extensive DMTI curriculum. These considerations not withstanding, the DMTI curriculum offers a comprehensive and practical approach to improvisational training that affords any interested educator tremendous insight into what a progressive and sequential improvisational module could look like within their music program.

\textbf{Jump Right In: the Instrumental Series for Winds and Percussion.} Using some of the same improvisational constructs and approaches from DMTI\textsubscript{421} and the currently out-of-print curriculum entitled \textit{Creativity in Improvisation} (CII)\textsubscript{422}, prominent music education scholars Azzara, Grunow and Gordon joined forces to release a comprehensive beginning band curriculum incorporating an extensive series of improvisational elements\textsubscript{423}. \textit{Jump Right In: the Instrumental Series} (JRIIS) incorporates core approaches of the Gordon music learning theory in the context of beginning band instruction through a sequential and logical plan for musical development\textsubscript{424}. Each lesson presented in the JRIIS curriculum emphasizes the development of audiation as a requisite skill for young musicians. Comprehensive guidance is provided to the educator through the curriculum

\textsuperscript{419} Schopp, “A study of the effects of national standards for music,” 2006, pp. 175.  
\textsuperscript{421} Azzara and Grunow, \textit{Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation}, 2006.  
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., pp. 19-20.
including; suggestions on how to recruit for a band program\textsuperscript{425}, strategies on using the accompaniment CDs\textsuperscript{426}, guidance on how to approach student assessment\textsuperscript{427}, ways to help a student decide upon what instrument they should play\textsuperscript{428}, and so on.

Similar to language used by Kratus\textsuperscript{429}, the JRIIS curriculum references the need for beginning instrumentalists to pass through a stage of “instrumental babble,” similar to the stage of verbal babble passed through by a child learning how to speak\textsuperscript{430}. The JRIIS curriculum is structured to acclimate students at this earliest stage of development to a music learning process centered on skill acquisition by means of audiation, rote song memorization, rhythmic training and harmonic fluency as acquired through learned tonal patterns. The majority of improvisational content in the JRIIS curriculum centers on the performance of tonal and rhythm patterns as part of the aforementioned learning process\textsuperscript{431}. Similar to the approach of the DMTI\textsuperscript{432} and CII\textsuperscript{433} curricula, JRIIS has students improvise tonal patterns over the harmonic context of learned song material (tonic, dominant, sub-dominant).

While the improvisational framework of the JRIIS curriculum is not as extensive as the DMTI improvisational framework, JRIIS is attempting to provide a comprehensive instrumental approach for a beginning band program and thus incorporates improvisation as one of many educational goals. As the curriculum states, “the primary objective of

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid., pp. 23.
\textsuperscript{426} Ibid., pp. 29.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., pp. 31.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., pp. 24-25.
\textsuperscript{429} Kratus, “A developmental approach to teaching music improvisation,” 1995.
\textsuperscript{430} Grunow, Gordon and Azzara, \textit{Jump Right In}, 1999, pp. 27.
\textsuperscript{431} Ibid., pp. 299.
\textsuperscript{432} Azzara and Grunow, \textit{Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation}, 2006.
(JRIIS) is to develop musical independence.

Unlike more traditional beginning band curricula that tend to strictly emphasize learning music from the page, the JRIIS curriculum strives to impart that skill while simultaneously fostering an aural learning approach that promotes increased audiation and musical independence. As a comprehensive curriculum JRIIS consists of a teaching manual, 2 separate workbooks designed for each traditional band wind instrument (and percussion), and a companion CD for both workbooks. There are also additional solo books and CDs available for purchase providing solo performance models for much of the covered curriculum as well as a student composition book. There is additionally a version of this curriculum designed for strings.

As a stand-alone beginning band curriculum, JRIIS provides more opportunities for creativity and improvisation than any other pedagogy of its kind. Using other traditional beginning band curricula as a comparison (even one in particular that claims to emphasize creativity, yet only offers two identifiable improvisational opportunities throughout the curriculum) the true accomplishment of the JRIIS approach can be fully appreciated. Teachers using this methodology can also trust that the approaches outlined in the curriculum are supported by significant research and generated by three of the most established pedagogues in the music education community. That being said, picking a

\[\text{Grunow, Gordon and Azzara, 1999, pp. 279.}\]
curriculum for a band program is a personal decision for many educators, and a financial decision for others. As many educators know, finding funding for music programs can be a challenge\textsuperscript{439, 440}, therefore purchasing an entire new curriculum for a band program may be out of the financial reach of some music teachers. Even with appropriate funding, many educators may not feel comfortable selecting an entire band curriculum strictly based on the improvisational opportunities it provides. Flexibility has been proposed as an important metric for the successful inclusion of improvisation in the secondary school environment\textsuperscript{441}, adopting a complete curriculum may not provide such flexibility for the music educator.

**Resources for middle school jazz ensembles.** While the focus of the current study is to examine approaches and methodologies incorporating improvisation into the general music curriculum at the middle school level, the jazz band ensemble has become a common feature within secondary school music programs\textsuperscript{442} and presents a context conducive to improvisational training. Studies indicate that a majority of jazz ensembles taking place at the middle school level are voluntary and co-curricular (taking place outside of the standard school day/curriculum) and are therefore populated by only a fraction of students from any given music program\textsuperscript{443}. The primary goal of the current study is to explore improvisational approaches for the middle school concert band setting,


\textsuperscript{443} West, “Teaching middle school jazz,” 2011.
as research supports the concert band as the most common installment within present day school music programs. However, if the educator feels that time constraints limit the improvisation study that can occur within their established general music curriculum, they may decide a jazz ensemble provides the most promising opportunity to introduce interested students to the practice of improvisation.

Despite improvisation being considered an intrinsic component of the jazz tradition, some studies have shown a surprising lack of improvisational activity occurring within the jazz ensemble rehearsal setting. There are resources available designed with the purpose of organizing improvisational study within the jazz ensemble context as well as providing information for the educator inexperienced in the practice of rehearsing a jazz band. An overview of these resources will be provided.

*Jazz Pedagogy: the Jazz Educator’s Handbook and Resource Guide.* For the educator interested in constructing a jazz ensemble at the secondary school level, Dr. Willie Hill Jr. and J. Richard Dunscomb have compiled a comprehensive resource detailing rehearsal techniques, band set-up procedures, scheduling approaches, as well as

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guidelines for efficient rehearsing methods as they relate to specific instruments and sections within the large jazz ensemble setting. *Jazz Pedagogy* caters to most of the conceivable needs of the educator inexperienced in running and rehearsing a jazz ensemble, covering a range of topics from the logistical through the theoretical. There is even an enclosed DVD showcasing the authors as they rehearse large and small jazz ensembles at the middle school, high school and collegiate levels. This supplemental DVD recording provides applicable and time-tested jazz ensemble rehearsal techniques as established educators deliver them in an applied rehearsal context.

This resource provides a relatively limited amount of improvisational guidance for the prospective jazz ensemble instructor since it is, at its core, endeavoring to cover the entire range of considerations inherent in constructing a jazz ensemble at the secondary through collegiate levels. The enclosed improvisational content is structured predominantly on developing student improvisational ability through the acquisition of a *jazz vocabulary* and aural skill set. The developmental sequence promoted by Dr. Willie Hill Jr. for the appropriate acquisition of these skills involves: listening, practicing, playing, transcribing, copying and analyzing. Dr. Hill defines a *jazz vocabulary* as, “scales, chords, patterns, modes, sequences, riffs, quotes, snippets, melodies, harmonic chord progressions, and so on.” The exercises and examples provided by the resource are centered on the presentation of chord-scales, riffs and licks (idiomatic jazz improvisational melodic fragments) in conjunction with modal and blues progressions.

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451 Ibid., pp. 95.

452 Ibid.

453 Ibid., pp. 97.
While these improvisational approaches might not have the same applicability in a more general music setting, they are fundamentally well suited for the characteristic improvisational applications in a traditional jazz ensemble setting. The text also provides an exhaustive list of relevant resources organized according to topics and specific instrumentation, equipping educators to pursue other methodologies as their particular situation dictates or as they see fit. An overview of technology-based applications for jazz instruction is also provided centering on suggestions on how to use midi play-a-long software programs such as Band-in-a-Box\textsuperscript{454} and SmartMusic Studio\textsuperscript{455} with students

\textit{Chop Monster: Jazz Language Tutor, Books 1 & 2.} Applying and extending the approach used within \textit{Chop Monster Jr.}\textsuperscript{456}, the \textit{Chop Monster: Jazz Language Tutor} series by Berg is constructed for use within a large jazz ensemble setting and appropriate for beginning through intermediate level bands\textsuperscript{457}. The \textit{Chop Monster} series is structured primarily as an improvisational resource that also serves to teach traditional jazz ensemble performance skills. Using a primarily chord-scale improvisational approach, \textit{Chop Monster} guides students along a path from scale skill acquisition, using scales to instruct about chord qualities and chord tones on 7\textsuperscript{th} chords, embellishing learned scales with chromatic passing note approaches, learning about the b3rd as a “bluesy” note, all the way to learning about chord tone resolutions as a means of “nailing” chord changes

within chord progressions\textsuperscript{458}. This last approach is also referred to as guide-tone improvisation in other resources\textsuperscript{459, 460} and is quite common within jazz improvisational pedagogy.

*Chop Monster* takes a time tested jazz oriented improvisational approach and applies it within a beginning to intermediate jazz ensemble setting. The series provides four arrangements for jazz ensemble (two from each book) within the curriculum that offer students opportunities to apply the improvisational content learned through the methodology. A supplemental recording provides recorded models of the arrangements and exercises as well as recorded solo passages intended for student transcription. The supplemental recording also provides *call & response* activities which, along with the recorded solos for transcription, serve to train the ears of students as well as providing stylistic applications for the learned material. Lastly, the supplemental recording also contains play-a-long tracks for students to practice the material at home with a pre-recorded accompaniment. *Chop Monster* is published as a methodology for a large jazz ensemble, therefore there are separate editions for each member of a traditional big band (for example, there are separate books for trumpet 1, 2, 3 and 4). There are also editions for less traditional jazz ensemble instruments such as French horn and tuba and a teachers score for book 1 & 2.

**Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble.** A concise method book designed for a beginning big band jazz ensemble and following a similar structure to the common beginning band curriculum, *Essential Elements for Band*[^1], *Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble*[^2] offers a primarily chord-scale based approach to improvisation instruction. Similar to comparable pedagogies, *Essential Elements for Jazz Ensemble* offers exercises establishing proper swing feel for ensemble performance and a supplement recording providing models and harmonic accompaniment for included exercises. A unique offering within this method is the discussion regarding bebop improvisational techniques including exercises outlining chromatic approaches (i.e. half-step pick-ups and chromatic enclosure techniques[^3]). Bebop stylistic improvisational techniques are complex and typically reserved for the more experienced jazz improviser, however, providing chromatic exercises in this beginning methodology offers a tangible bridge towards more advanced concepts and practice.

**First Place for Jazz: Introductory Method for Jazz Ensemble.** A recent publication for jazz ensemble authored by Sorenson provides a sequential improvisational methodology for beginning students coupled with arrangements for the jazz band setting[^4]. *First Place for Jazz* also provides guidance for rhythm section instrumentalists in regards to proper accompaniment practices. The chronology of improvisational studies

[^3]: Ibid., pp. 25.
that occurs within this curriculum is based on a progression of skill acquisition through a *chord-scale* approach. Each section is centered on an organizational pitch (starting with Bb) and students advance through a series of units devoted to the Major scale (and chord), dominant scale (and chord), minor scale (and chord) and lastly, the blues scale and blues progression built on that organizational pitch.

Within each unit, students study a collection of *pitch sets*, which are melodic fragments derived from the scale being studied\(^{465}\). These pitch sets function much like *licks* or *riffs* presented in other methodologies as a means of further developing the scale acquisition of students as well as providing melodic material for use in improvisation. In addition to these melodic pitch sets, students also practice a series of rhythmic figures in each unit derived from the studied arrangements as a means of developing stylistic comprehension. Each unit also provides the students with a means of constructing chords from the scales they learn and the basic theory that relates chord construction to the progressions involved in the studied music.

Each unit offers 4 *charts* (arrangements) for the jazz ensemble, typically ranging across a spectrum of styles and always offering improvisational opportunities. Multimedia offerings, including play-a-long recordings and recorded models (audio and video) guiding interpretation of the provided content, are all provided via an *interactive practice studio* which is available through the publishers website\(^{466}\). *First Place for Jazz* offers the educator a practical means of developing student improvisational skill while simultaneously promoting ensemble growth and advancement. As the starting point for

\(^{465}\) Ibid.
\(^{466}\) http://www.kjos.com/ips/
the improvisational content within this method book is a concert B\textsuperscript{b} scale, it is certainly appropriate for the beginning jazz ensembles common at the middle school level. First Place for Jazz is published with separate editions for full traditional big band instrumentation with additional books for less traditional jazz ensemble instrumentation (such as tuba, french horn, and auxiliary percussion).

Play-a-Long accompaniment recordings and software programs as an improvisational supplement. A common approach used in improvisational pedagogy involves utilizing prerecorded accompaniment in conjunction with improvisation instruction. Research suggests that providing a harmonic accompaniment as an element within improvisational education can play a beneficial role in improvisation skill acquisition\textsuperscript{467}. Appropriate for private or classroom use alike, play-a-long recordings and software programs offer a platform for applying learned improvisational material that is convenient and flexible. An overview of the most common of these resources is offered within this section.

Prerecorded play-a-longs. Perhaps the most commonly used play-a-long resource is the series of recordings produced by Aebersold\textsuperscript{468}. One of the first resources of its kind, the Aebersold catalog has grown to offer well over 100 different accompaniment recordings designed for improvisational use. While the majority of these offerings are

\textsuperscript{468} Aebersold, A New Approach to Jazz Improvisation, 1967.
designed for use by jazz students of an intermediate to advanced level and are comprised of pre-recorded accompaniment to the chord progressions of songs considered to be jazz standards, there are also many recordings from Aebersold catalog that are appropriate for use in a beginning context. Specifically, volume 1 (How to Improvise\textsuperscript{469}), volume 2 (Nothin’ but Blues\textsuperscript{470}), and volume 21 (Major & minor\textsuperscript{471}) are very popular resources that are appropriate for beginning study.

A play-a-long resource well suited for beginning improvisational efforts, Do It! Improvise: A Start-up Kit for all Melodic Instruments provides 24 tracks of pre-recorded accompaniment for predominantly pentatonic and blues oriented improvisation\textsuperscript{472}. The insert for the CD provides the designated scale for each track transposed for all instruments, making this an entirely self-contained resource. The tracks are presented in a range of styles from jazz waltz to Latin rock, making for a fun supplement to beginning improvisation endeavors. Other prerecorded play-a-long sources available for use as part of an improvisational education include recordings by Willie Thomas\textsuperscript{473}, George Garzonne\textsuperscript{474}, and Rich Matteson\textsuperscript{475}. Recordings from popular music-publishing companies like Sher Music\textsuperscript{476} and Advance Music\textsuperscript{477} also add to this sizeable repository.

\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{474} Garzone, George, Mulgrew Miller, John Lockwood, and Bob Gullotti. Tradin’ with the greats: Savannah, GA: JodyJazz Inc, 2011.
of pre-recorded accompaniment options for the music educator to consider, as well as numerous recordings that are attached as supplements to many of the published improvisational methodologies discussed as part of the current research.

**Band-in-a-Box and other software programs.** A very popular play-a-long software program that has been shown to have documented use within the observed literature\(^ {478, 479} \), is the program known as *Band-in-a-Box*\(^ {480} \). With the ability to manually input harmonic progressions of their choice and have playback produced at any tempo and in a range of styles, *Band-in-a-Box* allows a tremendous amount of flexibility for the educator. Other software programs such as *Cakewalk*\(^ {481} \) and *Smart Music Studio*\(^ {482} \), as well as applications for computers, tablets and/or smartphones such as *Garageband*, *iReal b*, and *iReal Pro* can provide a similar functionality and flexibility to the educator.

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CHAPTER 3

Method

While a body of research exists suggesting the benefit of incorporating an improvisation methodology into the general music curriculum, educators have struggled to find effective ways of incorporating improvisation into their pedagogy. Improvisational instruction at the secondary school level, when it is present to any degree, tends to predominantly occur within jazz idiomatic settings (i.e. a jazz ensemble or a jazz improvisation class), which tend to be voluntary and/or co-curricular (existing outside of the standard curricular offerings of a music program or after school hours). This selectivity runs in contradiction to suggestions from scholars stating that improvisation should be an intrinsic component of a holistic music education. The MENC affirmed this broadly held belief that improvisation is a fundamental component to comprehensive musicianship in 1994 when they established improvisation as one of the 9 standards for music education. In the wake of this action from the MENC, conducted studies reflected a view from educators that improvisation was amongst the most challenging of the standards to implement.

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491 Stringham, “Improvisation... in high school instrumental music curriculum,” 2010.
494 Byo, “General education... ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
Educators have cited multiple challenges inhibiting the assimilation of improvisation into a more universal general music curriculum; chief among these challenges is a suggestion from educators that they feel unequipped or ill prepared to teach improvisational topics within the general music setting. While a plethora of materials exist for the individual student looking to study an idiomatic improvisational approach on their own time, there is a scarcity of resources available for the middle school music educator seeking to incorporate improvisation into the general music curriculum.

The objectives of this study are to (a) explore the methodologies currently available to an educator interested in teaching improvisation within the general music setting (more specifically, within a beginning band context), (b) explore the factors that have been shown to influence improvisational achievement, (c) ascertain the primary approaches to improvisational pedagogy as presented through the literature and intended for use at the beginning developmental level, and (d) explore the primary obstacles music educators face in trying to incorporate improvisational methodology into their general music curriculum. The results gathered from objective (c), and as informed by the results from the remaining objectives, will be analyzed in an attempt to construct an improvisational resource applicable within the middle school concert band setting, as this

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497 Byo, “General education... ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
context has been cited as the predominant musical activity at the secondary school level\textsuperscript{500}. 

The first objective of the current research attempts to give a comprehensive survey of improvisational methodologies available to the music educator interested in absorbing an improvisational component into their general music curriculum. This survey will draw distinctions between idiomatic methodologies and non-idiomatic ones, the primary distinction between practicums intended for use in jazz ensemble settings and pedagogies geared more towards general music settings. Methodologies intended for beginning level musicians will be the focus of this survey; however, important pedagogies that may fall outside of that identified spectrum will still be considered when relevant to the inquiry at hand. This survey of methodologies and practicums is provided within the review of literature. 

The second objective of this research will be an attempt to explore the factors that can influence the improvisational achievement of a developing music student. For any educator to feel adequately confident in how they approach the implementation of an improvisation curriculum, they should be familiarized with all issues and considerations that can impact the improvisational achievement of their students. For a resource of improvisational approaches to be provided, it should be informed by factors that can affect improvisational achievement. This objective will be explored by reviewing previously conducted research regarding the factors that can influence improvisational achievement. 

\textsuperscript{500} Abril and Gault, “The state of music in secondary schools,” 2008.
The third objective will be an attempt to ascertain the primary pedagogical approaches to improvisational instruction applicable at the beginning musical level. Are there practices and practicums that can be distinguished as principal approaches to the challenge of incorporating improvisational instruction at the middle school level? If so, can these identified approaches be applied within a middle school concert band setting? To answer these questions, a comprehensive survey of published and unpublished improvisational pedagogies as well as an overview of case studies observing improvisational constructs at the middle school and secondary level will be employed in an attempt to extricate a consensus of primary approaches and practicums. The principle focus of the current research is to identify key improvisational pedagogies applicable at the beginning level of musical studies, therefore methodologies designed to accommodate that particular classification of music student are of primary interest.

The fourth objective of this study will attempt to explore the various challenges music educators may face in trying to incorporate an improvisational component into their general music curriculum. This demands consideration in order to give a full perspective of what has inhibited the teaching of improvisation in schools and also what should be addressed in any methodology that strives to attain a universal applicability. These challenges will be primarily identified through an examination of educator surveys conducted in the wake of the MENC’s establishment of improvisation as a core standard of music education, in which educator accommodation to said standards was observed through various means. Particular consideration will also be given to conducted research relating to cases where implementation of improvisation studies were considered or attempted and perhaps faced numerous challenges. Consideration will also be given to
approaches that have been used or suggested by the literature to circumvent these assorted educator challenges related to improvisation instruction.

The results gathered from these four objectives will be analyzed in an attempt to identify the primary improvisational approaches that are observed through the research to be effective constructs for beginning level music students. Once these principle approaches are identified, exercises adapting these methods for a middle school concert band setting will be constructed using information gathered from the survey of practicums and the results observed from objectives (b) and (d). Using the research to identify the primary obstacles confronting the teaching of improvisation within the school music curriculum (objective d), exercises will then be constructed (using guidance from the literature) to address these principle established educator concerns.
CHAPTER 4
Findings and Results

Summary of Study and Objectives

Numerous studies have been conducted showing how the inclusion of an improvisational element into the general music education curriculum can provide meaningful benefits to the holistic development of music students\textsuperscript{501, 502, 503, 504}. The MENC (now known as NAfME) codified this view of improvisation as an essential component to an all-inclusive musical development when they established it as one of the nine common core standards for music education\textsuperscript{505}. Previously conducted research examining music educator practices in the wake of the NAFME’s establishment of these common core standards revealed improvisation to be a particularly challenging subject to implement into a general music curriculum for an assortment of reasons\textsuperscript{506, 507, 508, 509, 510}.

Among the findings that paint a widespread picture of the challenges facing music educators who struggle to incorporate improvisation into their classroom was research that observed a deep lack of consensus over what kind of improvisational methodology should be used within a general classroom setting\textsuperscript{511}. This same study also observed that a general lack of financial funding posed a challenge to music educators who sought

\textsuperscript{501} Montano, “The effect of improvisation... sight-reading achievement,” 1983.
\textsuperscript{504} Stringham, “Improvisation... in a high school ... music curriculum,” 2010.
\textsuperscript{505} Music Educators National Conference, 1994.
\textsuperscript{506} Riley, “Pre-service music educators’ perceptions of the national standards,” 2009.
\textsuperscript{508} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005.
\textsuperscript{510} Byo, “General education... ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{511} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 120.
improvisational resources to supplement their general music curriculum. At the conclusion of another recent survey of music educators, the involved researcher established the need for a collection and consolidation of improvisational models and activities that could serve to motivate educators into modifying their classroom curriculum in order to provide improvisational opportunities for their students.

**Research Question #1: Methodologies Designed for Application Within the Beginning Band Setting**

The review of literature presented in the current research provides a survey of published improvisational methodologies with a range of applicability at the middle school level. While a multitude of improvisational materials could be modified for application within the beginning band context, only two currently available published methodologies were found to weave improvisational studies into a comprehensive and applicable band curriculum. In the eyes of the current research, a middle school improvisational methodology is defined as a pedagogy that is applicable within the beginning band setting. Therefore, for a pedagogy to be effectively structured for the beginning band setting, it must be an improvisational methodology or module that is arranged for band instrumentation that can also accommodate the technical limitations of beginning-level instrumentalists through intermediate-level.

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512 Ibid., pp. 106.
**Jump Right In: the Instrumental Series.** The two published methodologies fitting the criteria put forth by the research are quite similar in their improvisational content, however they differ significantly in their overall structure and designed application. The *Jump Right In: the Instrumental Series* (JRIIS)\(^{514}\) curriculum is a comprehensive beginning band methodology that covers a range of topics and material typical of beginning band curricula while simultaneously integrating improvisational activities within each chapter and unit. With workbooks provided for each instrument of a traditional beginning band orchestration that cover every relevant topic from proper performance posture to notational reading skill development, the JRIIS curriculum stands as a universal band methodology covering the needs of the modern day music educator. The improvisational component of this curriculum is structured on using songs and melodies (common to beginning music pedagogy) as a basis for improvisational activities. These improvisational activities call upon a developed knowledge base of practiced scale patterns and rhythmic motives, which are advanced through each progressive unit.

**Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation.** Created by two of the same authors as the JRIIS curriculum, the *Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation* curriculum (DMTI)\(^{515}\) approaches improvisation studies in almost an identical manner as JRIIS. However, the DMTI curriculum functions as a supplemental pedagogy that could accompany most any other band curricula. DMTI is strictly an improvisational

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\(^{515}\) Azzara & Grunow, *Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation*, 2006.
methodology structured for beginning band instrumentation that is not meant to function as a comprehensive band pedagogy in the way that the JRIIS curriculum does. The improvisational pedagogy of Gordon, Grunow and Azzara (the authors of JRIIS and DMTI) prioritize audiation as an essential component of improvisation performance. This requires students to develop their ability to hear what they are going to play as they play it (or immediately before they play it). Both of these curricula (JRIIS and DMTI) utilize provided accompaniment recordings to assist in student improvisations and provide opportunities for transcription as a tool to improve improvisational achievement.

While the two discussed published improvisational pedagogies offer the middle school music educator distinct options for teaching improvisation within the beginning band context, research has shown that time constraints as well as potential funding challenges can inhibit the implementation of complete improvisational methodologies within the middle school music classroom\textsuperscript{516}. Flexibility has been identified through the research as an essential element for the educator seeking to teach improvisation as part of a general music curriculum\textsuperscript{517}. As stated by Whitcomb, “teachers do not need to abandon their methodological choices or teaching approaches in order to include improvisation\textsuperscript{518}.” Using the observed research to identify key strategies used by teachers to introduce improvisational studies in the middle school setting can offer the educator this aforementioned flexibility by allowing them to teach the subject on their own terms and as they see fit.

\textsuperscript{516} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005, pp. 106 & 120.
\textsuperscript{518} Whitcomb, “Teaching improvisation in elementary... music,” 2013, pp. 45.
Research Question #2: Factors Influencing Student Achievement in Improvisation

A survey of relevant literature revealed four (4) primary factors that can positively influence student achievement in improvisation. An understanding of these factors can inform the approaches of educators interested in incorporating an improvisational element into their general music curricula.

**Self-evaluation.** The first factor, as identified through the research, that was found to positively affect student achievement in improvisation was the practice of self-evaluation\(^{519, 520}\). The implication of this finding is that tasking students with listening back to recordings of their own improvisations (or the improvisations of their peers) can be a beneficial exercise for their improvisational development. Students could also be tasked with reflecting on their improvisation immediately after a performance as a means of self-evaluation. The educator could either utilize “recording sessions” of student improvisations and task students with listening back to their performances as homework, or provide time for student reflection after improvisational activities as an effective means to using self-evaluation as a tool to promote improvisational development.

**Imitation.** The second factor influencing student improvisational achievement, as observed through the literature, was student ability to imitate rhythmic and melodic information within their improvisation\(^ {521, 522}\). Utilizing *call & response* exercises, where students are tasked with imitating musical statements on the spot, can be an effective

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\(^{519}\) Ciorba, “The creation of a model to predict jazz improvisation achievement,” 2006, pp. 79.


\(^{521}\) Ibid.

means of developing student imitative skills and thus their improvisational skill. Transcription exercises were also cited through the research as a means of promoting imitative skill development.

**Modeling.** A third factor found through the research to positively influence student achievement in improvisation, and one which could be considered closely related to the aforementioned factor of imitation, was the approach of instructor modeling\(^{523}\). Providing students with modeled improvisational examples was found to be a beneficial practice for student improvisational development. This modeling could be provided through instructor performance or through listening to, and analyzing, recorded improvisational models.

**Harmonic accompaniment.** Lastly, the research suggests that providing a harmonic accompaniment to student improvisation is beneficial for student improvisational achievement\(^{524}\). An educator could accomplish this through (a) the use of pre-recorded accompaniment, (b) performing along with students on a guitar or piano, or (c) the use of ensemble arrangements as a means to provide harmonic accompaniment for student improvisation.

An appreciation of these aforementioned factors that have been shown by the research to positively influence student improvisational achievement should serve to inform educator practices, not necessarily dictate how an improvisational curriculum is structured or taught. These factors constitute a series of tactics that an educator could

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utilize in conjunction with a broader methodology to promote positive student improvisational development.

**Research Question #3: Primary Approaches to Improvisational Instruction at the Beginning Level.**

A comprehensive examination of relevant literature has provided insight regarding the most common practices and approaches used by educators when attempting to incorporate improvisation into their middle school music curriculum. Information gathered from this inquiry of practicums, surveys, and literature has led to the identification of six (6) primary approaches to improvisational pedagogy applicable at the middle school level. These identified methods have been applied to a beginning band context in order to create a catalogue of improvisational approaches catering specifically to the needs of the intermediate band director and intended primarily for use in the context of concert band rehearsals, as this has been cited as the most common music curricular entity within secondary schools.\(^5\)\(^2\)\(^5\).

This inquiry of practicums, surveys and literature also revealed three (3) primary impediments to teaching improvisation within a general school music setting. Exercises and approaches have been provided to circumvent two of these challenges, as the current study is seen as an attempt to confront the primary expressed obstacle relating to a lack of educator familiarity with improvisational pedagogies. The scope of the current research defines an improvisational pedagogy as being applicable at the middle school level if it

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can be applied to beginning level instrumentalists without the limited experience or limited technical skill of these beginning students presenting a critical obstacle for the execution of the methodology.

**Group Improvisation.** The vast majority of improvisation activities occurring in middle school settings, according to an overview of surveys and conducted research, consisted of some variation of group improvisational approaches. The reason group improvisational activities are seen to be more common than solo improvisational undertakings can be attributed to (1) a lack of teaching time available to administer individual improvisational opportunities\(^{526}\), and (2) student inhibition in regards to solo performance in front of other classmates\(^{527}\). Common sense also dictates that for large ensembles or classes, it is advantageous for the educator to include as many students in every activity as possible in an effort to maximize focus and minimize distractions. For these reasons, the exercises and approaches presented by this study were constructed as group improvisational activities in the sense that they have been arranged to maximize student participation. For the purpose of this study, group improvisation strictly means an improvisational activity calling upon the investment of numerous subjects simultaneously, which differs from a historically jazz oriented definition of group improvisation that is rooted in early New Orleans practice and performance where a relatively small collection of musicians improvise simultaneously in a soloistic manner.

The improvisational exercises presented are also primarily instrumental in nature in an effort to provide for the educator seeking to utilize rehearsal and class time for maximum training on respective instrumentation. However, providing students with opportunities to sing through tonal content as well clap through the rhythmic material before performing on their respective instruments is a recommended approach that could be educationally beneficial. This approach has been used within multiple improvisational pedagogies and observed as a common practice of improvisational instruction.

**Free Improvisational Exercises.** According to Kratus, the first stage of improvisational development is considered to be purely exploratory, or lacking the “purposefulness or structural constraints” that make for meaningful improvisation. While this stage of development may lack the qualities some educators may desire to hear in student improvisations, Kratus establishes the exploratory process as a necessary element of musical development. Free improvisational exercises provide students with the appropriate context for such exploratory activities. For the purpose of this research, free improvisation refers to improvisational tasks devoid of an overt tonal center or established time constraint to inhibit the creative choice of the improviser. This creates a safe context for student explorations, as noted by Niknafs, and can alleviate student inhibition about playing wrong notes or rhythms while improvising.

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529 Ibid.
More than one scholar has made recent arguments for the inclusion of free improvisation in the music classroom\textsuperscript{531, 532}. However, it has also been cited through conducted research that the lack of any clear parameters for student improvisation can lead to chaotic and musically meaningless results\textsuperscript{533}. The offered example exercise establishes a clear set of parameters for the student while allowing for a free improvisational effort in a context that will ideally minimize the aforementioned risk of chaos that can plague activities of this nature.

**Exercise 1a.** In this exercise students are asked to perform a song common to most beginning band curriculum, thereby potentially circumventing the need to write the song out for a rehearsal or class. Students are taught the melody to “London Bridge” in the tonality of $B^b$ Major, which could be sung first for acquisition purposes or simply performed on respective instrumentation. Once the melody has been satisfactorily learned, the director should walk students through the improvisational instructions for the “B” section as notated in the example. Directors should emphasize the temporal and dynamic drop through section “B” as a way to connect the student improvisation with the “falling” nature of the learned song (“London bridge is falling down”). Students make their own decisions about what pitch to start and end on within section “B,” and the way in which they connect the two pitches (high to low) will be improvisational at a rudimentary level. That being said, the dynamic and temporal direction has been strictly


\textsuperscript{532} Niknafs, “Free Improvisation,” 2013.

\textsuperscript{533} Caslor, “Spontaneous improvisation,” 2010, pp. 100.
dictated through the specified instructions. Exercise 1a was inspired through approaches employed by Caslor\textsuperscript{534} and Agrell\textsuperscript{535}.

*London Bridge is Falling Down* - Free Improvisational Exercise

IMPROVISATION INSTRUCTIONS:
- At a medium volume, start playing a comfortable higher pitch on your instrument.
- Slowly slur (or glissando) down to your lower register, constantly getting softer as you descend.
- Imagine how the voice of someone skydiving out of a plane would get quieter as they fell further from you.
- Continue to your lowest, softest note and wait for your director to cut you off.
- Watch for your director count-off to start back in with the original theme (A).

Fig. 1: *London Bridge* arrangement with a free improvisational component.

\textsuperscript{534} Caslor, “Spontaneous improvisation,” 2010.
Additional material for this exercise, including transpositions for band instrumentation and optional harmonic accompaniment, is provided within the appendices. One additional consideration for the educator in regards to this activity, as Caslor notes, it can be potentially problematic to encourage students to play a high pitch on their instrument\textsuperscript{536}. Even when emphasizing that students perform within a comfortable range, they still may be inclined to play with improper and unsafe technique in order to force out a note too high for their capacity. It would be important for the educator to stop the exercise when this happens in order to insist on proper technique at all times and performing within a comfortable range. Another example of a free improvisational approach is provided within the appendices.

**Single Pitch Improvisation.** The pedagogies of Azzara, Grunow and Gordon\textsuperscript{537, 538, 539} as well as the jazz improvisational methodology of Crook\textsuperscript{540} have made significant use of single pitch exercises as a means to develop rhythmic aptitude and other musical skills. Limiting a student to one pitch during an improvisational activity allows the student to focus on a range of other pertinent considerations. Single pitch improvisation relates very closely to another approach discussed in this results section entitled, *improvisation as a teaching tool*. Limiting student improvisations to a single pitch allows for greater consideration of rhythmic, dynamic, and phrasing elements while improvising. In other words, removing the complication of trying to improvise with multiple pitches

\textsuperscript{536} Caslor, “Spontaneous improvisation,” 2010, pp. 35.
\textsuperscript{537} Grunow, Gordon and Azzara, *Jump right In*, 1999.
\textsuperscript{538} Azzara, Grunow and Gordon, *Creativity in improvisation*, 1997.
\textsuperscript{539} Azzara and Grunow, *Developing musicianship though improvisation*, 2006.
allows students to focus on other musical elements, which provides a great vehicle for learning universally applicable musical skills through an improvisational construct. As such, the exercises provided in the *improvisation as a teaching tool* section will also include single note improvisational examples.

The example provided in this section emphasizes the single note improvisational approach as a subsequent step after the free improvisational approach posited within the previous section. Progressing beyond what Kratus\(^{541}\) considers an exploratory stage of improvisation, the educator can now place greater restriction on the choices of the student in an effort to guide them in making more deliberate decisions with their improvisations. This creates a path towards the kind of audiation so central to the approaches of Gordon, Grunow and Azzara\(^{542}\).

The offered exercise in this section introduces another common approach found in the literature for the application of improvisation in the school music setting. This above-mentioned approach would be the use of drone accompaniment for student improvisational efforts. The use of drone accompaniment was found in multiple sources\(^{543},^{544},^{545}\) and provides a simple yet effective means of including many students in the music making process at one time while serving a functional purpose for the improviser (or improvisers). Conducted research suggests that a harmonic accompaniment provides a benefit to the improvisational achievement of students\(^{546}\);

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\(^{541}\) Kratus, “A developmental approach to teaching... improvisation,” 1995.


\(^{543}\) Higgins and Campbell, *Free to be Musical*, 2010.


drone accompaniment offers a straightforward and inclusive means for providing that potential assistance.

**Exercise 2a.** The following exercise involves two stages: a preparatory phase to acquire familiarity with a set of predetermined rhythmic models and an improvisational phase where a drone is performed to accompany student improvisations on a single pitch. The goal of the predetermined rhythmic models is to familiarize the students with the phrasing of rhythmic statements in the given style. These should help inform their rhythmic improvisations in the second phase. If the educator sees fit, students can clap or stomp the supplied rhythms before performing on their respective instruments. These models should initially be taught aurally to students, then reaffirmed by writing them out with notation.

These predetermined rhythmic models can also serve as “fallback patterns” during student improvisations. The use of fallback patterns was referenced by Whitcomb as a means to alleviate student inhibition by establishing motifs that could be used in place of an improvisation if nerves and anxiety proved too much for a student to handle in the moment of performance. These fallback patterns can serve as a safety net for students who should be encouraged that while using these patterns is certainly acceptable, the goal should be to eventually wean off of them to create their own improvised material. The predetermined rhythmic content, as well as the improvisational exercise instructions, are detailed below. This exercise was inspired by a combination of approaches from

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Whitcomb, Higgins & Campbell, Agrell, O’Reilly & Williams, and Fitzgerald, McCord & Berg.

**Exercise 2A**

**Rhythmic Models and "Fallback" Patterns - Phase #1**

- a) Clap Through Rhythms First
- b) Perform Rhythms on Instruments Using the B♭ Pitch

**Phase #2**

Student Drone Group #1

*Allegro (M.M. = c. 120)*

**Fig. 2: Exercise 2a rhythmic models**

Improvisation instructions:

- Divide class or ensemble into 3 groups.
- Assign 2 of these groups to *drone groups* #1 and #2 (above).
- Members of group #3 will wait silently until pointed to by the director.
- Once pointed to, chosen student will improvise a 2-measure rhythmic motif.
- After each solo, leave 2 measures of rest before pointing to next soloist.
- Rotate group roles after sufficient time.

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548 Ibid., pp. 49.
Students asked to improvise can choose to improvise on an E\textsubscript{b} or B\textsubscript{b} pitch, whichever they prefer and in whatever octave range is most comfortable. This exercise provides the foundation for many variations, one of which will be expanded upon within the appendices. The director may wish to have their percussionists mark time, and an accompanying snare drum rhythm is provided in the appendix. When “pointing to a student,” it is essential the director also provide a \textit{count-in} for that student as well so there is no ambiguity as to where the improvisation should start rhythmically. As currently constituted, this exercise would be simple enough to incorporate at the beginning of a rehearsal or class as a warm-up activity. For students performing the drone component of the activity, the instructor should emphasize good sound projection and tone as it can offer the opportunity for long-tone performance which is a long standing practice for beginning wind instrumentalists to develop proper embouchures\textsuperscript{553, 554, 555}. It may also be beneficial for the director to hold up one or more fingers randomly throughout the exercise, thereby tasking the improvisatory group with performing one of the predetermined patterns collectively as a means to reaffirm rhythmic clarity.

Once the educator feels students have grown comfortable with the original exercise, they can increase the amount of notes available for use within the improvisation to two and eventually three notes. The exercise can also be modified to create a simple

harmonic progression for the background to student improvisation by having the established drone ostinato modulate down a half step upon director cue and back up to the original key on cue. These options will be detailed in the appendix, however it is important to observe how a single pitch improvisation exercise with drone accompaniment can provide a fertile groundwork for modification and alteration as the instructor sees fit.

**Call & Response Exercises.** Another common approach by which educators were found to incorporate improvisational practice within the school setting as observed through the literature would be the usage of call & response style activities\(^{556}\). While it was seen to be a common practice among observed educators, Whitcomb remarked upon the lack of clarity that was provided by educators in regards to how they utilized call and response activities as a means to promote improvisation\(^{557}\). Using the call & response approach has been cited as a way to increase creativity and listening skills amongst student musicians\(^{558}\), and it can accomplish those goals while serving as a launching point for improvisational activities as well\(^{559,560}\). The following exercise provides a simple platform by which educators can apply the call & response approach for the purpose of introducing improvisational elements to their music students.


\(^{557}\) Ibid., pp. 144.

\(^{558}\) Feierabend, John Martin. *The Book of Call & Response: You Sing, I Sing*.


Exercise 3. Building upon the approach offered in the previous example (ex. 2a) that utilized a one-pitch improvisational approach, in this call & response exercise students will be tasked with using two different pitches during their improvisations. As with the previous exercise, a series of rhythmic models will be practiced before engaging with the improvisational component of the exercise, and these models can function as “fallback patterns” within student improvisations if issues are encountered with anxiety during performance. Also in an attempt to build upon the skills acquired in the previous example, the drone accompaniment from example 2a has been modified to challenge student improvisation and rhythmic aptitude in a new metric and tonal setting. The rhythmic models presented in this exercise are more complex than in the previous example, therefore the educator should model each pattern multiple times to facilitate comprehension.

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Exercise 3

Rhythmic Models and “Fallback” Patterns

Once the educator feels the students have gained fluency with the rhythmic models, students will be divided into three groups to begin the improvisational component of the exercise (drone groups #1 and #2 as well as an improvisational group). Similar to the previous exercise (2a), the director will point to a student in the improvisational group once the drone accompaniment has commenced. In this exercise, once the student is pointed to, he/she will improvise a one-measure rhythm utilizing two pitches (concert A and G). After a complete one-measure statement has been improvised,
everyone else in the improvisational group echoes the stated musical content as a response. The director should allow this response to be repeated until everyone in the improvisational group is performing it properly, only then will the next student will be chosen to improvise a new statement.

Instructions for the improvisational group:
- The first chosen student improvises a one measure “call” over the accompaniment drone using only pitches A and G concert.
- The rest of the improvisational group “responds” by playing back the “call” as accurately as possible.
- The response is repeated until everyone in the improvisational group plays it together and correctly.
- The next student soloist improvises a new “call” and the process repeats.

Fig. 5: Exercise 3 Drone Accompaniment

The outlined exercise can be used in the context of a large ensemble rehearsal warm-up routine or as part of a smaller, group-lesson setting. The call & response component of this exercise not only provides an improvisational opportunity for students, it also promotes listening skills and rhythmic development within the ensemble. This level of improvisational training would qualify as process-oriented according to the designations put forth by Kratus, who identified “alternating improvisation,” much like a call & response, as an appropriate activity for said level. As such, the educator should strive to promote a thoughtful effort from improvising students. The educator can

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563 Ibid., pp. 33.
accomplish this by encouraging improvising students to try and audiate their improvisations, or in other words, try to hear in their head what they want to play before they actually play it. Having students quietly vocalize their improvisational statements to themselves before playing on their instrument could be an approach to promote basic audiation. This exercise was inspired by a combination of components from the work of Whitcomb\textsuperscript{564}, Agrell\textsuperscript{565}, Berg\textsuperscript{566}, and Azzara & Grunow\textsuperscript{567}.

**Pentatonic Improvisation.** One of the more common approaches found in the literature for teaching improvisation to beginning students consisted of a pentatonic improvisational methodology. From the elementary pedagogy of Orff\textsuperscript{568} to the advanced jazz improvisation texts of Bergonzi\textsuperscript{569}, the use of pentatonic scales stands as an exceedingly prevalent approach within improvisational curricula. Similar to the principles inherent in the single-note and two-note approaches used in the last two example exercises provided, a pentatonic approach limits the melodic choices for the improvising student to five notes at the pentatonic level. While the majority of pentatonic scales used in these aforementioned approaches are anhemitonic in nature (without semitones), there are certainly applications for hemitonic pentatonic scales (with half steps), and such

\textsuperscript{564} Whitcomb, “Teaching improvisation in elementary general music,” 2013.
\textsuperscript{567} Azzara & Grunow, *Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation*, 2006.
applications have been observed within the literature\textsuperscript{570}. The popularity of the pentatonic improvisational approach, tracing to its use within Orff pedagogy, can be partially attributed to the lack of a leading tone within the scale; allowing students to experience early success with their improvisations by removing the implications of leading-tone dissonances\textsuperscript{571}.

Unlike the restrictions of single-note or two-note improvisation exercises, using the pentatonic scale allows for greater melodic expression as could be evidenced to students by naming (and/or performing) some of the abundance of famous melodies that have been constructed strictly using a pentatonic scale (i.e., “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Amazing Grace,” “Camptown Races,” “Auld Lang Syne,” “Old MacDonald,” etc…). This increased opportunity for melodic expression should not come at the expense of rhythmic content; therefore a series of rhythmic models will again be presented along with this exercise. These presented models along with the additional modeling of pentatonic improvisation, either from the educator directly or from a pre-recorded source, should serve as sufficient guidance for the offered exercise. As noted by Campbell\textsuperscript{572} as well as utilized by other music education pedagogues\textsuperscript{573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578}, modeling can be an effective means of inspiring and guiding student improvisation. The educator

\begin{footnotes}
\item[570] Higgins and Campbell, \textit{Free to be Musical}, 2010, pp. 83.
\item[577] Bitz, “A description... of strategies for teaching classroom... improvisation,” 1998.
\item[578] West, “Teaching middle school jazz,” 2011, pp. 142.
\end{footnotes}
should strive to model improvisational content for students as much as they feel comfortable doing so, or as Campbell suggests, consider bringing in another musician who is acknowledged for their improvisational acumen to provide some examples to students. Using recordings to model improvisational content for students has also been observed as a common approach within the literature.

The majority of pentatonic material observed through literature was presented in the form of traditional major (1, 2, 3, 5, 6) or minor (1, b3, 4, 5, b7) pentatonic scales, which have been shown to resonate very deeply with listeners and students alike. The major and minor pentatonic scales are intrinsically related, as a major pentatonic scale contains the same pitch set as its relative minor pentatonic counterpart. Therefore, once students have learned a C Major pentatonic scale, they have also acquired the ability to perform an A minor pentatonic scale starting on the second degree. With an increased pitch palate for student improvisation, the educator should increase their emphasis on promoting audiation prior to each student effort as a means to encourage intentionality and overall musical meaningfulness. Initially restricting the range of the pentatonic scale to within one octave, or in other words strictly the limiting student improvisations to the 5 notes of the scale without duplication at the octave, will simplify the learning process for students. After assimilation of the primary 5 notes, extending past the octave can be encouraged.

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579 Ibid.
581 Sorenson, First Place for Jazz, 2011.
582 Grunow, Gordon and Azzara, Jump Right In, 1999.
The intention in repeatedly practicing a pentatonic scale should be to acquire a level of fluency requisite to partially replicate the kind of exercises employed in Orff pedagogy and practiced on Orff instrumentation. As some Orff instruments are constructed to only provide the notes of a pentatonic scale, which removes the risk of playing an incorrect note during performance or improvisation, student instrumentalists will need to develop enough familiarity with a pentatonic scale before improvising so that they are not performing in constant fear of playing wrong notes. Reaching this level of comfort with the scale could take considerable time.

The provided exercise also employs the customary jazz improvisational approach known as trading fours, which was also a used methodology found within the literature\textsuperscript{584}. With this approach, students in the improvisational group will alternate, or trade, four measure improvisations and can choose to either imitate the content of the previous soloist or play unrelated material. Trading fours is also a way for students to “alternate improvisation\textsuperscript{585},” which was suggested by Kratus as an appropriate activity for process-oriented improvisational level studies\textsuperscript{586}. The presented exercise is based on the use of a specific pentatonic scale over an instrumental accompaniment and should be performed in conjunction with an arrangement of a common song in beginning band literature, Scarborough Fair.

\textsuperscript{584} Fitzgerald, McCord and Berg, \textit{Chop-Monster Jr.}, 2003.
\textsuperscript{585} Kratus, “A developmental approach to teaching... improvisation,” 1995, pp. 33.
\textsuperscript{586} Ibid.
**Exercise 4a.** The pentatonic scale used for this exercise will be the D minor pentatonic scale.

![D Minor Pentatonic Scale](image)

**Fig. 6: D minor pentatonic scale**

After establishing student familiarity and comfort with these 5 notes through repetition, perform the following manifestation of the same scale with octave reaffirmation of the D and C concert pitches.

![D minor Pentatonic Scale - Modified](image)

**Fig. 7: D minor pentatonic scale: extended for performance practice**

This modified version of the minor pentatonic scale provides resolution in both octaves between the $b7$ of the scale and the tonic. This scale can be practiced during the warm-up routine for an ensemble rehearsal or during a time specifically allotted for scale building exercises. Once students have acquired comfort reciting the scale, the conditions for this exercise can be undertaken. Students should then rehearse the provided arrangement for *Scarborough Fair* (provided in the appendix). This arrangement provides the harmonic context for the accompaniment during the improvisational component.
Once the provided arrangement is satisfactorily rehearsed, practice can begin on the provided pentatonic rhythmic models (which serve as optional “fallback” patterns during the improvisational segment). As these models contain a greater amount of material (in comparison to previous examples using single-note or two-note approaches), a greater amount of time will likely be required to attain fluency with the patterns.

Ex. 4a - Pentatonic Models and "Fallback" Patterns

Fig 8: D minor pentatonic models and “fallback patterns”
After the provided patterns have been sufficiently practiced, students can begin with the improvisational component of the exercise. The director should divide the instrumentation of the ensemble into five different groups, one improvisational group and four accompaniment groups (“S, A, T and B” as listed in the provided accompaniment example). The ensemble should perform the arrangement to *Scarborough Fair* (provided in the appendix) and then transition directly into the accompaniment/improvisational component. The director should assign numbers to the members of the improvisational group and instruct them to improvise four measure solos in the order given. This practice is known as *trading fours* and students can be encouraged to try to imitate the improvisational statement made before them. This promotes active listening and can also create a fun exercise for more advanced students. The provided accompaniment also offers a reduction for piano accompaniment and a snare drum part for a percussionist.
Once all of the students in the improvisational group have had a few turns improvising along with the provided accompaniment, the director can cue the ensemble to replay the provided arrangement of *Scarborough Fair* (provided in the appendix). The exercise specified here is more involved than some of the other examples offered and thus could take more time to properly execute. That being said, pentatonic improvisation can offer the developing music student meaningful opportunities for melodic improvisation and thus should be considered worthy of an investment of time. Similar to the approach used in the Bingham study\(^{587}\), this exercise incorporates the performance of a song common to beginning band pedagogy, which could potentially make the

investment of time more feasible for the concerned educator. Another example of a pentatonic improvisational approach is offered within the appendices.

**Chord-Scale Improvisation.** A common improvisational approach observed throughout the literature, particularly within numerous jazz oriented methodologies, is the chord-scale improvisational approach\(^{588, 589, 590, 591}\). With this approach, educators and pedagogues teach improvisation through a general methodology of scale and chord arpeggio acquisition, structured in such a way so as to prepare students to perform over harmonic progressions ranging from the simple to the complex with tonal accuracy. Chord scale improvisational pedagogy tends to lead quite naturally into guide-tone improvisation pedagogy\(^ {592}\), which involves the strategic resolution of chord tones within a harmonic progression that gives the impression of “playing the changes”\(^ {593}\.) The chord-scale methodology is an approach well suited for intermediate to advanced music students as it calls upon a resource of musical skills that could rarely be assumed at the beginning music level.

There are examples provided through the literature where the chord-scale improvisational approach has been used in a context suited for younger students.


\(^{591}\) Sorenson, *First Place for Jazz*, 2011.


instrumentalists\textsuperscript{594, 595}, typically these examples have been specifically geared towards the jazz ensemble setting. Attempting to apply this approach in the school concert band setting can pose some challenges, however an exercise will be offered that provides the basic structure of the chord-scale improvisational approach for a middle school band context. Unlike in previous examples where the supposition is that any student could be called upon to engage in the proposed improvisational sequence, the challenge inherent in this approach makes the next exercise potentially better suited for volunteer soloists who may be at a more advanced level and therefore more equipped to navigate the higher degree of difficulty, at least initially.

\textit{Exercise 5a.} The first stage of the presented chord-scale improvisational exercise would be the practice and acquisition of four scales, which to maximize ease of execution, are four modes of the same Major scale (B\textsubscript{b}). As it is common for the warm-up component of a band rehearsal to be used as an opportunity for scale development\textsuperscript{596}, this first phase could effectively be used as a warm-up component.

\textsuperscript{594} Berg, \textit{Chop-Monster}, 1998. \\
\textsuperscript{595} Sorenson, \textit{First Place for Jazz}, 2011. \\
After the stated modes are practiced sufficiently, the arpeggios derived from these scales should be rehearsed with the ensemble.

After the scales and arpeggios have been rehearsed to a satisfactory degree, the improvisational component of the exercise can be initiated. As the combination of these four prepared scales in succession constitute a ii-V-I-vi harmonic progression, the
provided accompaniment to the improvisational component of the exercise consists of the ensemble performing an arrangement of this chord progression. A common accompaniment approach, as seen throughout the literature, was the practice of attaching a performance style to an accompaniment. This exercise is presented with a Latin style association; the percussion part in particular has a cascara rhythm notated for cymbals and a clave rhythm notated for wood blocks.

![Improvisational group](image)

(available pitches for improvisation - "chord tone soloing")

Fig. 12: Exercise 5a accompaniment

Once the accompaniment arrangement has been rehearsed, the educator can ask for volunteers to improvise along with the accompaniment using only chord-tones. This is

598 Sorenson, First Place for Jazz, 2011.
known in the literature as chord-tone soloing\(^{599}\). After student improvisers have gained a fluency improvising using only chord tones, the educator can discuss the idea of resolving the \( b7 \) to the 3\(^{rd} \) of the following chord in measures 1-3 of the exercise.

![Fig. 13: Rearrangement of chord tones to establish guide-tone resolution](image)

In the above figure, a more linear approach to chord-tone improvisation is achieved through the establishment of guide-tone resolutions. Additional melodic patterns for this exercise are provided in the appendix.

Another approach to this exercise would be to allow improvisers to use the entire scale over the dictated progression as a starting point. While this approach may be easier as students would only have to remember their \( B^b \) Major scale as they improvised, the effect of playing within the chord progression will be lost unless students understand the importance of chord tones in achieving a tonal improvisation. Using the entire scale for improvisation in this case should be reserved until after chord tone soloing for this very reason.

Blues-Form Improvisation. The last of the approaches shown by the literature to be a common improvisational application within school music curricula is the practice of blues-form improvisation. While not an improvisational approach in and of itself, but rather a progression over which improvisation can occur, blues improvisational pedagogy is so universal within the observed methodologies it demands acknowledgement as a primary approach unto itself. The blues exists as the root to a myriad of American musical genres and traditions, and the harmonic progression associated with the blues has served as a wellspring for immeasurable musical evolution over the past century and a half. Aside from the profound historical significance associated with the blues progression, it also serves as an effective platform for improvisation at all levels of musicianship, including beginning levels.

There are innumerable ways to approach blues-form improvisation, which is a testament to the remarkable flexibility blues pedagogy provides the educator. Any of the previous approaches discussed in this section could be theoretically applied over a blues progression. The blues progression can be played in a variety of styles and approached any number of ways. The exercise presented will use the blues progression as a vehicle to teach a swing feel concept very common to jazz literature and jazz-oriented improvisational pedagogy. The offered exercise will also utilize riffs, which was an

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approach found often in the observed literature. Riffs will function like ensemble shouts that interject into an improvised solo, and they can also serve the function of being “fallback patterns” for soloists during their improvisations.

**Exercise 6.** The first phase of this exercise involves a discussion and practice towards developing a swing style feel. Exercises that demonstrate the triplet subdivision of a swing eighth note would be the first step of this process.

![Swing Feel](image)

*Fig. 14: Swing eighth note example*

Eighth notes written in a swing style (as shown in fig. 14) should be performed as such:

![Swing eighth notes demonstrated with triplet subdivision](image)

*Fig. 15: Swing eighth notes demonstrated with triplet subdivision*

After practicing the swing feel on a single note, the educator can encourage students to perform scales or other melodic material using a swing feel as a means to further

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internalize the technique. Once the educator feels students have attained a basic grasp of the swing feel concept, practice should begin on the *riff* material, which should also be performed with a swing eighth-note feel.

Exercise 6 - Blues Riffs and "Fallback Patterns"

Fig. 16: Blues riff patterns
Providing a performance model for students will be very important while teaching the swing feel concept. Whether it is provided through teacher performance modeling or through pre-recorded models, offering students an aural conception of swing eighth note performance is essential. After the riff patterns have been practiced sufficiently, the director should divide the band into 3 groups: an accompaniment group, a riff group and an improvisational group.

The accompaniment group will perform a simple harmonic arrangement of a blues progression in a swing style (complete with a “ride cymbal” swing pattern for percussion). The progression used in this exercise is perhaps the most basic version of a blues progression (other common varieties of the blues progression are explored in the appendix). The progression is as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
I - IV - I - I \\
IV - IV - I - I \\
V - IV - I - I
\end{array}
\]

*Fig. 17: Basic blues harmonic progression*

The accompaniment group in this exercise should strive to function like a rhythm section would in a jazz ensemble; their role is to provide a rhythmic and harmonic support for the performed riffs and improvisation. The bass part of the provided accompaniment functions as a *walking bass line*, which is a traditional performance practice from the swing and jazz style.
These measures should be performed the same way!

Fig. 18: Accompaniment arrangement for blues-form improvisation
Members of the improvisational group will be directed to solo using either the B♭ minor pentatonic scale:

![Fig. 19: B♭ minor Pentatonic Scale]

Or they can use the B♭ blues scale, which simply adds one pitch (E♮) to the minor pentatonic scale.

![Fig. 20: B♭ Blues Scale]

Some time should be spent rehearsing these scales prior to using them within the improvisational component of the exercise.

After all elements of the exercise have been rehearsed, a performance utilizing the material should commence. Improvisational instructions for the exercise should be articulated as follows:

1) Director counts into the accompaniment arrangement (fig. 18) and specifies a 4-measure riff (1 through 8 from fig. 16) to be first performed by the riff group.
2) After the riff is performed, the first soloist from the improvisational group improvises for 4-measures using the Bb minor pentatonic scale (fig. 19).
3) The director cues the performance of either the same riff or a new riff from fig. 16 using hand signals (1 through 8).
4) The next soloist from the improvisational group improvises for 4 measures.
5) This sequence continues, with the improvisational group effectively trading fours with the riff group over the accompaniment.
The accompaniment group should repeat the arrangement until the director cues an end to the exercise. Because the three groups of this exercise play significantly different roles, the director should strive to allow all students an opportunity to perform each task.

**Research Question #4: Educator Concerns Inhibiting the Teaching of Improvisation Within the Classroom Setting**

After establishing what the observed literature presents as the primary approaches to improvisation education within the secondary school setting and attempting to provide examples of exercises utilizing these approaches within a middle school band rehearsal context, the current study attempts to identify the primary impediments (as expressed by educators through the literature) to teaching improvisation within the classroom. After recognizing these principal concerns, additional exercises are offered using approaches extricated from the literature intended to circumvent these expressed obstacles. The primary impediment to teaching improvisation within school music programs, as seen through the research, was a lack of educator familiarity with improvisational curriculum due to either a personal inexperience with improvisational performance due to a teacher training devoid of improvisational studies.  

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612 Byo, “General education... ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.  
As this study is presented in an attempt to address these aforementioned issues relating to the observed lack of educator familiarity with improvisation methodology as demonstrated in the literature by providing a survey of pedagogies and a consolidation of common approaches, this concern will not be separately addressed extensively within the current section of this study. However, it will be noted that numerous researchers have recommended confronting this obstacle by focusing on teacher training programs and how they can be adapted to be more inclusive of improvisational methodology as a means to better prepare educators to teach the subject matter in the classroom. A further examination of improvisation instruction within teacher training programs exists outside the confines of the current study.

**Impediment #1: Lack of Instructional Time.** A principal conveyed obstacle to teaching improvisation within the school music setting, as expressed by educators through a survey of the literature, was found to be a general lack of time available to

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615 Filsinger, Mark H. “Novice teachers learning to improvise in an improvisation professional development workshop.” Ph.D. diss., Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, 2012.


teach the subject within the general music curriculum. The primary approaches to circumvent this challenge, as posited by the literature, will be presented subsequently.

**Warm-up Exercises.** One approach suggested by the literature as a means of dealing with the perceived lack of instructional time being an obstructive issue preventing the teaching of improvisation within the music classroom was through incorporating an improvisational component into the ensemble warm-up routine. Using the initial moments of an ensemble rehearsal period, which traditionally serves the purpose of focusing students on musical tasks at hand or developing certain skill sets (scale acquisition for example), to provide opportunities for improvisational activities effectively guarantees that these skills get taught in a consistent manner. Some of the previously suggested exercises, particularly the activities utilizing drone accompaniment, could be used in this warm-up context effectively as drone performance is wholly comparable to the traditional warm-up activity of long tone performance. The following offered exercise combines elements of long tone performance, 7th chord tutoring, and improvisational training in an activity viable for warm-up application.

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**Exercise 7.** In this exercise, the instructor will begin by discussing three different variations of 7th chords (Major, Minor and Dominant) and guide their ensemble in the collective performance of those structures, each built on a C concert pitch (C Major7, C minor7, C dominant7). Once the instructor has enunciated the functionality and characteristics of these different chord structures, the chord sequence as arranged for ensemble should be performed without an improvisational component. After the ensemble has performed the chord sequence, the instructor should describe the improvisational component.

![Chord Sequence Diagram]

*Fig. 21: Exercise 7 warm-up chord sequence arranged for band instrumentation*
In between each sustained chord, the director should conduct the 4 eighth notes notated at their own desired tempo (extremely fast to extremely slow). The students of the ensemble will improvise the pitch choices for the eighth notes in the tempo dictated by the director. Students can be encouraged to improvise a pitch sequence that leads them in some way towards the next sustained chord tone, or they can improvise a 4 note pitch sequence totally unrelated to the pre-determined sustained notes. The students should be directed to perform the improvised pitches at a very soft dynamic level in an effort to listen to the dissonance produced around them as well as the resolution upon reaching the set chord structures. In addition to providing an exploratory improvisational opportunity, this exercise should also encourage meaningful student listening as well as promote attentive ensemble performance skills. A supplementary variation to this activity would involve the instructor requesting that students select their own eight chord qualities and root pitches in sequence, within the context of the given exercise, effectively composing their own harmonic progression on the spot. This could create a fun activity and integrate a compositional element to the warm-up period in addition to the intended improvisational component.

_Including Improvisation in Concert Programs._ Another approach suggested in the literature as a means of confronting a perceived lack of instructional time as an impediment to teaching improvisation within the school music setting was by incorporating improvisation into school concert programs.\(^{623, 624}\). Including an

improvisational component within every school concert program serves to prioritize the subject as a topic worthy of regular attention. Doing so also compels the educator to consistently provide improvisational opportunities, not so much as a discretionary study, but rather a necessary one required by the demands of the concert literature. The only way to guarantee a subject gets taught within a middle school music curricula is to establish it as a fundamental of standard musical performance, and consistently accommodating the practice of improvisation within school concert programs accomplishes as much.

An approach suggested by Schopp in the conclusion to his study was that educators could “open up” band arrangements to allow for improvisation\textsuperscript{625}. Opening up an arrangement for band would consist of identifying a point within an arrangement that could be appropriate for student improvisation. Once this point for departure within the arrangement is identified, the educator can either choose to utilize the written material as a backdrop for student improvisation (by adding repeats to a section and removing the melody for example), or they could compose an insert to the arrangement that supports student improvisation while maintaining certain qualities of the piece. The following offered exercise opens up a popular beginning concert piece for the purpose of adding an improvisational element.

Exercise 8a. Using the popular band composition by Curnow\(^{626}\) (based on the Korean folk melody, *Ahrirang*), an example will be provided on how to open up an arrangement for improvisation as a means to include an improvisational component within school concert programs. Using the material provided in the arrangement, an opportunity for pentatonic improvisation could fit quite easily within the structure of the piece. At measure 13 of the piece\(^ {627}\), instead of continuing on to measure 14, the improvisational insert will be performed and proceeding to measure 14 will occur upon conductor cue. The accompaniment insert strictly uses the ostinato that has been occurring in the piece until this point.

Fig. 22: Accompaniment for *Korean Folk Rhapsody* improvisation insert

As the melody performed in this piece (measures 5 – 14) is constructed strictly using an F Major pentatonic scale, the improviser(s) will use that pitch set for their improvisations.


\(^{627}\) Ibid.
The director can set the length of the solo ahead of time or simply use the repeat for the insert (fig. 22) as a vamp that can continue until a cue to proceed to measure 14 of the arrangement. While this insert can perhaps only afford an improvisational opportunity to one or two students, it demonstrates a means by which an educator can infuse a concert band program with improvisation thereby ensuring its prioritization and instruction.

**Improvisation as a Teaching Tool.** Another approach presented by the literature as a way to circumvent the obstacle of a lack of perceived time inhibiting improvisational instruction within the school music setting is by using improvisation as a means of teaching other musical topics. Cited by numerous pedagogues as a way to incorporate improvisation instruction into a general music curriculum, using improvisation as a tool for the teaching of other musical subject matter can offer the educator a great deal of flexibility by allowing them to promote the development of multiple skills simultaneously. Using improvisation to assist in the instruction of other subject areas

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628 Ibid.
such as articulation, scale acquisition\textsuperscript{632}, rhythmic aptitude\textsuperscript{633} and song form association\textsuperscript{634} were all approaches found within the literature. However, improvisation could be used to teach a number of other topics as well, such as dynamics, harmony, counterpoint and performance style. The offered exercise uses improvisation as a means of teaching the whole-tone scale.

\textit{Exercise 9.} Using Debussy’s “Voiles” from his book of preludes as an inspiration, an exercise will be constructed in an attempt to teach the whole-tone scale through improvisation. The first phase of this exercise involves a discussion of the whole-tone scale followed by practice and performance of the scale starting on a C concert pitch.

\textbf{Fig. 24:} C whole-tone scale

For the purposes of simplifying the improvisational component, students can be asked to improvise using one of the two tetra-chords fundamental to the whole-tone scale initially, until fluency is gained.

\textsuperscript{632} Chyu, “Teaching improvisation to piano students,” 2004.
\textsuperscript{633} Whitcomb, “Teaching improvisation in elementary general music,” 2013.
\textsuperscript{634} Ibid.
The educator should divide the ensemble into an improvisational group and an accompaniment group. The accompaniment provided utilizes a harmonic ostinato; which is a common accompaniment practice closely related to the drone approach.

After rehearsing the accompaniment to exercise 9, members of the improvisational group can solo alongside the harmonic backdrop using an assigned tetra-chord of the whole-tone scale (fig. 23) at a length of 4 measures per solo. After each member of the improvisational group has made an attempt soloing with the accompaniment, roles should be interchanged amongst the members of the ensemble. After participating in this exercise, students should have an increased awareness of the
unique sound produced by the whole-tone scale and educators will have accomplished teaching a theoretical lesson as well as provided students with an improvisational opportunity.

**Impediment #2: Student Inhibition.** A prominent impediment to improvisational instruction within the school music setting, as seen throughout the literature, was student anxiety in regards to improvisational performance in front of their peers. Some improvisational resources emphasized the establishment of a safe and hospitable environment as a precursor to undertaking improvisation activities. Instead of avoiding improvisational exercises altogether in an effort to protect students from experiencing undue anxiety or angst, educators can rather structure activities in a way that minimizes these negative reactions. In general, less exposed improvisational activities that allow students to find confidence by blending into a greater whole can be an asset for the educator seeking to navigate this challenge. The exercises presented within this study have predominantly group improvisational in structure and thus may mitigate some of the inherent challenges related to student anxiety.

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The exercises presented within this study have also made use of the suggestion from Whitcomb to provide students with “fallback patterns” during their improvisations that can serve to mitigate some of the potential anxiety they can experience. If a student is aware that they can utilize specific learned material during their solos, it can aid their confidence and remove a measure of apprehension. Higgins and Campbell sought to create an appropriate environment for improvisational activities by recommending breathing exercises. With this approach in mind, an educator could use established breathing pedagogy designed for practical use within a concert band curriculum like the breathing gym to foster the kind of focus and calm requisite for improvisational training while simultaneously serving to develop the breath control skills of student wind players. The research provides additional approaches to mitigate the obstacle of student inhibition in regards to improvisational activity and these approaches are presented below.

**Ornamentation.** Cited by multiple educators as a simple and practical approach to very beginning improvisational efforts, ornamentation of learned melodies can also provide the stepping stones towards improvisation for students experiencing anxiety. With an ornamental or embellishment oriented improvisational approach

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642 Whitcomb, “Teaching improvisation in elementary general music,” 2013, pp. 49.
the educator can provide a melody for students to learn, then offer guidance to the students on how to ornament that melody in creative and/or semi-improvised ways. Using an approach like ornamentation can be beneficial in situations where students feel inhibited to improvise since it reduces the pressure to come up with material on the spot. The material is already provided in the form of a learned melody. The following exercise uses a song common to beginning band pedagogy and uses it as a platform for ornamentation.

**Exercise 10.** Using the song *Kum Ba Yah*, common to numerous beginning band pedagogies, students will be asked to ornament a learned melody using either practiced patterns or simply by improvising with a major scale. The first phase of the exercise involves learning the melody to the song, which should be sung first then practiced with instruments.

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After rehearsing the melody, models of ornamentation should be provided by the educator simply using the notes of the C Major scale. One such example model is provided below.

Once the concept of ornamentation is communicated to the students, the ensemble should perform the accompaniment arrangement as each student individually attempts to perform the melody to *Kum Ba Yah* with some degree of ornamentation, using only the notes of the C Major scale.
Fig. 29: Accompaniment arrangement for *Kum Ba Yah*

Students should be encouraged to keep their ornamentation simple at first, and then add complexity as they gain comfort with the task. Even if students only add one or two ornamentations to the melody during their turn, they have taken small beginning steps in their improvisational development and have ideally gained a degree of confidence towards undertaking creative musical tasks.
**Improvisational Games.** Another approach seen through the literature as a means of overcoming student anxiety when tasked with improvisational undertakings was found to be the practice of creating *improvisational games* for beginning students. Improvisational games can take the fear out of the process of improvising for some students as it can remove the musical criteria (trying to *sound good*) from the activity, allowing students to focus on the objectives of the game. This can free some students from the inhibition and anxiety that can occasionally plague more traditional improvisational efforts. As the name implies, games can be fun and a good change of pace for educators trying to keep their students engaged.

The majority of published literature examining this improvisational game approach focuses on the use of this strategy in smaller settings with occasional exceptions. The research showed that game strategies can be complicated when used within larger settings and with larger ensembles, as chaos can overtake the proceedings if structure is too loose. With that in mind, an example of an improvisational game intended for use within the concert band rehearsal setting will be presented here, and special attention will be paid to establishing clear parameters and objectives so as to avoid the aforementioned chaos.

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Exercise 11a. When articulating the rules of this exercise, the instructor should emphasize the importance of cognizant listening as it relates to music making in general and ensemble playing specifically. The point should be made clear, that for this exercise and most musical situations in general, if a student cannot hear the music around them, they are either failing to listen intently enough or they are playing too loudly. The ensemble should be divided into 3 groups: (1) an ostinato group, (2) a trill and crescendo group, and (3) a rhythmic group.

The objective for the first group is to softly oscillate between the two dictated notes a whole step apart at a moderate pace, but not in a specific tempo.

![Group 1 - Ostinato](image)

Fig. 30: Ostinato group improvisational game objective

The objective for the second group is to trill between the two dictated notes a half step apart. For trombonists in the ensemble, suggest that instead of trilling they simply can start playing a concert G, then use slide vibrato between 4th and 3rd position to achieve a similar effect. This trill should crescendo and decrescendo according to the signals from the director. These dynamic shifts can be extreme, or subtle and quick or slow depending on the gestures from the director.
The third group is referred to as the rhythmic group, not because they are assigned a rhythm but rather because it is their objective to collectively find a rhythmic ostinato by listening to each other. Only using a C concert pitch, members of this group should start playing in a pointillist manner. The educator should instruct students to rest at least 6 times longer than they play and that their notes should be short and articulated, with a great deal of space between each one. Students should use this space to listen around themselves and try to find a collective rhythmic ostinato. As disparate rhythms begin to emerge, students can start to play more in an attempt to consolidate ideas into one agreed upon rhythm motive. Once everyone in the rhythmic group agrees on a singular rhythmic ostinato and performs it collectively multiple times, the exercise should be stopped and roles should be rotated. If the educator senses that this consolidation is taking too long to materialize, they can enter the activity to identify a rhythm being performed as the one selected for the ostinato.

This exercise is just one example of how an improvisational game approach could be used in the beginning band context. Suggestions from the material regarding how to best set the scene for the kind of activities involve the use of breathing exercises to
promote focus\textsuperscript{657} and turning off the lights in the band room for a short stretch before or during performance to heighten aural awareness\textsuperscript{658}. The improvisational game approach, when used effectively, can offer a non-traditional path for improvisational instruction within the classroom. It can also serve to alleviate certain inhibitions some students may experience when asked to improvise by removing musical judgment from the improvisational scenario and replacing it with game objectives and tasks.

\textsuperscript{657} Higgins and Campbell, \textit{Free to be Musical}, 2010.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion And Recommendations

Summary and Justification

Research has suggested the benefit of an improvisational component to the general music studies of the developing student musician\textsuperscript{659, 660, 661}. Numerous pedagogues and scholars have recognized the importance of improvisation as a necessary element to holistic musicianship\textsuperscript{662, 663, 664}. This view of improvisation as a fundamental component of comprehensive musicianship was reinforced by the MENC when it established study of the subject as a core standard of a rounded music education\textsuperscript{665}. Despite this institutional appeal for the inclusion of improvisation within the general music curriculum, numerous studies conducted in the wake of the MENC establishment of the common core standards showed improvisation as an especially difficult standard to incorporate into the classroom setting\textsuperscript{666, 667, 668}. Educators point to numerous factors that have combined to inhibit the assimilation of improvisational studies into the general music curricula within school systems\textsuperscript{669}, and ultimately these factors have led to a noticeable deficiency of improvisational instruction within school music programs\textsuperscript{670}.

\textsuperscript{660} Montano, “The effect of improvisation... accuracy in sight-reading,” 1983.
\textsuperscript{661} Burnsed, “The development... of an introductory improvisation sequence,” 1978.
\textsuperscript{662} Stringham, “Improvisation... in a high school music curriculum,” 2010.
\textsuperscript{663} Campbell, “Unveiling the mysteries of musical spontaneity,” 1991.
\textsuperscript{664} Lehman, Sloboda and Woody, Psychology for Musicians, 2007.
\textsuperscript{665} Music Educators National Conference, 1994.
\textsuperscript{666} Byo, “General education... ability to implement the national standards,” 1997.
\textsuperscript{667} Adderley, “Music teacher preparation in South Carolina,” 1996.
\textsuperscript{668} Louk, “National Standards for music education,” 2002.
\textsuperscript{669} Whitcomb, “A description of improvisational activities,” 2005.
\textsuperscript{670} Orman, “Comparison of the national standards for music education,” 2002.
Studies have implied that this scarcity of improvisational instruction is especially manifest at the middle school level\textsuperscript{671, 672}. Band programs are cited as the most common construct within school music curriculum\textsuperscript{673}, thus identifying improvisational approaches for this particular setting could provide a significant advancement towards achieving the kind of balanced music educational curricula scholars have long called for\textsuperscript{674}. The beginning band setting has proven to be a challenging environment for the inclusion of improvisational instruction and educators have been inclined to reserve improvisational opportunities for voluntary co-curricular offerings such as after-school jazz ensembles\textsuperscript{675}. However, as Ramsey states:

Traditionally, improvisation has been associated with the playing of jazz; however, the underlying musical benefits of improvisation should be nurtured by every teacher for every student… Much of the instruction that occurs in the beginning band is focused on reading music from the written page and reproducing music from the published parts. All students deserve the opportunity to play music by ear and compose in their minds through improvisation. Providing students with the opportunity to expand or change a written melody provides a chance for students to increase their listening skills and to develop the freedom to play by ear on their instruments, unencumbered by written notation, hopefully providing motivation for greater achievement\textsuperscript{676}.

\textsuperscript{672} Orman, “Comparison of the national standards for music education,” 2002.  
\textsuperscript{673} Abril and Gault, “The state of music in secondary schools,” 2008.  
\textsuperscript{674} Campbell, “Unveiling the mysteries of musical spontaneity,” 1991.  
\textsuperscript{675} Stringham, “Improvisation… in a high school music curriculum,” 2010.  
The justification for this study originates from the view that beginning band instruction needs to incorporate improvisation universally in an effort to provide a music education that is not strictly based upon performing pre-written notes on a page. In the conclusion to a study surveying the improvisational practices of music teachers in Illinois, Niknafs concluded that educators would benefit from an improvisational resource that compiles methods and approaches applicable for use within the school classroom setting. This study sets out to provide such a resource.

**Research Questions and Method**

The primary research questions guiding the study were:

1. What improvisational methodologies are available to the middle school music educator interested in incorporating the topic into their general music curriculum? Are any of these methodologies designed for application with the beginning band setting?

2. What set of factors have been suggested by previously conducted research to influence student achievement in improvisation?

3. What are the primary approaches to beginning improvisation instruction as derived from the literature? Can these extracted approaches be applied to a beginning band context?

4. What are the documented challenges music educators have faced when attempting to incorporate an improvisational element into their general music curriculum? Does the research offer insight on how to circumvent these educational obstacles?

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These research questions were answered through a comprehensive survey of practicums, methodologies and other relevant literature. The ultimate goal of the research was to identify the primary approaches to improvisational instruction at the beginning developmental level. Subsequently, an effort was made to modify these established methodologies for use within a beginning band context. Exercises representing each of these identified approaches were offered in an attempt to compile a categorized improvisational resource for the beginning band director. An attempt was also made to identify the primary inhibiting factors that have been shown through the literature to obstruct the inclusion of improvisational pedagogy within the general music curriculum. Exercises were offered to confront these challenges using approaches inspired from the literature.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

Through the conducted survey of improvisational pedagogies and methodologies, as well as an overview of case studies and related research, six (6) primary approaches to improvisational instruction catering towards the beginning level student musician were identified. These principle approaches were recognized to be: (1) free improvisational activities, (2) single pitch improvisation, (3) call & response improvisational activities, (4) pentatonic improvisation, (5) chord-scale improvisation and (6) blues-form improvisation. It was determined that these approaches could be adapted for application within the beginning band context despite the inherent challenge large ensemble settings present for the incorporation of improvisational study.
Three primary factors inhibiting the assimilation of improvisational studies into a more general music setting were identified through the literature. These primary obstacles were recognized as: (1) a general lack of teacher preparedness or fluency in teaching improvisation due to insufficient training or a lack of performance experience with the practice, (2) an overall lack of instructional time available for the teaching of improvisation within the school music setting, and (3) student inhibition and anxiety when asked to perform improvisational tasks. It was determined that approaches could in fact be offered as a means to try and circumvent the latter two of these acknowledged deterring factors. This study is, in and of itself, an attempt to confront the first of these identified hurdles to improvisational studies within the school music setting. However, the literature does suggest music educators need more improvisational instruction as a component to their teacher training programs as means of confronting this first identified inhibiting factor.

The survey of published improvisational methodologies provided within the review of literature demonstrates there is a vast array of resources an educator could use in an attempt to try and incorporate improvisation into their general music curriculum. However, the majority of these surveyed resources are not fundamentally constructed for application within beginning band context. To adopt or incorporate one of the few methodologies that are in fact designed for application within the beginning band context, the educator may have to make significant changes to their curriculum which is a reality that presents its own potential inhibiting factor as most educators are not prone to dramatically alter their pedagogical approach in an effort to promote the instruction of any one particular subject.
As scholars \(^{678, 679}\) have suggested, educators should not be required to make dramatic pedagogical modifications in order to teach improvisation within the context of their established music curriculum. Offering an improvisational resource that provides flexibility for educators as well as simplicity for absorption into their existent curriculum is an objective that, if met, could serve to significantly increase the application of improvisation within school music programs. This study was conducted as an attempt to provide the foundation of such a resource as well as provide an initial set of examples to lay the groundwork to how the aforementioned resource could be structured.

As Ramsey notes, “very simple, guided improvisation activities of short duration are appropriate\(^ {680}\),” within a beginning band curriculum. Schopp identified flexibility as an essential component to successful improvisation pedagogy within the school music program\(^ {681}\). Whitcomb noted that when improvisation is undertaken within school music programs, educators are usually creating their own materials and exercises\(^ {682}\). Educators need to be equipped with practical models for improvisation activities so that they can in turn assimilate these examples into their curriculum as they see fit. There is no such thing as one-size-fits-all when it comes to teaching improvisation, as the survey of literature clearly demonstrates.

\(^{678}\) Whitcomb, “Teaching improvisation in elementary general music,” 2013.
\(^{680}\) Ramsey, ed. by Miles and Dvorak, 2001, pp. 23.
While there exists a range of published pedagogies available detailing various means of approaching improvisation studies through a multitude of procedures and protocols, as long as improvisation is viewed as an intrinsically creative practice, there will likely never be consensus on any one specific way of teaching the topic. There will always be a myriad of legitimate approaches to improvisation instruction at all levels, and this should theoretically benefit concerned educators. However, for educators unversed in improvisation practice, this multitude can instead be confusing and even overwhelming. It can become too easy for an educator to observe this array of approaches and pedagogies and become dissuaded from pursuing improvisation in the curriculum altogether. The overarching priority, however, should be to include improvisation within the music curriculum through any practical means.

The six primary improvisational approaches identified in this study were observed through a range of different pedagogies and methodologies. While it may be hyperbolic to suggest that any of these approaches are necessarily universal in practice, they are seen with enough consistency to be considered standard practices of improvisational pedagogy. Presenting them in the context of simple models applied to the beginning band setting should provide educators with a blueprint to create their own exercises that accommodate their particular needs and curricular priorities, which in the end could be considered an additional goal of this study.

The two primary inhibiting factors observed within this research; (1) lack of instructional time and (2) student inhibition, which were observed to encumber the teaching of improvisation within school music curricula were examined and exercises were offered to circumvent these common challenges. This is not meant to suggest that
difficult issues such as student inhibition or the lack of instructional time can be easily resolved by utilizing one or two exercises. Issues such as the ones observed within this study may persist for as long as an educator attempts to teach improvisation. However, these issues should not serve to dissuade the music teacher from attempting to incorporate improvisational studies altogether. It is the view of this researcher, as well as the view of other scholars\(^\text{683, 684}\), that teaching improvisation is a responsibility of music educators and receiving an improvisation education is the right of music students. Through this view, challenges such as the ones encountered within the observed research should be seen as hurdles rather than barriers to improvisation instruction.

**Considerations for Future Research**

Ideally, future studies and surveys should be conducted observing renowned improvisation teachers at all levels in an attempt to document how these educators use improvisation within a more general music curriculum, with the ultimate goal of compiling a range of models and applied examples. Videos and recordings of teachers conducting improvisational lessons, set within the context of a school music program, could provide a helpful model for teachers interested in observing applied lesson plans and approaches.

Studies observing various teacher-training programs and the effectiveness of these programs in preparing educators to teach improvisation within general music curricula should also be conducted. The lack of adequate teacher training was identified as a

\(^{684}\) Stringham, “Improvisation... in a high school instrumental music curriculum,” 2010.
primary impediment to the teaching of improvisation through the literature. Music educators training at the undergraduate level should receive all necessary tools in order to teach a comprehensive music education to their future students. Studies should be conducted examining whether recent music education graduates feel they have received adequate training to teach improvisation within a general music curriculum. Ways in which teacher-training programs can also become more adept and flexible in regards to providing a range of improvisational instructional approaches should be explored further.

Lastly, studies should be conducted observing the benefit, or lack thereof, in regards to including improvisational game pedagogy within a school music curriculum. With the recent release of methodologies devoted primarily to improvisational game approaches\textsuperscript{685, 686}, the concept of using this alternative improvisational methodology should be explored more fully to assess practicality, challenges and benefits.

As Levin remarked while reflecting on the art of improvisation,

\begin{quote}
The remarkable thing about improvisation is precisely that it narrows to the vanishing point the distinction between spontaneous invention and what is on the page, because the act of improvisation makes one aware at every point that there is always a multitude of possibilities from which to choose\textsuperscript{687}.
\end{quote}

It is with this view in mind that educators should strive to make improvisation a natural and fundamental aspect of holistic musical training. Without it, the music making process

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{685} Higgins and Campbell, \textit{Free to be Musical}, 2010.
\end{footnotesize}
will simply consist of written-note recitation and repetition, a process devoid of the kind of creative choices so essential for attaining comprehensive musicianship. It is the hope of this study that the ideas and approaches provided could serve to embolden educators in their attempt to provide improvisational instruction to their students. Using the activities provided as a template, educators should seek to craft personalized approaches that cater to their particular needs. Ideally, the goal of teaching improvisation to as many music students as possible should be a shared goal amongst all concerned music educators and pursued with requisite diligence. It is a sincere hope that the current study can assist educators in this unending pursuit.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Catterall, James, Richard Chapleau, and John Iwanaga. "Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theater Arts." *The Imagination Project at the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California at Los Angeles* (September 1999): 1-18.


Riveire, Janine H. “California String Teachers’ Curricular Content and Attitudes Regarding Improvisation and the National Standards.” DMA essay, University of Southern California, 1997.


APPENDIX A

Supplemental Material For Exercises Presented Within the Findings Section

Exercise 1a – (Free Improvisational Exercise)

Concert Instruments

London Bridge is Falling Down - Free Improvisational Exercise

IMPROVISATION INSTRUCTIONS:
- At a medium volume, start playing a comfortable higher pitch on your instrument.
- Slowly slur (or glissando) down to your lower register, constantly getting softer as you descend.
- Imagine how the voice of someone skydiving out of a plane would get quieter as they fell further from you.
- Continue to your lowest, softest note and wait for your director to cut you off.
- Watch for your director count-off to start back in with the original theme (A).
**Bb Instruments**

*London Bridge is Falling Down - Free Improvisational Exercise*

**A**

\[\text{English Folk Song}\]

**B**

**IMPROVISATION INSTRUCTIONS:**
- At a medium volume, start playing a comfortable higher pitch on your instrument.
- Slowly *slur* (or glissando) down to your lower register, constantly getting softer as you descend.
- Imagine how the voice of someone skydiving out of a plane would get quieter as they fell further from you.
- Continue to your lowest, softest note and wait for your director to cut you off.
- Watch for your director count-off to start back in with the original theme (A).
**Eb Instruments**

*London Bridge is Falling Down - Free Improvisational Exercise*

**A**

*English Folk Song*

**B**

**IMPROVISATION INSTRUCTIONS:**
- At a medium volume, start playing a comfortable higher pitch on your instrument.
- Slowly slur (or glissando) down to your lower register, constantly getting softer as you descend.
- Imagine how the voice of someone skydiving out of a plane would get quieter as they fell further from you.
- Continue to your lowest, softest note and wait for your director to cut you off.
- Watch for your director count-off to start back in with the original theme (A).
F Instruments

London Bridge is Falling Down - Free Improvisational Exercise

IMPROVISATION INSTRUCTIONS:
- At a medium volume, start playing a comfortable higher pitch on your instrument.
- Slowly slur (or glissando) down to your lower register, constantly getting softer as you descend.
- Imagine how the voice of someone skydiving out of a plane would get quieter as they fell further from you.
- Continue to your lowest, softest note and wait for your director to cut you off.
- Watch for your director count-off to start back in with the original theme (A).
London Bridge - Arrangement for Band

London Bridge – Band Arrangement Pg. 1
Improvisational Component - Refer to the exercise description for detailed directions

London Bridge – Band Arrangement Pg. 2
Exercise 2a – (Single Note Improvisation)

Optional Snare Patterns for Drone Accompaniment

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\begin{verbatim}
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\end{verbatim}
Instructions:

1) The instructor can cue the harmonic shift from the E₅ tonality (A) to the D₅ tonality (B).
2) Students can continue to use the fallback patterns listed in fig. 2. They should perform these patterns using the concert pitch “A.”
3) As fluency is gained using a single pitch, the instructor can allow for additional pitches. The pitches a minor third above and a major second below the original pitches for the exercise could be added.
   a. For the E₅ section (A), the concert pitches “A♭” and “D♭” could be added sequentially as students gain comfort with the improvisational task.
   b. For the D₅ section (B), the concert pitches “G” and “C” could be added sequentially as the students gain comfort with the improvisational task.
Exercise 3a – *(Call & Response)*

Modified Drone Accompaniment

Student Drone Group #1

Student Drone Group #2

Optional Snare Accompaniment Patterns

Option #1

Option #2

Option #3
Exercise 4a – (Pentatonic)
Exercise 5a – (Chord-Scale Improvisation)

Additional melodic examples utilizing guide-tone resolutions as a part of a chord-tone improvisational exercise over the given harmonic progression.
**Exercise 6a – (Blues-Form Improvisation)**

Common variations of the Blues Harmonic Progression (Major Blues)

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APPENDIX B

Additional Exercise Examples

Exercise 1b – Free improvisational Exercise

*Tuning-Up - Free Improvisational Routine.* As a way of combining the suggested approach of free improvisational exercises with the concept of using ensemble warm-up time as an opportunity to engage with improvisational activities, the director can task the beginning band ensemble with tuning-up to a concert “A” pitch, as is fairly traditional practice during a large ensemble warm-up. However, for this exercise, students should gradually turn their attention from *tuning-up* on the dictated pitch into a more improvisational mindset, while still considering intonation to be a primary concern. Using only the allowed pitch set, students should shift from performing a long unison concert “A” into a free melodic exercise.

As students perform *part 2* of the above exercise, the effect should be similar to the sound of an orchestra as they tune-up before a performance. In this case, however, students should be consciously considering the creative possibilities of performing in such a free context. As the director cues *part 3*, students should return to a concert “A” tuning pitch and the exercise should conclude. Ideally this exercise will provide a simple, quick, and non-threatening environment for basic improvisational efforts while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of ensemble intonation.

Part 1 - Tune Up!  Part 2 - Slowly begin to add the dictated notes and improvise, while still considering overall ensemble intonation  Part 3 - Return to original tuning pitch

As students perform *part 2* of the above exercise, the effect should be similar to the sound of an orchestra as they tune-up before a performance. In this case, however, students should be consciously considering the creative possibilities of performing in such a free context. As the director cues *part 3*, students should return to a concert “A” tuning pitch and the exercise should conclude. Ideally this exercise will provide a simple, quick, and non-threatening environment for basic improvisational efforts while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of ensemble intonation.
Exercise 2b – Single Pitch improvisation

In an effort to combine a single pitch improvisational approach with its most common counterpart, “using improvisation as a teaching tool,” an exercise is provided here using single pitch improvisation to demonstrate the concept of syncopation and non-syncopation. The first part of the exercise involves the director leading the ensemble in the performance of a set of examples (which will eventually function as “fallback patterns” during the improvisational component of the exercise) demonstrating the differences between syncopated rhythms and non-syncopated rhythms (on the next two pages).

After these patterns have been adequately rehearsed, the drone component of the exercise should be rehearsed. Continuing with the practice of varying the stylistic approach of the drone accompaniment, a funk-oriented style will be applied to the drone accompaniment in this exercise. Shown below is the accompaniment arrangement, including a part for snare drum. Parts of the provided accompaniment should be divided throughout the ensemble. However, the bass pattern is challenging and should perhaps be performed by a select group of more advanced students.

Exercise 2b - Drone Accompaniment (Funk)
Non-Syncopated Examples and "Fallback Patterns"

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)
Syncopated Examples and "Fallback Patterns"

1) 

2) 

3) 

4) 

5) 

6) 

7) 

8)
Once all components of the exercise have been rehearsed, students within an assigned improvisational group can take turns improvising using a single pitch (concert B♭). Depending on hand signals from the director, the student should attempt to solo using either syncopated statements or non-syncopated statements. The director could use a *thumbs-up* for syncopation (since these phrases should end on an up-beat), and a *thumbs-down* for non-syncopation (as these phrases should end on a down beat). This exercise could take some trial and error, so students should be afforded the opportunity to make multiple attempts in order to gain fluency alternating between syncopation and non-syncopation. Self-reflection could also be an effective tool when used in the context of this exercise by asking students if they think they successfully performed the assigned task. If a student is unsure about whether or not they successfully executed their assigned task, they should strictly try to perform from the practiced “fallback pattern” examples until they have gained more clarity on the difference between the two rhythmic techniques.
Exercise 4b – Pentatonic

While most examples of pentatonic improvisational exercises found in the literature made use of anhemitonic pentatonic scales (without semitones), there are also applications for pentatonic improvisational examples using hemitonic pentatonic scales (with semitones). An example of such a case will be explored here. Using a song common to beginning band pedagogy that itself makes use of a hemitonic pentatonic scale, an improvisational opportunity will be extracted. *Sakura*, a traditional Japanese folk melody, makes use of what could be considered an A minor 6th pentatonic scale, which consists of the following scale degrees (1, 2, b3, 5, b6).

An accompaniment arrangement for this melody will be provided on the following pages, as well as an ensemble arrangement to accompany improvisation using this pentatonic scale.

The director should lead the ensemble in a performance of the provided pentatonic scale until comfort is acquired. Practice should then begin on rehearsing the accompaniment arrangements provided. After rehearsing the band arrangement portion, practice can begin on section B of the arrangement, which is the improvisational component of the exercise. The hemitonic nature of the provided pentatonic scale creates an exotic sound that can create interesting results for student improvisation. Students should be encouraged to emphasize the half steps in their improvisations in an effort to accentuate the exotic quality of this scale.
Japanese Folk Melody

SAKURA
Exercise 5b – Chord-Scale Improvisational Exercises

An approach found in the literature that can be strategically employed to spark student interest and engagement was the concept of utilizing popular songs in an effort to teach improvisation\(^6\). Music educators can modify songs that resonate with their students and insert said popular music into their curriculum as a means to connect lessons and studies with identifiable music that kids can relate to in a very direct way. As of the writing of this document, the most popular current song according to the Billboard 100 (for seventeen continuous weeks) is the Pharrell Williams tune, “Happy.” The chord progression extracted from the chorus of this highly popular song will be used as a platform for the following chord-scale improvisational exercise.

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{D}^b \text{ Lydian Scale} & \text{C Dorian Scale} & \text{C Dorian Scale} & \text{F Mixolydian Scale} \\
\end{array}\]

The educator could arrange the provided chord sequence to create an accompaniment arrangement for band instrumentation and soloists could take turns improvising using either the arpeggios or the notated chord-scales. Similar efforts could be made using most any popular song as a basis for improvisational efforts. Using popular song material as a platform for teaching improvisation can provide a welcome departure from typical beginning band pedagogy.
Exercise 8b – Including Improvisation in Concert Programs

Similar to the example provided on page 142 of this document detailing how a director can “open up” a band arrangement to allow for student improvisation, additional examples will be provided here utilizing a comparable approach.

Snakes! Using the popular middle school performance piece, “Snakes!” by Thomas C. Duffy\(^{689}\), a simple improvisational approach can be suggested. This piece lends itself to improvisation quite nicely as it already establishes moments for creative undertakings (the murmurs in the brass at letter E). The repeated section at C (measures 37-43) can be easily opened up for student improvisation. The director could advise the band to perform section C one time as written without a soloist, then allow for one (or two) soloists to improvise over said section as the accompaniment group (percussion, tuba, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, and bassoon 1 & 2) continue to play their written parts. Upon director cue, the last performance of C should be executed with the melody replayed (trumpets 1 & 2, tenor saxophone, oboe, and piccolo) and performance of the piece should continue as arranged.

The student improviser could use any one (or any combination) of the following scales during their effort at letter C. These options are listed in a general order relative to the degree of difficulty involved with the acquisition of each scale.

The first scale option would be a basic C minor pentatonic scale:

A second option would add an augmented 4th to the above scale to create a C blues scale:

Lastly, the educator could use the six notes from the melody used in this section (the piccolo, trumpet 1&2, tenor saxophone and oboe parts at letter C of the band arrangement show the melody\textsuperscript{690}) to create an exotic six-note scale based on the scale degrees \{1, b2, 3, 4, 5 and b6\}.  

\textsuperscript{690} Ibid.
Exercise 11b – Improvisational Games

An improvisational game approach intended for application within the beginning band setting is offered here in addition to the exercises offered on pg. 158 of the main document. In this exercise, the educator should try and set a scene and encourage the members of each different improvisational group within the ensemble to identify with their role within the scene. The scene for the exercise will be a serene but windy seaside cottage.

**Group One.** The first group for this exercise will be tasked with being the *wind group*. This group is responsible for blowing air through their instruments (not playing any pitch, just moving air through the instrument) in an effort to create a *wind-like* sound. The director of the ensemble will lead this group dynamically with hang gestures for an intensifying wind.

**Group Two.** This group is the *wind-chime group*. This group should consist of the flutes and pitched percussion (marimba, xylophone or vibraphone) players in the band. The members of this group should perform the following four-note pattern at different tempos and starting points to create a wind-chime effect. Members of this group should also follow the director’s dynamic gestures, in conjunction with group one, as the wind chimes should grow louder as the wind intensifies.

Wind Chime Ostinato
**Group Three.** The third group in this exercise should function as a *seagull group!* This group should consist of three to four trumpet players playing half-valve gestures imitating the sound of seagulls. They should have fun with this, but should always attempt to stay within the spirit of the exercise.

**Group Four.** The fourth group is a *sea-monster group!* This group should wait for almost a full minute before entering with their melody. This group should consist of low brass (tuba, euphonium and trombones), baritone saxophone and bassoon. The director should assign one student to be a leader of this group. The student leader will direct the performance and tempo of the low, grumbling *sea-monster* theme. Again, fun should be had, but within the spirit of the exercise.

\[\text{Sea-Monster Theme!}\]

Once the director feels the exercise has run its course and the *sea-monster* theme has been performed three or four times, a decrescendo gesture followed by a single cut-off gesture ends the exercise.