

**Learning to Improvise: The Lived
Experience of Music and Music Therapy
Students**

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Abstract

This study investigates the lived experience of learning to improvise for music and music therapy students on postgraduate courses in UK Higher Education. Findings demonstrate that learning is complex: engendering changes to identity, increased emotional regulation, intense relationships, and creating flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). It is a qualitative phenomenological, reflexive, arts-based study, drawing on performative social science (Etherington, 2004; Jones, 2021). Ten participants took part in individual semi-structured interviews combined with improvisations. The verbal interviews were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, *et al.*, 2009), and the music employed an adapted method of Ferrara's (1984) phenomenological music analysis. In response to the music, the researcher hand drew graphic scores. This enabled a member checking process, in which the scores were given back to the participants together with transcriptions of the verbal

data (Giorgi, 1975; Colaizzi, 1978). Drawing the scores created an unanticipated embodied researcher reflexivity, enabling a deep focus on the music data. The findings produced five themes: identity, emotions, relationships, flow, and learning. It was found that learning to improvise can influence changes to identity, including relationship to instruments and performance of gender. In addition, findings showed that learning takes place within specific musical communities, involving close relationships, and can broaden individual emotional expression. It was also found that special experiences and flow are an important aspect in development of learning, sometimes accompanied by spiritual narratives. Finally, the study suggests that there are many different ways of learning, which can begin in early childhood and continue on into adulthood, examples include: the development of musical memorisation, responding to dancers moving, and learning unfamiliar instruments. This study demonstrates that learning to improvise is nuanced and

multi-faceted and can strongly influence the development of the self.

Statement of Original Authorship

I declare that this PhD thesis has been written solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Preface

I have been involved with music improvisation all my life. Beginning with playing with sounds as a child on a first piano, including climbing on top and inside; to working as a professional music therapist and performer. Improvisation has always held a fascination. I can remember being thrilled and awed at the very first live music I ever attended, hearing the improvising big band Southampton All Stars (Discogs, 2021). The music seemed like a wonderful mystery. The motivation for this study developed out of years of experience of taking part in improvisation focused rehearsals, performances, church services and workshops with Springwood musicians (1990–2000), teaching clinical improvisation as an associate lecturer in music therapy at the University of the West of England (2013–2020), University of South Wales (2017 – 2020), being employed as programme lead and senior lecturer at the University of Derby (2020–present) and working as a music therapist in special education with many children

and young people (2001–2019). It is apparent through focusing on improvisation, students often have deep experiences which cannot be immediately explained. It is out of these observations that the study arose. This research is aimed at music professionals, music therapists and students who are involved in improvisation, as well as those who are just curious about such things. It addresses a gap in the literature and gives emphasis on student voice. The research is intended to be useful for music therapy trainings, and higher education music courses in helping to understand the lived experience of learning to improvise. The project is intensely creative, situated within arts-based research (Jones and Leavy 2014). I would encourage readers to experiment with and explore the possibilities of arts-based research for their own work. This research is dedicated to music therapy students at the University of the West of England Bristol, University of South Wales and University of Derby.

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**List of research music and instrumentation
-mp3s**

Track one	Dunnock– guitar Becky–melodica
Track two	Linnet–ocean drum, glockenspiel, shaker, tambourine, snake shakers, bells, party hooter, recorder, tin whistle, claves Becky–melodica, tambourine, drum, sweetcorn shaker,
Track three	Oriel–piano Becky–electric bass guitar
Track four	Bullfinch–piano Becky–electric bass guitar
Track five	Wren–rapid speech, glockenspiel, acoustic bass guitar, piano, belly– dancing bells (silent), shaker Becky–speech, acoustic bass guitar, melodica, egg shakers, ocean drum (Track five has been omitted due to confidentiality – the participant

	speaks at the same time as playing the music).
Track six	<p>Curlew–piano, acoustic bass guitar, shekere, glockenspiel, ocean drum, tambourine</p> <p>Becky–acoustic bass guitar, tambourine</p>
Track seven	<p>Swallow–lap harp,</p> <p>Becky–acoustic bass guitar,</p>
Track eight	<p>Goldfinch–double bass</p> <p>Becky–melodica, belly dancing bells, snake shakers, wooden clapper, thunder drum</p>
Track nine	<p>Starling–grand piano</p> <p>Becky–melodica, belly dancing bells, snake shakers, wooden clapper, thunder drum</p>
Track ten	<p>Chaffinch–thunder drum, snake shakers, desk bell, small bell ring</p>

	Becky-voice, melodica, thunder drum, desk bell, small bell ring
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigates the lived experience of learning to improvise for postgraduate music and music therapy students. The original impetus developed out of personal experience as a music therapist, improviser and tutor, with observations and reports from students and colleagues of specific experiences attached to the learning of improvisation. Anecdotal evidence, from my own experience and initial reading of literature, strongly suggests that learning involves experiences related to identity and freedom. My experience of one student I taught was that she had, when taking a clinical improvisation course in music therapy, ‘found her true music’; a professional classical music colleague stated that in learning to improvise during her 60s, ‘her music had opened up’ (names omitted for anonymity). Schlict (2008) quotes students’ experiences of taking an improvisation course as giving them: ‘true colours ... a musical renaissance ... and freedom’

(Schlict, 2008, p.13). These reports aroused my curiosity about the lived experience and nature of learning to improvise.

This study is set within the context of learning for postgraduate students in higher education; improvisation is understood as a skill to be learnt requiring great ‘devotion, preparation, training and commitment’ (Bailey, 1992, p.xii). However, I also acknowledge that improvisation can be conceived of as a spontaneous act made without prior expertise. This view has foundations in the etymology of the word improvisation, which comes from the Latin *improviso*, referring to ‘unforeseen, not studied or prepared beforehand’ (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020a). However, as Wilson and MacDonald (2005a, 2005b, 2017) demonstrate, an understanding of improvisation is socially constructed through the experience and talk of musicians. This suggests that improvisation can be

understood in many ways depending on the context, and perhaps what is required is a wider lexicon.

1.1 Personal experience of improvisation

The motivation for this study developed out of personal lived experience in improvisation. It has therefore been important to recount and acknowledge my experience. This was one of the first stages of the study, and an attempt to separate and create an auto-heightened awareness of my story. As Etherington (2004) suggests, it is vital that we make transparent the researcher's experience of the topic so as to understand the relationship between researcher and participant, and 'what is discovered and how' (p.32). Connected to this I acknowledge that my cultural situatedness is based within Western art music education and the study is influenced in this way (Decolonising the Musical University, The University of Edinburgh (2020). Here follows a personal account and

how this has led to the present doctoral study. See

Personal experience of improvisation

My very first memories of improvising were at six years old at the piano, creating music games and songs, whilst directing my younger sister to dance. Although I had some early difficulties reading notation, I had no problems creating my own music and constantly explored this throughout childhood with whatever instruments were available. At seven I remember putting on a show for the neighbours, complete with costumes, original songs and narration.

At secondary school I had the opportunity to learn trombone through the county's free instrumental lessons scheme. This was the start of my formal music education, learning to read music and playing in school bands. However, improvisation was a constant companion and every day as part of practice sessions I always improvised on trombone or piano. In this I either explored instrumental textures, improvised on existing

notated music, used images (sometimes self-drawn), utilised imagined themes or played emotionally for cathartic release. I was very fortunate to be part of the generation of the liberal schools music education movement (Paynter and Aston, 1970). The general certificate of music had a heavy compositional and improvisational component complete with an introduction to graphic scores, and Paynter and Aston championed a pupil's 'creative exploration and development of critical powers and perceptions' (1970, p.7). I strongly identified with this curriculum and found a space where my daily explorations into improvisation could be made public and recognised as valid. Despite this, the following years in formal music education retained a non-validation of improvisation in music, and the schools I attended largely focused on Western art classical notated music without acknowledgement of other kinds of musical expressions. This was apart from extremely memorable lessons with a Glaswegian jazz trombonist who taught instrumental

brass lessons, a mentor and friend who gave encouragement and practical help, driving me sixty miles every other Saturday to rehearsals with the Youth Big Band.

Opportunities to improvise were very scant at music college, apart from a series of incredible small group keyboard improvisation lessons with the pianist Keith Tippett (2020) and improvisation through keyboard harmony. However, during music college years I continued to improvise daily in secret, almost having another musical persona which I did not reveal to teachers. I now realise, informed by my music therapy training, this was a kind of mask to remain psychologically safe at what was a difficult period of life. I was perhaps improvising my secret real self. Around this time two formative experiences occurred which have influenced my lifespan career and musical choices. The first was joining a charismatic church (Christianity, 2020) a hothouse of creative

personalities, musicians, technicians, dancers and artists. Run by the inspirational Graham Perrins, one of the 'fabulous fourteen' (Walker, 1998; Aldred, 2019) a radical group of charismatic church leaders. This small but hugely creative group of people sought to explore improvisation and worship through the arts, with weekly intensive arts-based rehearsals, church services, workshops and performances around the UK and further afield. The following is an extract from my personal journal in which I recall the first encounter with this remarkable group of people:

I remember very vividly; I was eighteen and had just left home and started a music degree. I was keen to join a church and had been invited to a music worship practice. When I arrived, I realised that the band didn't use any music, but they seemed to all know the chords and were playing together; it fascinated me how they were managing it, and I wanted to find out how they could play together. I had taken my trombone and

the group were very warm and welcoming; they said they had been waiting for an instrument like a trombone to join them as there was already an existing brass section of a trumpet and a saxophone. The group played a 'chorus' (a type of modern hymn developed in the 1970s) and then moved into improvisation, using the chords and melody as a platform. I felt envious and desperate to join in, but very nervous. It came to my turn to play: the leader of the church pointed at me and said, 'play'! I was very hesitant, and I remember picking up the trombone and playing a glissando from the note C to the note F; it fitted the music exactly. The whole group burst into spontaneous applause and cheers; I felt goose bumps. I went on to play a solo. It wasn't a very good solo, some of the notes didn't fit, but the start of the solo had been so powerful, I felt it was the beginning of a new phase of a musical journey.

An important aim of this group was to introduce and

teach improvisation to the wider church community. Individuals, singers and instrumentalists with no previous experience in improvisation were encouraged to begin to explore through workshops and performances. During these workshops I often observed individuals having what seemed to be powerful experiences of release, of intense discovery and emotions, which had a spiritual context. This sowed the seed for this present study, in which I was extremely curious to understand what exactly had occurred for these individuals.

The second concurrent formative experience was my first encounter with music therapy. Despite the dearth of improvisational opportunities at music college, there was a pioneering undergraduate module in music therapy run by the very creative composer and music therapist Gill Stevens. This initial experience involved a placement at what was at the time the traditional city mental asylum: institutional long-term ward-based

hospitalisation for people with disabilities, mental health issues and social problems (Beyond the point, 2020). On the placement I was encouraged, together with fellow students, to utilise improvisation skills to engage the clients in communication and social interaction. In music therapy I discovered a profession in which improvisation was a focus and viewed as an important aspect of music making. This was one of the major reasons I later went on to train as a music therapist. The secret improvisation could be useful and made visible in a professional capacity. Perhaps I was looking for validation of my own skills, a way of revealing my secret identity or a place to fit in musically?

As part of music therapy training and subsequently, I have been able to hone my improvisation skills, receiving official lessons, such as improvisation bass lessons with solo bass improviser Steve Lawson (Lawson, 2020), and continual practice at home and

with others in small groups. I have performed in a wide range of settings, soul bands, folk and jazz groups. I am currently part of a free improvisation network of musicians exploring small-group improvisational performances, and I also continue to use improvisational trombone in a church worship context.

Through teaching and lecturing in music therapy, I have observed some of the early experiences of individuals in the church workshops replicated, and this has given an underlying motivation for the focus of this study: to explore the experiences of learning to improvise.

Personally, improvisation was a large part of childhood play, ran parallel to formal music education and finally was made explicit in the professions of music therapy and performance. As I have explored in this narrative, I consider improvisation to be part of my musical identity, which was split in adolescence and young adulthood, which has become and is becoming

increasingly integrated as I negotiate middle adulthood. I have always explored improvisation in varied ways: through guidance with mentors, in small groups and individually. I have creatively found methods to keep up an improvisational practice, through using notated music, response to visual arts and in recent years in song writing.

In contemporary times, during the Covid-19 crisis, working alone in lockdown, I frequently turn to the acoustic bass for expression, and my days are punctuated with a series of short solo improvisations containing all the range of emotion and enabling my thinking and problem-solving as I write the thesis and teach online. In this way musical improvisation has been and is a constant companion in life.

Figure 1: Research experience of learning to improvise.

I have used a reflexive stance in setting out my improvisation story in this opening chapter of the

thesis to declare my subjectivity and personal interest. With each interview, through reflective writing, I have attempted to separate my story from that of the participants; however, I acknowledge some of the similarities that have occurred; these are illuminated upon in reflexive text boxes throughout the thesis. As Clarke and Hoggett (2009) observe, in qualitative interviews data can be a co-creation between the interaction, mental activity and intersubjectivity of researcher and participants.

1.2 Rationale and focus of study

As will be seen in the literature review the study addresses the lack of academic studies in learning and improvisation, both in music therapy and performance. Improvisation was a 'neglected area of scholarly interest' for many years (Nettl, 1998, p.1), and it was only at the latter end of the twentieth century that it began to be acknowledged as a useful arena within

music. This is despite its large historical presence within Western art music, such as the keyboard improvisations of J.S. Bach (Moersch, 2009) or live performances of Beethoven (Kinderman, 2009). The reasons for this historical disregard are discussed in Section 2.4. The contemporary situation in the study of improvisation is much healthier, found in the new discipline of improvisation studies (Caines and Heble, 2015) and within research projects such as the concurrent improvisation group at the University of Edinburgh (2020) and new publications which examine pedagogy and groups in improvisation, such as Johansen *et al.* (2018), MacDonald and Wilson (2020) and Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos (2020).

This research is situated within the contemporary surge of interest in improvisation in scholarly circles. It is unusual in that it combines two professions, music therapy and performance. This was a part of the design, in order to examine experiences from

participants across the two disciplines. Improvisation in performance and improvisation in music therapy is discussed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5.

1.2.1 Contribution of study

The study makes a distinctive contribution to the literature. It employs an unusual research method, combining interviews with improvisations (Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015). In addition, there are few studies which examine the lived experience of learning to improvise, with the exception of Rose (2017) who investigates the professional practice of free improvising musicians, or Johansen (2018) who examines how jazz musicians practise improvisation. This study has the potential to influence curricula in music therapy trainings and performance in higher education. The research will be disseminated through academic channels at appropriate conferences and publications, such as the 2022 European Music Therapy conference

(Queen Margaret University, 2020) and *British Journal of Music Therapy* (2020).

1.2.2 Evolution of the research questions

The anecdotal evidence and initial reading of the literature suggested links between learning to improvise and flow experience, such as reports of specific experiences with sudden shifts in learning (Schlict, 2008). Flow is defined as occasions when perception of time changes, individuals become absorbed in the moment and there are dramatic changes in learning (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, see Literature Review Section 2.7. Thus, the original research questions focused on flow, and were as follows:

- 1. What is the nature of flow experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?*

2. How do students express their experiences of flow and learning to improvise music?

However, after undertaking the first literature review, it was found that a focus on flow was too narrow and restrictive to explore the lived experience of learning to improvise. Therefore, the research questions were changed to incorporate a wider consideration of the phenomenon. This process is further explained and the new research questions are presented in the methodology and method, Section 3.10.

1.3 Hypertextuality

An important aspect of this thesis is hypertextuality. Initially when imagining the design, I employed lateral and visual thinking skills. During the course of the PhD, in 2015, I was officially diagnosed with dyslexia, and lateral thinking is a type of cognition commonly associated with, but not restricted to, dyslexic

thinking (Madebydyslexia, 2017). Lateral thinking can be described as problem-solving in a non-sequential, non-direct manner; this is in contrast to linear thinking, which is characterised by straight lines and sequences. I have been influenced by the music therapist Stige (2002, 2012) who suggests hypertextuality can offer an explanation for processes within music therapy, defining it as: ‘... a series of text chunks or nodes that are connected by links that offer different pathways to the reader’ (Stige, 2002, p.159).

Music therapy is generally lateral, made up of numerous components: namely, the room, instruments, client and therapist. Hypertextuality could be used to make explicit the interrelationships between these elements. Similarly, I have considered the design of the research project: how the complexities of relationships between the varying aspects of the study might be thought about as a hypertext. For further details on

the role of hypertextuality as methodology and method within this research see Section 3.8.

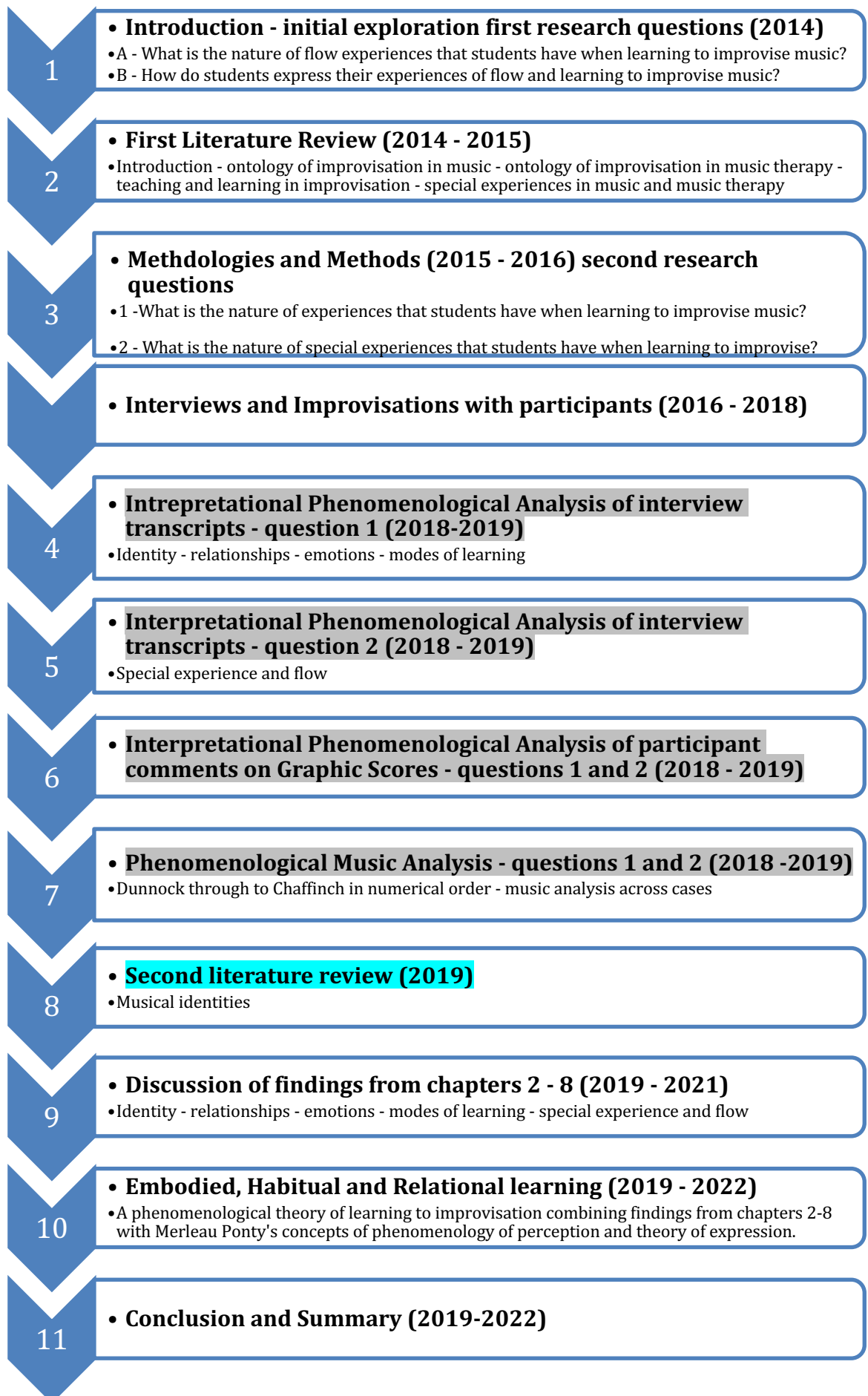
1.4 Structure of thesis

This thesis is structured in eleven chapters; following this introductory chapter (1) there is the literature review (2), with sections on ontology of improvisation (2.4), ontology of improvisation in music therapy (2.5), teaching and learning in improvisation (2.6) and special experiences in music (2.7). This is followed by the methodology and method chapter (3) and findings chapters (4,5,6,7). There is a second literature review (8), a discussion chapter (9), proposed phenomenology of learning to improvise (10) and conclusion (11).

References are supplied in a separate booklet A, together with a glossary of terms – B, and mp3 copies of the research music. Appendices A to I consist of; research documents (A–C), analysis extracts (D,E), material from taught modules (F), reflexive materials

(G), list of publications (H), graphic scores (I) and further information on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (J).

The thesis is structured through chapters representing the actual time-line of research activity, analysis and writing that took place over the course of seven years (2014–2022). This is shown visually in figure 2 where chapters 1 – 11 are depicted, literature reviews are highlighted in light blue, and analysis chapters in grey. It can be noted that between the years 2016 – 2018, there is a space, this is when interviews and improvisations took place. It is to be noted that this thesis has a meta-structure where each section of analysis builds on the previous analysis. For example, the analysis of question 1, builds on analysis of question 2, followed by graphic score comments and music analysis. In this way the themes are presented in different form (words and music) are in-depth and detailed.



**Chapter 3 detail / Methodologies – Phenomenology
– Reflexivity – Hypertextuality**

**Methods – Arts Based Research – Performative
Arts Social Science – IPA – Reflexivity –
hypertextuality (phenomenological music analysis –
added at step 3 of the research process)**

Figure 2: Time-line and structure of thesis.

Figure 2 and chapters 1 to 11 show the time-line and research activity undertaken at each stage of the study. Chapter 3 is detailed showing the methodology and methods used. It can be seen that phenomenology, reflexivity and hypertextuality are considered both as methodologies and methods. In figure 2 the overall shape of the study is depicted. The steps of the research process are also shown in bullet points below:

1. After an initial exploration of the topic of improvisation and flow a literature review was undertaken. Following this review, it was decided that the research focus was too narrow, and the

questions were broadened out to include a variety of learning experiences (Chapters 1-2).

2. Following this the methodology (phenomenology – reflexivity – hypertextuality) and methods were formed (arts based research, performative arts social science, reflexivity, hypertextuality), and fieldwork of interviews and improvisations undertaken (Chapter 3).
3. IPA analysis was undertaken using questions 1 and 2, and analysis of written comments on the graphic scores. At this stage became apparent that the music data required more in-depth inquiry than the graphic scores could provide, thus and a further analysis method was added (phenomenological music analysis) was added (Chapters 4-7).

4. The theme of identity had developed during the analysis, and so a further literature review on musical identity was added (Chapter 8).
5. A synthesis and discussion of findings was made, drawing on the literature reviews and analysis chapters (Chapter 9).
6. A phenomenological theory of learning to improvise began to emerge, and is discussed in chapter 10.
7. Conclusions, summary of research and thoughts how the study might be useful for future researchers, clinicians and performers, with suggestions for future studies (Chapter 11).

It should be noted that the data analysis is presented through a gradually building meta-structure in the whole study, see figure 3, (Chapters, 4-7). Initial

themes were generated through IPA analysis of the interview transcripts relating to research question one (section 3.10), these themes were then built upon and new themes developed in the IPA analysis of transcripts research question two, the same process was repeated for analysis of participant written comments on graphic scores and the music data. For further explanation of this see **Section 11.1a**, which presents all the codes related to **Super-Ordinate** themes and details how each **SO** theme evolved.

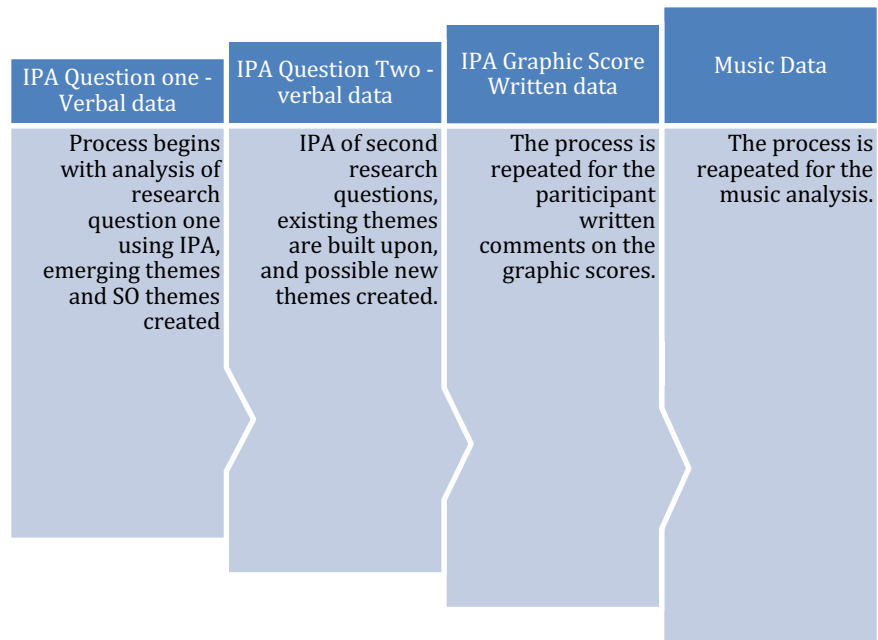


Figure 3: Meta- structure of analysis in study

1.5 Key Terminology

In this thesis, in order to avoid confusion, I have used the term *improvisation* to refer to music which is created with and without reference to specific genres, styles or idioms. I could have alternatively employed other words such as ‘non-idiomatic’, ‘total improvisation’, ‘open improvisation’ and ‘free music’ to refer to contexts where musicians

attempt to steer away from recognisable genres and the music arises from the ‘sonic identity’ of the musician (Bailey, 1992, p.xi, p.83). However, a broad consensus of definitions of these terms does not seem to exist. There could also be some confusion with the use of the phrase the *Free Improvisation Movement*, which is defined as a movement developed in the 1960s within America and Europe, with a specific set of characteristics, such as avoidance of melody, use of atonality and musical textures (Watson, 2004, Toop, 2016). A further useful term which I could have employed is *pan-idiomatic*, which describes improvisation as drawing on a range of genres or idioms, without specific reference to one (Heble and Laver, 2016). A reconsideration of the term improvisation is found in the conclusion chapter, section 11.8. Further definitions and terminology used within this thesis can be found within the accompanying booklet B ‘glossary of terms’. In addition booklet A contains all the references cited within this thesis. I will now present chapter two and the first literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Introduction

This is a narrative literature review which initially related to the research questions focused on flow outlined in **Section 1.2.2**. During the course of the review, in response to a reading of the literature, the questions were adapted to a broader consideration of the lived experience of learning to improvise. Reasons for this change are outlined in **Section 3.10**.

The literature search took place through accessible publications in English from the earliest possible date to 2016. Relevant electronic databases were utilised using pertinent combinations of keywords and phrases. Boolean searches were undertaken using the following:

improvisation, learning, music students, higher education, experience, change, flow, transformation, performance and music therapy.

Electronic databases consulted were as follows:

- **British Association of Music Therapy: ROSREP**

- DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals ERIC-
EBSCO
- EBSCO-cihahl Plus
- Medline-EBSCO
- Project muse
- PsycInfo
- PubMed
- Social Sciences citation index

Online and hand searches of journals:

- Australian Journal of Music Therapy
- Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music
Therapy
- British Journal of Music Therapy
- Canadian Journal of Music Therapy
- Critical Studies in Improvisation
- Index to Theses
- Journal of Human Psychology
- Journal of Music Therapy
- Journal of Research in Music Education

- Music and Medicine
- Music Therapy Perspectives
- Music Therapy, Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy
- The Arts in Psychotherapy
- The Journal of the Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists
- The Nordic Journal of Music Therapy
- Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being

Hand searches of relevant music therapy and musicology texts were undertaken; a small number of personal communications and contemporary relevant articles from less formal publications were also included. These personal communications with colleagues and tutors, and hand searches of contemporary music magazines, such as the *Wire* (2019), were noted in the literature list as they arose during the course of the review. Further to the analysis of findings a second literature review was

undertaken; this is detailed in Chapter 8. In addition, due to the long passage of time between completing the first literature review (2016) and submission (2020–2021) contemporary literature to 2022 is included in the discussion Chapters 9 and 10.

A narrative review was undertaken because there is an existing precedent in music therapy and musicology literature (Pavlicevic, 1991; Dyson, 2007; Rose 2017).

Narrative reviews consist of ‘identifying and summarizing ... previously published material’ with general and key concepts, to discover relevant gaps in the literature (Ferrari, 2015, p.230). Alternative approaches could have included methodological, historical, a theoretical focus or systematic literature review. See figure 4.

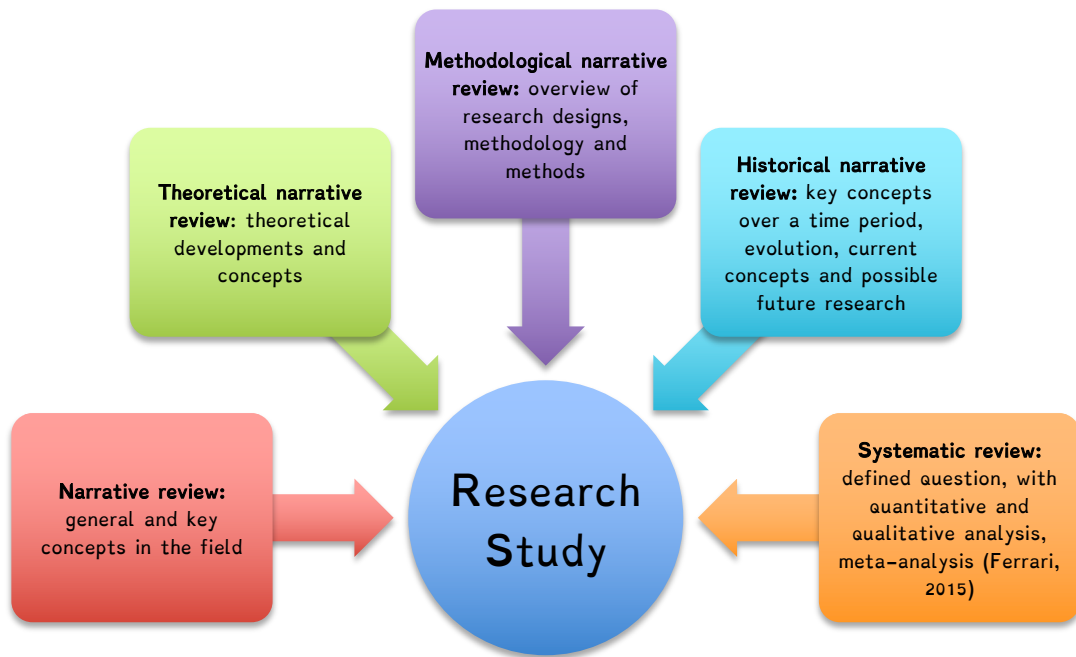


Figure 4: Literature review approaches: Narrative: key concepts; theoretical: overview of theory in the subject area; methodological: methods, methodology and research design; historical: tracking evolution of key concepts; contemporary and future research; and systematic review (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016).

Methodological, theoretical or historical approaches would have been too narrow and not have facilitated overall coverage of the relevant literature. However, this narrative review does contain aspects of these methods as can be seen in Chapter 2, Sections 2.4–2.8. Weaknesses of narrative reviews include less consensus of literature retrieval and potential author

bias. An alternative option would have been to carry out a systematic review, providing more consistency in selection of articles and less potential for author bias, with a qualitative or quantitative analysis of evidence. However, a systematic review would not have been appropriate because of the narrow focus on one research question and the central emphasis on selection of literature which would have negated the ability to be flexible and examine the topic from wide-ranging angles (Ferrari, 2015).

2.1 Existing qualitative doctoral studies in music therapy and improvisation

Between 1987 and 2006 Aigen reviewed fifty-five qualitative music therapy doctoral studies, of which only three focused solely on improvisation (Aigen, 2008b). For the purpose of this review studies which combined improvisation with further topics, such as autism, have not been included.

The first two music therapy doctoral studies on improvisation focused on communication. Pavlicevic's (1991, 1997) *Music in Communication: Improvisation in Music Therapy* examined improvisation and communication as originating between infant and caregiver. Through a study of intersubjectivity in improvisation she developed a theory of 'dynamic form', viewing music as 'patterns of emotions made audible' (Pavlicevic, 1991, p.10). Further to this, Sutton (2001) analysed the music of freely improvising musicians (see Glossary) using conversation analysis, finding that both conversation and music utilised similar communication conventions. Sutton (2018, 2019) proposed the need for a third literature in music therapy drawing on musicology and performance scholarship. This gives a firm grounding for this study and the use of musicology and music psychology literature within the review. Furthermore, Keith (2005, 2007) focused on the music therapist's meaning making in improvisation, combining

improvised music and interviews. Darnley-Smith (2013) investigates aesthetics in music, defining clinical improvisation as ‘site-specific music for a purpose’ (p.248)’ music which is created within specific contexts of relationships and places. In addition, she provides a historical and philosophical overview of the development of improvisation in music therapy, and its connection to the avant-garde and free improvisation movements (see Glossary).

2.2 Doctoral studies in musicology and improvisation

There are a large number of musicology, music psychology and educational doctoral studies which examine improvisation. A single search on Proquest revealed 5,643 studies with the key terms of *music* and *improvisation* in 2019 alone. Some examples include Dyson (2007), see sections 2.4.1 and 2.6.5, who examined how jazz musicians learn, finding that they

build a repertoire of regular motor and cognitive schemas in order to improvise over chord changes and song structures, and Rose (2017), who investigated the lived experience of professional free improvising musicians, learning that musicians connect to improvising musical communities and learn as a social process (also see section 10.6, 11.10.1)

2.3 Literature review process and structure

In order to examine the lived experience of learning to improvise, it is important to understand the ontological nature and meaning of improvisation. Therefore, this literature review examines the development of ontologies in improvisation in music (section 2.4) and music therapy (2.5), encompassing twentieth-century ethnography and music psychology. Ontology is viewed as part of a branch of philosophy and metaphysics which examines the study of being and is understood as an examination of the 'nature of reality of

existence' (Heidegger 2014, Kant, 2014, p.69).

Heidegger, the philosophical originator of ontology, considered ontological understanding to be essential to an investigation into the open-ended nature of the human being (Rae, 2010; Heidegger, 2014). This is distinct from epistemology, which deals with the 'theory of knowledge' (Kant, 2014, p.70) or nature and breadth of knowledge (Shand, 2003). This review is based on comparative musical ontology, where music is 'essentially a social cultural practice, with implicit understandings'; differing musical historical traditions are understood therefore as having various ontologies of music (Kania, 2012, p.98).

The review is explored through the following sections shown in figure 5:

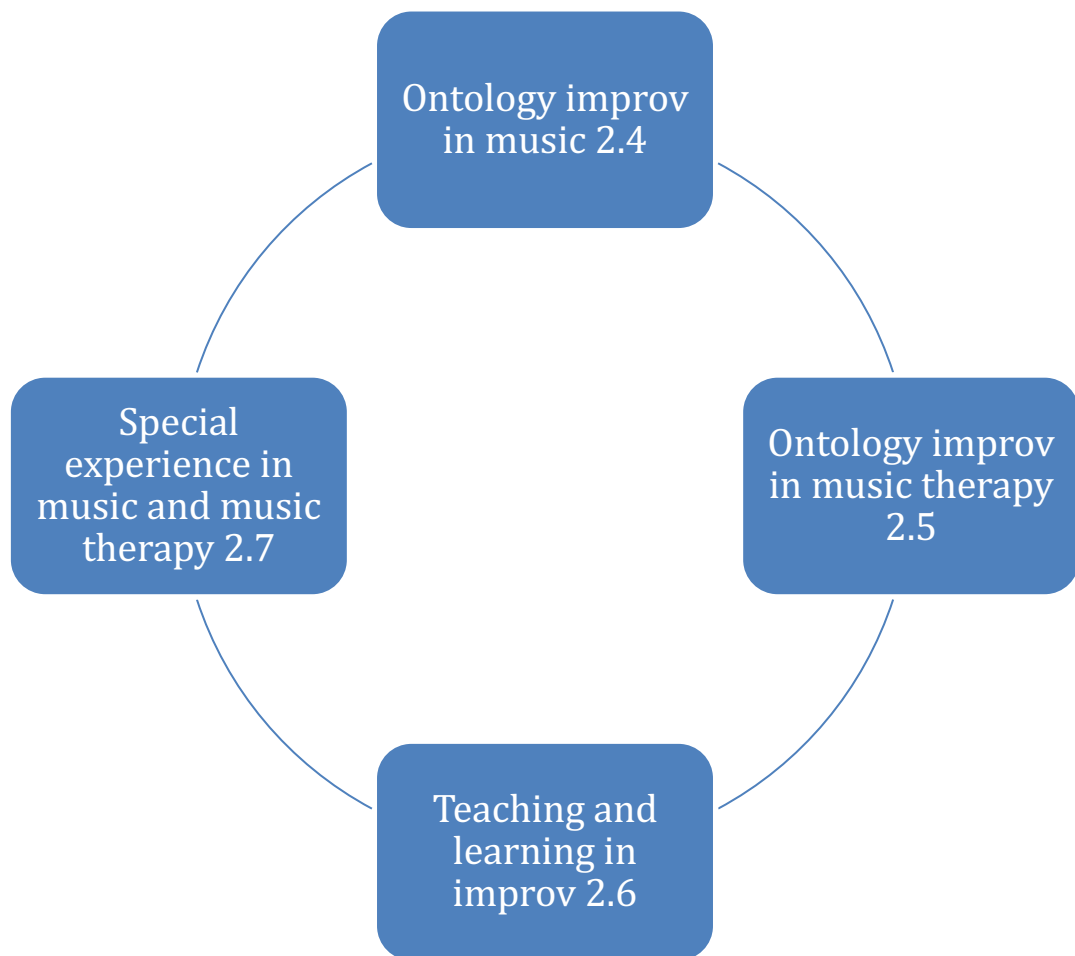


Figure 5: Structure of first literature review. Sections 2-4 to 2.7, ontology of improvisation in music, ontology of improvisation in music therapy, teaching and learning in improvisation, special experience in music and music therapy. The literature review is interspersed with some personal reflections shown in italic boxes (i.e. 2.4.1).

2.4 Ontology of improvisation in music

In order to study the lived experience of learning to improvise, there first needs to be an understanding of the nature of and meanings in improvisation. To explore this the first literature review expands on three ontologies of improvisation. This is shown in figure 6:

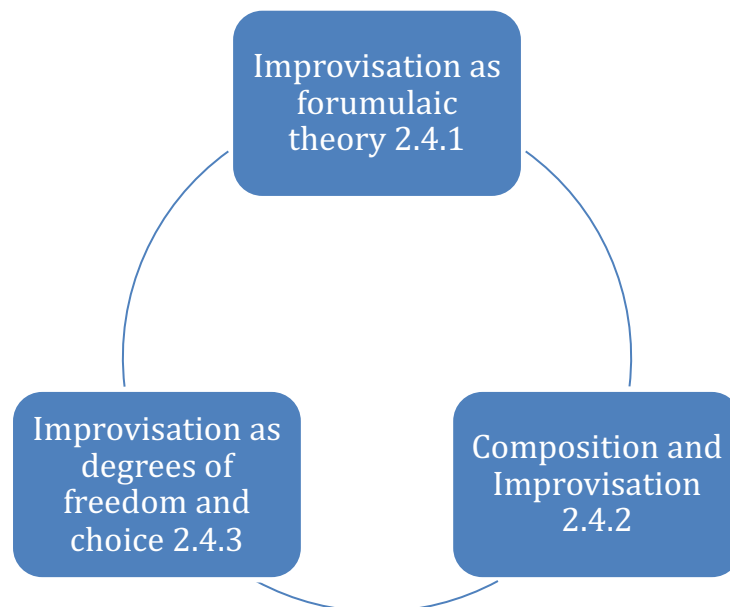


Figure 6: Sections 2.4.1 – 2.4.3 ontologies of improvisation

These different but overlapping ontologies consisting of improvisation as formulaic theory (2.4.1), the difference

between composition and improvisation (2.4.2), and improvisation as degrees of freedom and choice for the performer (2.4.3), provided a foundation upon which to build this study and create new ways of investigating the research topic.

2.4.1 Improvisation as formulaic theory

Improvisation can be understood as varying combinations of musical formulas and repertoires (Foley, 1995). This has origins in Lord's (1960) influential analysis of Slavic oral epic poetry. Lord, drawing on the Milman Parry collection (2012), found that this seemingly improvised sung poetry was actually continually constructed by the singers through themes into narrative groups, with common 'melodic, metric, syntactic and acoustic' musical form (Pressing, 1988, p.14). Lord's ontology of formulaic theory had a pervasive influence on scholars in ethnography and music psychology such as Nettl (1974) Kernfield (1983)

and Pressing (1984). Pressing (1988) extended formulaic theory to include choice making and time. See figure 7.



Figure 7: Pressing's (1988) model: decision making, time and musical events.

In Pressing's model, improvisation is found through three stages: the choices of the musician, experience of time and creation of musical events. He emphasises the building of improvisation through 'referents', defined as: musical intentions – influenced by past musical memory events, and sensory feedback and motor feedback. With practice, the ability to control musical intentions is honed and eventually 'automatised' (Pressing, 1988, p.135; Dean and Bailes, 2016). Pressing's concept of the referent was later

evidenced by Dyson (2007) who found that jazz musicians rely on the building of a repertoire of regular motor and cognitive schemas when learning to improvise. Turino (2009) makes a further distinction: improvisation only takes place at a micro level, known as 'mistakes' (p.105); the formula is not considered improvisation. However, it could be argued that this definition is too narrow. As Pressing demonstrates, improvisation can be a wider musical process involving decision making through time. This leads to clusters of musical events, made up of technical and expressive features; the improvisation is not in a single 'surprise event or mistake' (p.105), or even about originality, but rather it is about the re-combination of formulas.

Contrary to the nature of improvisation as live music, both Lord and Pressing, focused on music and literature as written works rather than live performance (Steinbeck, 2013). Although Pressing very briefly acknowledges environmental and cultural

aspects of improvisation, he does not take into account the contextual situation, or performative or relational dynamics of spontaneous music. Oral epic poetry can in fact be considered as ‘intertextual, extratextual and performative’ (Foley, 1995, p.5): the meaning is found through relationship to previous texts, tradition context, and between the work, performer and audience. Lord’s study however, does not consider ecology or intersubjectivity. Pressing’s work advances the formulaic ontology, but still remains focused on the cognitive act of the individual, without a full realisation of the emotional, sensory, embodied life of the musician. Therefore, an ontology of improvisation as formulaic theory is valuable but limited and further perspectives need to be considered. A personal reflection on improvisation as formulaic theory can be seen in figures 8 and 9.

This personal response to a reading of the literature on improvisation was elicited by attendance at an art exhibition at the Tate Modern in London.

Vital to my understanding of improvisation as formulaic theory was an encounter with the visual art of Louise Bourgeois (see figure 7), in particular the wire sculpture of Maman (Bernadac, 2006). Bourgeois constantly reworks ideas in the materials of pen and ink, sculpture, wire, glass and metal. She powerfully describes her work as re-woven, improvising with objects over the course of a lifetime. The work of Bourgeois speaks to me of a formulaic ontology of improvisation, where there can be the constant transformation of sounds over years.

Figure 8: Personal Reflection 5/8/16: Improvisation as formulaic theory.



Figure 9: Maman (mother) Bourgeois ,1999, steel and metal sculpture, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (Tate, 2018). A large steel spider, exploring the theme of motherhood. Maman began in 1947 as a small ink and charcoal mark, was later transformed into a red ink, gouache and crayon illustration (1994), and developed into a series of glass and wire sculptures.

2.4.2 Composition and improvisation

During the twentieth century ethnomusicologists and musicologists sought to define the difference between composition and improvisation. This arose out of two

factors: first, the development of ethnomusicology as a profession and as a study of the music of different peoples and geographical regions (Nettl, 1998), and second, the process–product divide, which during the Enlightenment (ideology influenced by Descartes in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) became embedded within Western art music (see Glossary). Previously, improvisation had been a much ‘neglected’ (Nettl, 1998, p.1) aspect of academic interest; the very few exceptions include Ferand’s general history (Ferand, 1938, cited by Nettl and Russell, 1998, out of print). Despite this, improvisation has a significant history in Western art music, from the Middle Ages, where vocal lines were sung in early *organum* (Burkholder, *et al.*, 2014), to the Renaissance and music of Palestrina, with highly embellished polyphonic voices (see Glossary; Cumming, 2013). In the Baroque era, musicians were expected to be skilled improvisers, as in the example of figured bass with its part–composed, part–improvised keyboard lines (Moersch, 2009). Equally,

during the Classical and Romantic music periods both Mozart and Beethoven were known as fluent improvisers, playing variations on popular tunes and often spontaneously completing compositions during performance (Kinderman, 2009).

This varied rich history was seldom discussed in scholarly circles in Western art music before the mid twentieth century; instead there was a stress on the importance of composition. This was largely the result of a shift of emphasis from performer to composer in the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century.

Descartes' (1596–1650) influence on intellectual thinking created a Cartesian mind and body split, which valued the work of the mind, considered as composition, over body, considered as improvisation.

Love comments:

... the composing of the musical work ... came to be equated with mind, and the performed process

of music-making, being inherently physical, came to be equated with body (Love, 2003, p.30).

Further significant factors in the decline of interest in improvisation include the growth of notation, where performances evolved to become set and repeatable (Miller, 1973; Treitler, 1992). Furthermore, at the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent of recording technology, music became an object, and performance was literally cut off from the body (Chanan, 1995). In Europe, music was formalised so that it could become an increasingly financial economical product, transferable and fixed (Cook, 2003).

The Cartesian split between composition and improvisation persisted until the twentieth century, when new forms of music evolved. It could be argued that this began with the famous flute opening of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) which breaks loose from diatonic tonality, exploring

tonal ambiguity and the interval of a tritone, three whole tones (see Figure 10).



Figure 10: Opening of Debussy's Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (1894) in which the flute melody is tonally ambiguous; the interval of a tritone can be heard between the opening C# and G natural (Wikimedia Commons, 2018).

Griffiths (1978) comments that Debussy's flute opening is like a 'spontaneous improvisation' (p.9), weaving in and out of the orchestral textures. During the twentieth century many new innovations gave performers increasing freedom, such as Schoenberg's explorations into atonality in *Pierrot lunaire* (1912), or the ground-breaking early works of Cage, where improvisation played an important role in prepared piano, such as *The Perilous Night* (1944); see Figure 11.

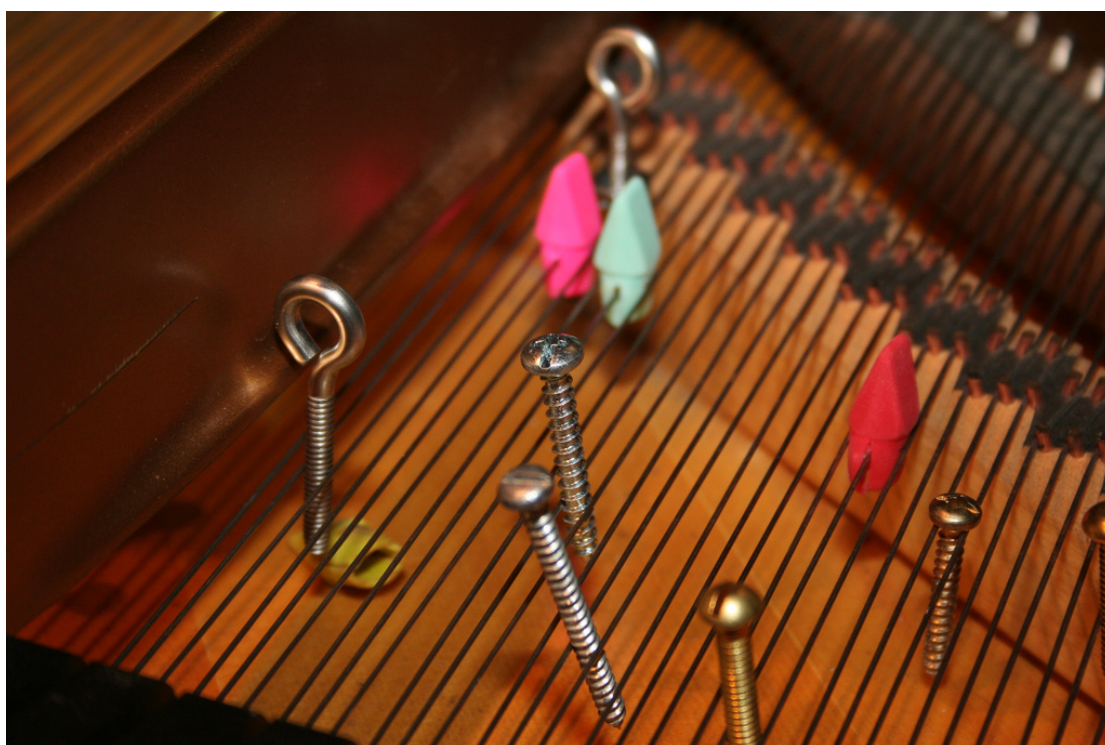


Figure 11: Prepared Piano, up close on a prepared piano (Hollins, 2007). Screws and rubbers can be seen to be prepared or inserted between the piano strings to create different sounds.

Early on in his career Cage explored improvisation, playing freely at the piano and notating the results. Through this practice he conceptualised improvisation as contained within structures consisting of ‘form, material and method’ (Feisst, 2009, p.2). Contemporary to these kinds of new developments in Western art music, jazz began to evolve. Jazz improvisation can be considered an expert skill

encompassing complex styles, set within political and cultural contexts, primarily originating out of an African American discourse (Ward and Burns, 2001; Monson, 2009). Jazz initially challenged Western art music notions of the expert composer/musician and gave opportunity for under-privileged social and racial groups to demonstrate high levels of musical skill and knowledge. However, history demonstrates that jazz also underwent a process of white gentrification where the notions of the expert musician were imposed upon the music, resulting in the revering of individual musicians and valuing of technical prowess over embodied or emotional expressions of the music (Pellegrinelli, 2008). Furthermore, in other developments during the 1960s in Europe and America, the free improvisation movement emerged out of roots in *free jazz* and *experimental music* (see Glossary) as performers rather than composers took the lead in spontaneous creation; such pioneering musicians

included Gavin Bryars, Tony Oxley and Derek Bailey (Bailey, 1992; Sansom, 2001).

This historical development of new emerging music and the rise of ethnomusicology paved the way for improvisation to be seriously considered in academic circles.

The ethnomusicologist Nettl (1974) theorised that improvisation and composition were essentially part of the 'same idea' (p.6), with 'building blocks' (p.13), or music which is performed with spontaneous variations of material which are already set (composed), reworked and sometimes notated. Nettl sets out that even where music has aspects which have been pre-planned (which he considered composition), there is always a degree of choice for the performer (the improvisation), thus he defines improvisation and composition as on a spectrum (see Figure 12).

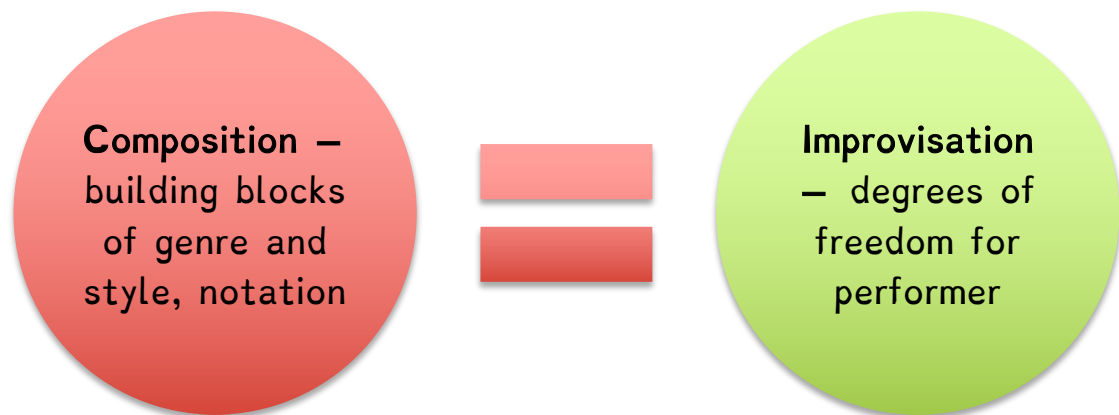


Figure 12: Nettl's (1974) composition and improvisation on a spectrum. Composition is understood as music with set material in genres, styles or idioms (see Glossary) which is reworked or notated, whereas improvisation is defined as the choices and degrees of freedom experienced by the performer.

Nettl's argument sits between the first ontology of music discussed, improvisation as formulaic theory, and improvisation as degree of choice. He is convincing in that even where there is a high level of pre-composed material, improvisation can be present. A good example of this is the Classical cadenza, intended as passages for the performer to show off their technical and expressive skills (Figure 13).

The image shows a musical score for the final bars of the first movement of Mozart's piano concerto in Bb major, K. 595. The score is written for piano and orchestra. It is in 4/4 time and Bb major. The piano part begins with a trill (tr) on the G4 note, which is the start of the cadenza. The orchestral part is silent during the piano's cadenza. The piano part ends with a perfect cadence on the tonic (I). The orchestral part resumes with a coda. The chord progression is indicated as I⁴, V⁷, and I.

Figure 13: Mozart's piano concerto in Bb major K. 595, final bars of first movement (Wikimedia, 2017). At the end of the first movement the piano soloist is required to improvise a cadenza which follows an orchestral imperfect cadence (I-V); there is a pause in the orchestral music, the pianist plays a trill (tr), performs the cadenza, and arrives back on the tonic (perfect cadence), as the orchestra once again takes up the music. Viewing the notation in this way, it is possible to understand the written music as composition and the pause with the cadenza as improvisation (see Glossary for terms).

Improvisation can also be understood as a single spontaneous act with 'nothing planned in advance' (Sarath, 2013, p.866) and absolutely no reference to pre-composed materials (Solis, 2009; Warren, 2014). In this view, composition is the planning and execution of

musical events and improvisation is pure spontaneity. However, this argument is problematic: if viewed in relation to formulaic theory, where the musician always has a repertoire of previously memorised material, then the ideology of completely spontaneous music can never truly exist (Pressing 1988; Dean and Bailes, 2016).

Improvisation can also be considered as different from composition through time. As Schoenberg offered, 'composition is slowed-down improvisation' (Schoenberg, 1950, cited in Feisst, 2016, p.56).

Composition can be thought about as an 'ongoing planning endeavor', taking place over 'days, weeks or months', whereas improvisation happens in real time in the moment (Sarath, 2013, p.866). This does suggest that there may be some difference in nature between composition and improvisation, with composition as a slow process and improvisation a quick act.

To define composition and improvisation is useful in that it highlights temporality, notation, performer choice, and at what level music is pre-planned or spontaneously created. However, the dialogue is held within the context of the Cartesian mind-body split, and could be considered a false dichotomy. It is important to note that in many cultures, genres and styles of music, improvisation and composition are viewed as wholly integrated aspects, for example in the Javanese Gamelan or the Arabic Tarab, (Sutton, 1998; Racy, 1998; Solis and Nettl, 2009; Weisethaunet, 2009). However, it can be further argued that there is a strong case for the study of improvisation to enhance our understanding and awareness of the nature of music.

2.4.3 Improvisation as degrees of freedom and choice

Linked to Nettl's concept of improvisation as on a spectrum with composition, it can also be understood as degrees of freedom and choice for the musician. Keil (1966, 1987, 1994) argues that all music to some extent contains micro decisions. Although not referring directly to musical improvisation, his theory of 'participatory discrepancies' suggests that micro-choices can create relational connections between musicians, either through 'procession events – being out of time with the beat and groove, or textual – involving intonation, timbre and tone' (Keil, 1987, p.7). Furthermore Cobussen (2014, p.15) develops the theory of participatory discrepancies into 'musical indeterminacies': in which music happens in the wider choices created by interaction between musician and musician, and musician and environment (technology, space, instruments, acoustics, musical histories, sociocultural background). In Cobussen's concept

improvisation occurs within a special network of situations and relationships. Similarly, Parkinson (2014) considers improvisation as an object-orientated philosophy, where sounds create opportunities for choice and musical creation. The debate is, to what extent can choice and freedom be marked as improvisation? Is improvisation found in the very small micro decisions made by the performers, the wider decisions, or both? Here Benson (2003) makes an important contribution: arguing against music as a fixed work or 'Werktreue' (2003, p.5), he presents a broad view, understanding all musical activities, whether composing, performing or listening, to involve participation and therefore always improvisational. Benson presents a historical case for music as an 'open dialogue between composers, performers and listeners' (p.18) in which there is the continual renewal of musical material. Equally Cook (2003) offers a similar argument in which music is understood as

‘performative’ and always changing and ‘transformed’ (p.205) by the history of its performances.

Alternatively, it is possible to consider micro-choices in music as interpretation rather than improvisation (Turino, 2009). Sutton (1998), in a study of Javanese Gamelan, suggests that where a musician is working within strict genre and stylistic boundaries, there are fewer opportunities for new material to be created, and the small formulaic variations cannot be considered improvisation because of lack of ‘originality’ (p.73). Similarly, as mentioned earlier in this section, Turino (2009) considers only completely new material (his surprises or mistakes p.105) as true improvisation. The problematic issue is how to identify what is original and what is a variant of the older ideas; indeed, Sutton comments that only the musician themselves might potentially have this knowledge. So, regarding improvisation as originality or new process is

an almost impossible task; one can never know when an idea is truly original.

2.4.4 Summary

Three ontologies have been explored: improvisation as formulaic theory; the difference between composition and improvisation; and improvisation as degrees of freedom for the performer. Improvisation as formulaic theory can be explained as series of transformations of groups of motifs over time (Pressing, 1988). Attempting to define improvisation as a separate or similar process to composition involves addressing concepts of notation, temporality, planning, performer choice and reworking (Nettl, 1974). Finally, interpreting improvisation as degrees of choice and freedom in music brings into question problems of original music within macro and micro-choices, and how improvisation may be understood as a process that occurs within all musics to a greater or lesser extent (Benson, 2003).

This overview of differing ontologies of improvised music has provided a good grounding and background for this study.

The focus in Section 2.5 will be on ontologies of improvisation in music therapy.

2.5 Ontology of improvisation in music therapy

Improvisation is a central part of music therapy practice in Europe; it is defined as the use of music-making for social, physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual or mental health needs (Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002). This section explores an ontology of improvisation in music therapy. In this section the term *clinical improvisation* (see Glossary) is used to differentiate from music in other settings, such as Western pop concert performance. As discussed by Darnley-Smith (2013), there have been many differing approaches to music therapy underpinned by divergent ontologies of music. Sections 2.5.1 – 2.5.7 are structured as shown in figure 14, from Alvin (2.5.1) to the new musicology, community and cultural centered music therapy (2.5.7).

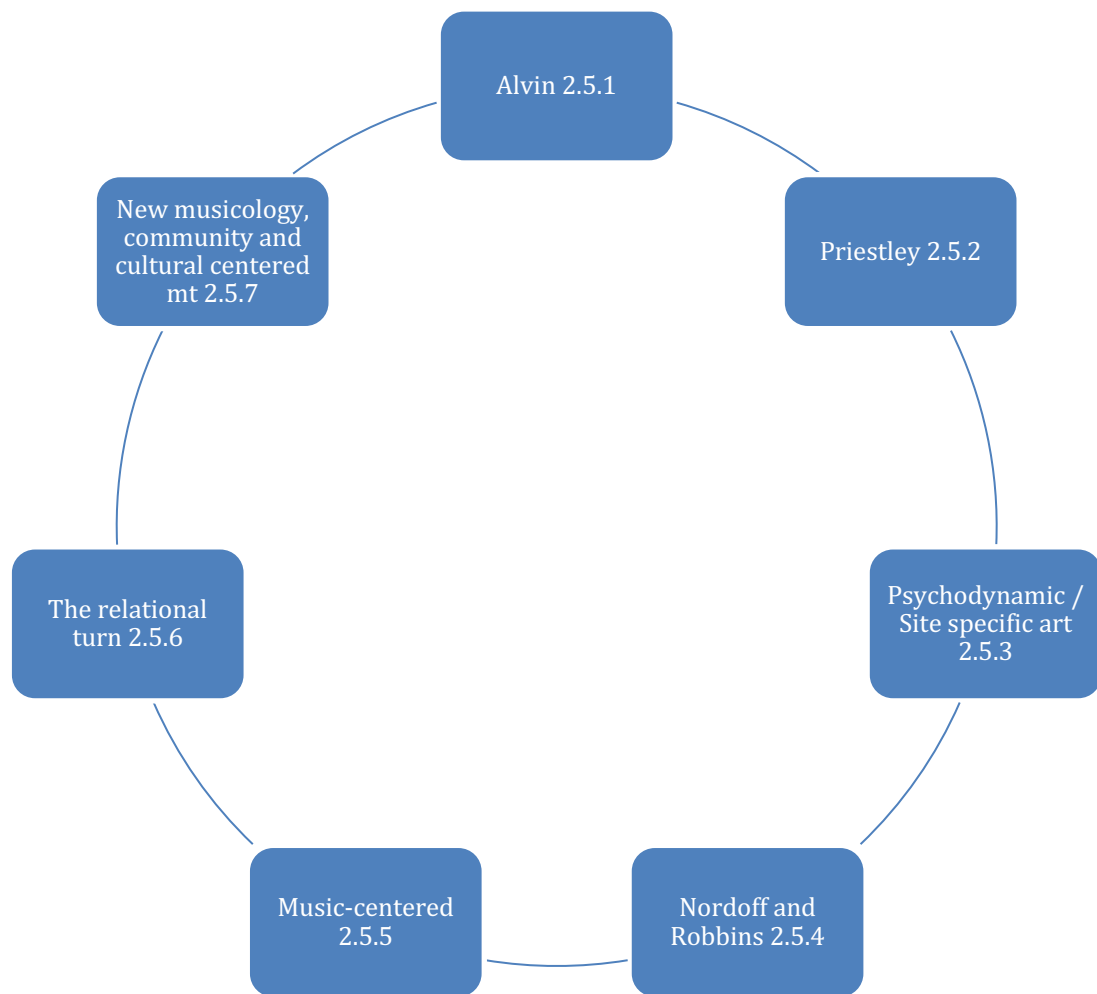


Figure 14: Sections 2.5.1–2.5.7 of the first literature review

2.5.1 Juliette Alvin

Alvin began the first training course in music therapy at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1968.

She identified three functions of music in therapy:

‘recreational, educational, and clinical – applied to the medical or psychological treatment of physical, mental or emotional disorder’ (Alvin, 1966, p.109; Alvin and Warwick, 1991). Her theoretical stance was broad, drawing on historical, mythological and religious constructs of the musician as healer, as well as psychoanalytic and humanistic perspectives (Thibault, 2019; Humanist UK, 2021, see Glossary). Equally eclectic were her therapeutic musical choices: she was as much known for her skilful playing of the cello, using folk songs or classical pieces, as for spontaneously improvising.

Alvin considered improvisation central to music therapy with two key points: firstly, she explored the possibility of improvisation to be a non-verbal means of communication on a conscious level. Secondly, Alvin linked psychotherapy and psychological, medical and musical theory together (Mursell, 1937; Radin, 1948; Langer, 1942) drawing on the work of Freud (1930,

1997), Jung (2001) and Klein (1933), developing a psychoanalytic understanding of improvisation where music has the potential to reveal unconscious processes. She drew from psychodynamic theory, developing an understanding of improvisation to be ‘an act of self-expression and knowledge’ at both conscious and unconscious levels (Haneishi, 2005; Darnley-Smith, 2013, pp. 67–68). Helpfully, Bruscia (1987) describes Alvin’s approach as having an ‘orientation towards psychoanalytic theory’ (p.83) but still containing a strongly musical emphasis.

Alvin was influenced by twentieth-century forms of music such as the serial compositions of Berg and Schoenberg, or the aleatoric (chance) music of Cage and the free improvisation movement (see Glossary, Darnley-Smith, 2013, Section 2.4). Within this historical context Alvin stressed a levelling of the elements of music (such as melody and harmony, Bunt and Stige, 2014); this was in contrast to the

hierarchical importance of harmony and melody found in romanticism and other genres of Western art music.

This levelling of the elements meant that participation in improvisation could become potentially become inclusive and accessible, with even the smallest sound or simplest rhythm contributing to the musical whole.

2.5.2 Mary Priestley: analytic and psychodynamic music therapy

Priestley, a pupil of Alvin developed ideas around improvisation in Analytic music therapy (Priestley, 1975; 1994; Darnley-Smith, 2013). This was a type of music therapy where improvisation was regarded as a ‘projective ... manifestation of the unconscious’ (Hadley, 2002, p.35). In Analytic music therapy improvisation is viewed as a kind of non-verbal ‘musical dreaming’ (Sapen, 2012, p.48; Lawes, 2020). This is similar to Freud’s (1997) ‘free association’ in which the patient is encouraged to verbalise a stream

of internal reflections. Central to Priestley's understanding was the 'ineffable' (Priestley, 1994, p.321): that improvisation can express aspects of the unconscious and conscious mind. She considered psychoanalytic concepts such as 'transference, countertransference and projective identification (see Glossary for definitions). Priestley's influence was foundational for the development of 'psychodynamic music therapy' (Hadley, 2002) and the advanced training for music therapists termed 'Intertherap' (Priestley, 1994, p.297) in which students encounter their own therapy and take part in peer role-play sessions of therapist and patient.

Drawing on the theories of psychoanalysts and psychologists such as Freud (1929) Klein (1933) Bion (1962) and Winnicott (1971), 'Psychodynamically-informed music therapy' (as it was first known, EMTC, 2020) employs specific relational techniques in improvised music to uncover the unconscious. For

example, the musical techniques of ‘mirroring’ and ‘matching’ can be used to encourage the building of a therapeutic relationship and potentially uncover unconscious process. These are defined thus:

mirroring – doing exactly what the client is doing musically ..., matching – improvising music which is compatible, matches or fits with the client’s style of playing (Wigram, 2004, p.82, p.84).

Music therapists Bruscia (1987) and Wigram (2004) have borrowed terms from psychologists Winnicott (1971) and Stern (1985) to develop these relational techniques in music therapy. For example, in ‘holding’, described as:

Providing a musical ‘anchor’ and container for the clients’ music making, using rhythmic or tonal grounding techniques (Wigram, 2004, p.97).

Wigram explains that this is designed to enable a client to feel held emotionally, paralleled with Winnicott's (1971) concept of holding as a physical and emotional process which takes place psychologically in the first relationship between the caregiver and infant. In this way, improvised music has the potential to not only uncover unconscious processes but can reproduce or create new ways of relating. This will be explored further in the section on the relational turn (2.5.6).

2.5.3 Psychodynamic music therapy and site-specific art

The music in psychodynamic music therapy can be considered a type of 'site-specific art' (Darnley-Smith, 2013). This is where meaning arises not from the object, but between the environment, space and art. In the words of Kwon, site-specific art gives itself 'up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it' (Kwon, 2004, p.11). This is an arts

movement, originating in the 1960s, and related to other approaches such as installation, land art and environmental art (Tate, 2020), were artists such as Cornelia Parker and Dan Flavin created large-scale sculptures or installations designed to interact with and be contained in specific spaces or galleries (see Figure 15).



Figure 15: Cornelia Parker's installation of sixty flattened instruments at the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate entitled Perpetual Canon (Fray, 2018).

As can be seen in Figure 12, Parker uses flattened silenced brass instruments, associated with coal mining communities, to create an artistic commentary on the decline of industry in the north-east of England.

Designed to specifically take place in the town of Margate, the art and the location are intimately intertwined creating a political and social message.

Similarly, Darnley-Smith suggests that meaning in clinical improvisation is created through interpersonal interaction, conscious and unconscious processes and the elements of space, environment and acoustics. In this meaning occurs within the environment in which it originates. It could, however, be argued that it is possible to move the art form or clinical improvisation, to experience it within another space or intersubjective series of relationships. This would be the case for example, when improvisation in music therapy is taken into a performance space; however, as can be seen

through the example of Parker's 'perpetual canon', meaning would be significantly lost or altered. This understanding of clinical improvisation, as evoking site-specific art, is related to an ontology in which music is understood as revealing unconscious processes elicited by intersubjectivity, thus, to geographically move the music creates radically different meanings. This is different to an ontology of music as presented by Nordoff and Robbins in creative music therapy for example, in which music is considered an outside force acting upon the body, and therefore meaning can much more easily remain constant and be transferred between differing environments, people and contexts.

2.5.4 Paul Nordoff, Clive Robbins and creative music therapy

Nordoff and Robbins were pioneers in music therapy (Bruscia, 1987; Lee, 2012). Beginning with a collaboration at a Steiner educational community, they

developed a means of engaging children in improvised music using the traditions of Western classical music, tonal harmony, melody and rhythm, primarily with the instruments of the snare drum, cymbal and piano. Influenced by the anthroposophical philosophies of Steiner, a radical educationalist of the early twentieth century, they sought to draw children with disabilities into music making, with benefits for social, communicative and physical needs (Rudolf Steiner Archive, 1906; Nordoff and Robbins, 1971; Anthroposophical Society, 2018; Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, 2018). Eventually moving away from Steiner (Aigen, 2005a, 2005b), their work developed, with European tours, contributions to the department of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and a Scandinavian tour in 1967. The first Nordoff and Robbins training course was established in 1974 at the Goldie Leigh Children's Hospital in London, and in 1982 the first Nordoff Robbins centre in North London (Robbins and Robbins, 1998). Nordoff and Robbins

documented their clinical and teaching work with videos, case studies, articles and books (Nordoff and Robbins, 1971, 1977, 2008, 2015; Simpson, 2007).

Nordoff and Robbins's approach to improvisation is set within the traditions of Western art music (see Glossary), with a hierarchical emphasis on the three elements of tonality, melody and harmony (Robbins and Robbins, 1998). They viewed music as a universal object and naturally occurring phenomenon, utilised for health and well-being (Rudolf Steiner Archive, 1906; Stensøeth, 2017). This ontology of music is foundational to Nordoff and Robbins's theory of the 'music child' (Nordoff and Robbins, 1977). In this every child contains a 'core self' which can be:

stimulated to access universal music and develop their ... capabilities – receptive, cognitive, expressive, communicative, intelligence,

purposefulness, confidence and spontaneity
(Nordoff and Robbins, 2007, p.4).

The therapist's role is to act as an improvising guide, with expert musical knowledge, to take the child into a musical experience and discover their potential. The music child or musical self is considered wholly interconnected with and part of the individual's being (Nordoff and Robbins, 1971; Aigen, 2014b). Darnley Smith and Patey (2003) write about the theory of the music child as embodying the same principals as Trevarthen and Malloch's concept of communicative musicality (see section 2.5.6), in which the child has an innate music within them, this musicality can be encouraged with relational, health and social benefits for the child. The goals of Nordoff and Robbins work can be expressed as purely musical, in areas such as rhythmic function, melodic flexibility and adherence to pulse (rather than psychological or psychotherapeutic)

with the aim to develop the musical functioning of the child. Aigen offers:

the therapist works to expand the client's musical range of expression in order to help the client be able to experience all aspects of human emotional life (Aigen, 2014b, p.22).

The pianistic improvisations of Nordoff were used as an improvisational framework to accompany events in therapy, such as singing hello and goodbye, or 'sweeping up', as in the children's play *Pif-Paf-Poltrie* (Nordoff and Robbins, 1962a, 1962b, 1969). Influenced by Zuckerkandl (1959, 1969), Nordoff understood musical events to have special dynamic qualities and forces as found in the physics of sound, which acted through embodiment to create the sensation of music. In this music is considered an outside physical force, not inside the body, but outside and encountering the body (Zuckerkandl, 1959). Aigen (2005b) comments that

it is this outside view of music which lays a foundation for music centered music therapy, in which the qualities of, ‘tonal balance ... movement ... and tension and release’, are utilised by the music therapist to create a clinical encounter (Aigen, 2005b, p. 272). He further comments that:

... tones have a life of their own and communicate forces (Aigen, 2005b, p. 276).

For example, in *Healing Heritage* (Robbins and Robbins, 1998) Nordoff explains that intervals can be viewed as having inherent dynamic movement. He states:

... with this most mysterious of all the intervals, the augmented fourth, the tritone, with this [D-G#] ... beautiful interval, we have the possibility ... of withdrawing [playing the major third D-F#]

... and of sinking further back into ourselves
(Robbins and Robbins, 1998, p.36).

Nordoff also explored different genres, idioms and styles of music, for example, descriptions of the ‘Spanish’ or ‘Middle–Eastern’ modes, (Aigen, 2001). However, in this, as was common in ethnomusicology during the twentieth century (Agawu, 2003), these were simplified and characterised through a Western art music lens, with a reduction of musical cultural complexity. For example, the Middle–Eastern mode represents only a fraction of the tonal variety and richness of the music of countries such as Algeria, Egypt or Iran.

Furthermore, Nordoff drew on music and archetypes, such as the pentatonic ‘children’s tune’ (e.g., the English nursery rhyme *Ring a Ring a Roses*, Jangiankotia, 2009). Influenced by Jung (1968) he viewed archetypal ways of being and collective

unconscious states as universally found across cultures in stories, myths and dreams, as in the four main figures of anima or animus, shadow, persona and self (Nordoff and Nordoff, 1998). These are the opposite aspects of gender held within each individual (anima or animus), the hidden self (shadow), the public (persona) and the whole self (Stein, 1998). Nordoff attached significance to the musical archetype, viewing music as containing collective, universal sounds in patterns which can evoke emotional states of being (such as the pentatonic or whole tone). However, Burrows (2004), in a contemporary study of archetypes and collective free improvisation, found that it can be difficult to apply objectivity to universal meaning. She offers:

... Jungian archetypes help us understand the social and mythic origins of feelings and unconscious states; musical archetypes are a way of understanding deeper interactions in the collective consciousness of a performing group;

they point to the way in which emotional and spiritual elements interact ... Of course, it is impossible to point to durable, universal meanings for musical archetypes; the dialectical nature of the improvisational process and the essentially subjective nature of musical perception deny such associations. (Burrows, 2004, no page)

Furthermore, applying musical archetypes to idioms underestimates the ecology of the music therapy situation and the musical and cultural identity of the therapist and client (Ruud, 2010). As Bunt and Stige (2014) highlight, it may be more accurate to consider a universal proto-musicality, as music entwined with biology (i.e. rhythm in heartbeats and movement, pitch in vocalisation) which can then be influenced in a process of 'enculturation' as a child engages with the particular music of their cultures and traditions (Bunt and Stige, 2014, p.55).

Nordoff and Robbins influenced the development of music therapy across Europe and the USA. Their musical ontology, primarily influenced by Steiner (1906) and Zuckerkandl (1956), focused on meaning as created in music as a force acting upon the body. This differs from a psychodynamic approach, in which an ontology of music is understood to originate both inside and outside the body, enlisting unconscious and conscious processes, with an emphasis on the relational (De Backer and Sutton, 2014).

2.5.5 Music-centered music therapy

The term ‘music-centered’ associated with Nordoff and Robbins’s music therapy, also called ‘creative music therapy’, is one in which therapist’s focused on music as the locus of therapeutic change, without reference to pre-existing theory (Aigen, 1998, 1999; Lee, 2003a, 2003b). Aigen describes the chief therapeutic components of music-centered music therapy as ‘... the

forces, experiences, processes and structures of music’ (Aigen, 2014a, p.51).

Ansdell (1995) comments on the idea of the physical and external ‘forces’ (p.11) of tones in motion, in which tones have an inherent movement of temporal tension and release, which can elicit emotional and physical responses. Meaning in the music is created through the sensory perception and experience of the individual, and the forces are the agent of therapeutic change.

Aigen (2009) further develops music-centered thinking drawing on Dewey’s (1934) philosophy of art. This is where art arises between the ‘experience and action of making and the object’ (Dewey, 1934 p.85). Aigen considers that therapy occurs in the experience between therapist and client but is unclear how this differs from the concept of therapeutic relationship. He also refers to ‘schema theory’ (Aigen, 2009, p.238) in which human experience is seen as occurring primarily

in the body and in relation to space (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). However, this also has many similar parallels with psychodynamic theories, such as the concept of music as a container for a client's emotional responses, found in theories of Bion (1962) and Winnicott (1971). In this, Aigen does not address how unconscious response may be interpreted, and it is still unclear how schema theory is differentiated from psychodynamic music therapy. However, opening to experience as a locus of therapeutic change paved the way for new views in music-centered music therapy, such as 'community music therapy' and 'culture-centered', as will be discussed in Section 2.5.7.

Important musical components of music-centered music therapy are the structures of tonality, melody and harmony. Structure is understood as having a physiological, psychological and emotionally organising function. Similarly, Ansdell (1995) employs the term 'quickenings' (p.81) to describe how the structure and

forces of improvisation bring aliveness and engagement (Ansdell, 1995, p.81) to clients who are withdrawn, unable to communicate or in depressive and anxious states. With this emphasis on structure in music-centered thinking, importance is placed on the therapist's technical ability to improvise within structured genres, styles and idioms of music, such as the blues or rock (Lee and Houde, 2011; Aigen, 2001; 2002).

In *Aesthetic Music Therapy*, Lee (2003a) advocates that the therapist develop an in-depth knowledge of compositional styles and formal Western music analysis (Cook, 1987) in order to be able to improvise and analyse clinical improvisation. He suggests that an understanding of structures and forms, such as counterpoint and fugue (see Glossary), can enrich the therapist's work giving detailed knowledge of therapeutic events. However, this makes assumptions that the therapist has sufficient knowledge and

training in Western art music to be able to engage with Baroque or Classical structures. Lee's suggestion reveals his ontology as placed within music as a fixed work (or *Werktreue*, Benson, 2003, p.5); see Glossary) in which the structures of Western art music (e.g., concerto, symphony) create meaning and importance is placed on the faithfulness to the composer's original intentions. Structure is also emphasised in psychodynamic thinking but is understood in a much broader and different sense, often with an emphasis on the relational dynamics rather than Western art musical form. Instead of drawing the client into familiar Western art music structure, the therapist accompanies as the client creates their own musical form, as in the work of Alvin (1966). This musical form is created by the movements, sounds, directions and temporal space of the client's responses (Del Campo and Martin, 2014).

2.5.6 The relational turn

The ‘relational turn’ in psychotherapy and developmental psychology provided an important theoretical underpinning for understanding of clinical improvisation (Ruud, 2010). During the late twentieth century focus shifted from human development as a manifestation of individual naturalistic drives and self-motivation to growth through relationships (Freud, 1930; Maslow, 1962). As Trondalen (2016) argues:

The notion of the relational turn forms the basis for shifting from a one-person (monadic) to a two-person (dialogic) model of human development. (Trondalen, 2016, p.7)

For ethologists, in the study of human and animal behaviour the relational turn focused on early infant and caregiver interactions, examining it as an evolutionary, emotional mode of attachment formation (Papousek and Papousek, 1981, 1995; Dissanayake,

2001). Trevarthen and Malloch (2000) influenced theoretical music therapy thinking, describe early communication as musical, and found in the movements, rhythms, intonations and pulse of the mother and baby. They argue that the first relationship forms the basis for all human musicality and is an innate developmental and expressive form of communication, where the interactions are musical, improvised, playful and pre-verbal. This is very similar to the concept of the music child proposed by Nordoff and Robbins, where every child has an internal musicality (Darnley Smith and Patey, 2003). Stern (1985, 2004, 2010) describes this type of early communication as 'affect attunement', where the caregiver highly attunes to the infant's interactions across the modes of movement, sounds, shapes, feelings and touch. He describes 'vitality affects' in which the quality and form of cross-modal communication is felt by the caregiver and infant. These are best described in dynamic kinetic terms such as bubbling or exploding with joy, where the bubbling

and the exploding are the felt 'vitality affects'. Stern describes these as the experience of:

dynamic states or patterned changes within ourselves (Stern, 1985, p.57).

Pavlicevic (1991, 1997) describes how 'vitality affects' can be thought about as different elements of the overall musical therapeutic relationship, which she terms 'dynamic form' (1997, p.120). She argues that improvisation in music therapy is an intersubjective event, made up of 'vitality affects', emotions and musical features. Dynamic form contains three key elements: 'a growing towards', in which the therapist challenges aspects of the client's music, 'offering something new', emotional cathartic expression, and the opportunity to 'recreate ways of being' (Pavlicevic, 1997, p.135). Trondalen (2016) builds on the work of Pavlicevic, offering that intersubjective, improvised musical relationship not only recreates existing 'ways

of being' but manifests completely 'new ways of being with the other' (Trondalen, 2016 p.40). These are experimented with intersubjectively, where there is space for a musical dialogue and opportunities for each person to lead. Trondalen considers that therapist and client meet in the music, not continually, but through a series of intersubjective exchanges. She states:

... the development of the improvisation and the music listening experience requires sensitive adjustment and 'attunement' to allow for recognition of shared experiences at an existential level (Trondalen, 2016, p.87).

Thus, it can be seen that the relational turn had an important influence on a deeper consideration of the therapeutic musical relationship.

2.5.7 The new musicology, community and culture-centered music therapy

Further to the relational turn, at the end of the twentieth century music therapists began to reflect on ecological-social musicology theories. The theoretical basis of music-centered music therapy was influenced by the educational scholars Elliott (1995), who used the term ‘musicing’ as a verb, as something people *do*, and Small (1998), who employed ‘musicking’ to describe music as a social practice. Small and Elliott, influenced by sociological and feminist dialogues, brought into sharp focus the importance of music as an ecology, defined as ‘the interconnections of organisms and their relationship with inorganic components in a specific environment’ (Feisst, 2016).

In this, musicking or music ecology in music therapy can be thought about as the connections between all the differing components of the musical encounter or therapy session, such as: sound; acoustics;

instruments; relationships; bodies; place; context; gesture; social and cultural context. Ansdell (1997) called for a drawing on new musicological thinking. He offers:

I would like to suggest a change of metaphor for music itself (and hence for music therapy) – one that sees music as an ecology rather than a structure. An ecology is a balance of interlinking forms and processes in a context that sustains them and guarantees diversity (Ansdell, 1997, p.43).

Music as ecology had a further influence on the developments of community music therapy and culture-centered music therapy. These are illustrated below in Figure 16.

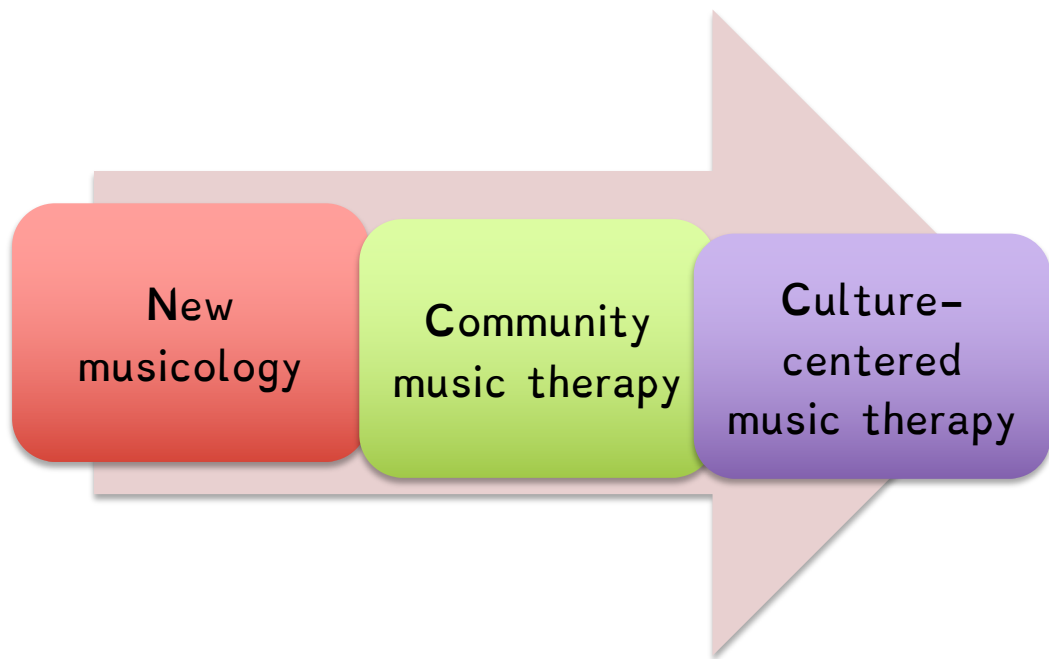


Figure 16: The process of influence from new musicology to community music therapy to culture-centered music therapy.

It is to be noted that community music therapy was at first (during the early-to-mid noughties in the twenty-first century) utilised as a concept by therapists in the Nordoff and Robbins tradition, but it now seems less commonly referred to as music therapists assimilate ecological thinking and community awareness into their practice. Psychodynamic music therapists have claimed a historical community and ecological awareness, although not always made explicit; this can be traced

back to roots in the pioneers of music therapy such as Alvin (1966), working in hospitals with adults and with children with disabilities. However, I have still included community music therapy in this dialogue, since it highlights useful concepts in relation to the nature of clinical improvisation.

In community music therapy, Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2004) explored the relationship between the individual, group and society in a music therapy context. The central component of community music therapy defined as 'communitas', or a collective felt presence of togetherness, described by Ansdell as 'consisting of closeness ... mutuality, immediacy and presence' (Pavlicevic and Ansdell, 2004, p.79).

Understanding music as an ecological system generates a question: what is the meaning of improvisation within an ecology of music? And furthermore, what is improvisation in a music therapy ecology? In partial

answer to this, Ruud (1995) discusses how improvisation in music therapy can create the opportunity for 'communitas' to take place. This suggests that 'communitas' and improvisation are intimately linked, placing improvisation as the interior of community and culturally-centered music therapy. Improvisation opens up the potential for mutual meeting (Ansdell, 2014), in which client and therapist coexist. It can happen in liminal spaces, where there can be a changed perception of time (Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002, p.3). Ruud (1995) comments that 'improvisation may also be understood to create a situation where change, transformation, and process come into focus' (Ruud, 1995, p.93).

A further property of 'communitas' and improvisation is the ability of the therapist to flexibly attune to the client which can create 'the first step from social isolation to living in a relationship here and now' (Ruud, 2010, p.66). For example, in the childhood case

of 'M', Bunt demonstrates the importance of the therapist's musical flexibility, incorporating 'M's musical ideas into their joint music making' (Bunt and Stige, 2014, p.92). Musical flexibility opens opportunities for the development of therapeutic musical relationships.

Trondalen (2016) further comments that even when there exists a difference in musical skill between client and therapist, the nature of improvisation means that 'sometimes one leads, sometimes the other so improvisations can be equal and mutual on a practical level' (Trondalen, 2016, p.87). In this way, improvisation affords 'complementary connections' (translation by Trondalen from Ruud, 1990, p.311) which ebb and flow between therapist and client.

A consideration of 'communitas' in community music therapy gives a useful grounding from which to understand the nature of clinical improvisation,

including: complementary connections (Trondalen and Ruud, 1990) liminality; time; and flexibility in relationships. This is not restricted to a dialogue on community music therapy, and can be found in other approaches; for example, Bunt and Hoskyns (2002) show how liminality can be linked to improvisation as the space between the unconscious and conscious, while Ansdell (2014) views liminality in connection to ritual.

Stige (2004) presents a meta-theoretical basis for community music therapy as cultural engagement, in which musicality is developed not only through early infant–caregiver interactions, but also through interface with society and culture. Music therapy is viewed as situated in cultural experience incorporating the ‘personal, social, group and cultural relationships’ (Stige, 2002, p.207, 2012). He defines music as ‘the act of creating and relating to emerging sounds and expressive gestures’ (Stige, 2002, p.82). For Stige, improvisation is made up of musical ‘affordances’, or

the potential for interactions between people, environment and things. The theory of affordances, originally developed by Gibson (1977, 1979), refers to the opportunities, the environment or environmental factors (such as music) given to the individual, and how they might be utilised. Music therapists and sociologists have utilised the term; Stige for example, highlights that structures of music (such as song) may give meaning to a client, viewing the meanings as socially, personally and culturally constructed, and De Nora (2003) views music as affording a 'mediating role in relation to, social action and experience' (p. 170).

2.5.8 Summary

This section considered an ontology of clinical improvisation, examining the historical approaches of Alvin (1966), Priestley (1994) and Nordoff and Robbins (2007) (see Figure 17).

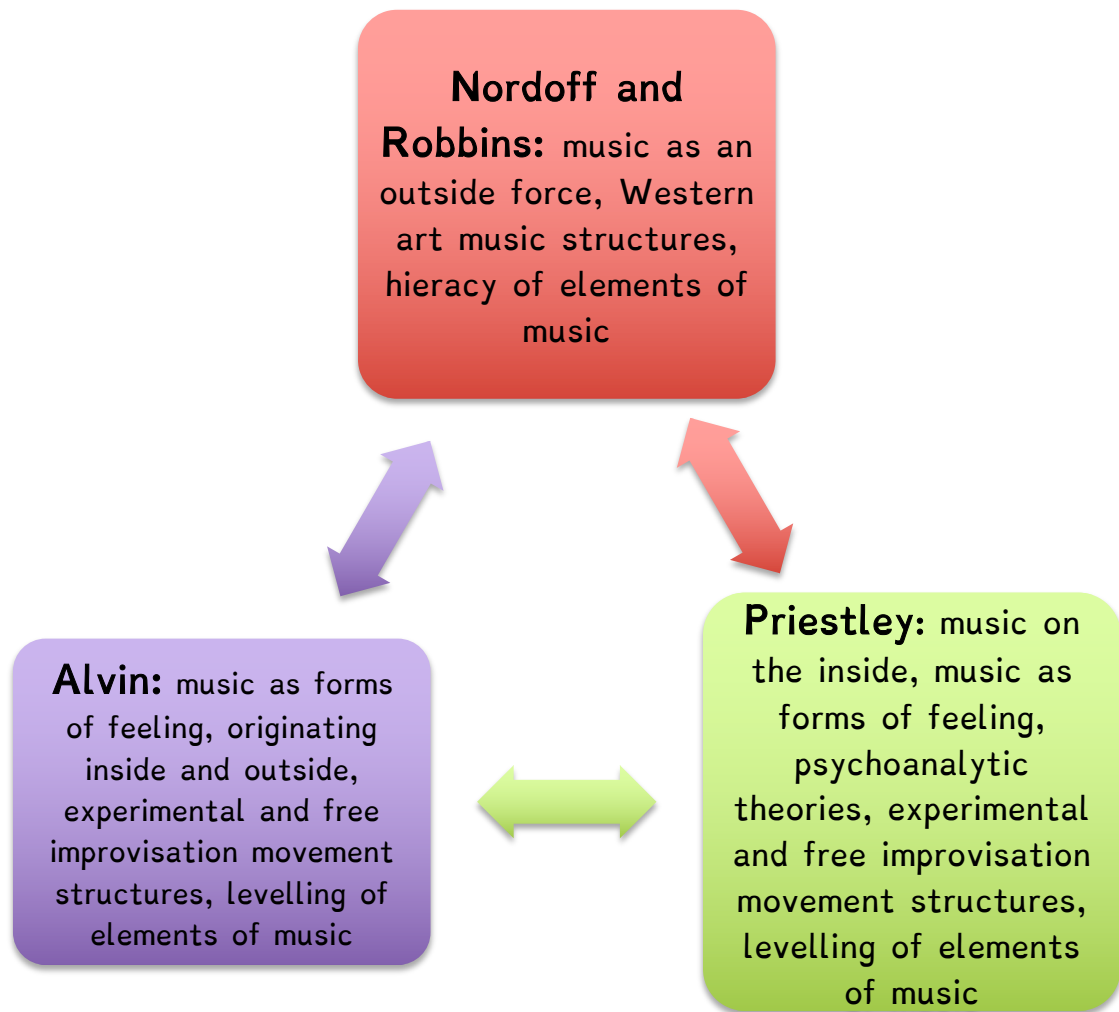


Figure 17: Summary of ontologies of clinical improvisation of Nordoff and Robbins, Priestley and Alvin.

Alvin viewed improvisation as involving biology, emotions and movements and originating both inside and outside the individual. Priestley (1994) emphasised a psychoanalytic stance, underlining improvisation as

having the potential to reveal unconscious and conscious processes. This is differentiated from Nordoff and Robbins (2007) who understood an ontology of music as an outside force acting upon the individual with the potential for organisational change. These four individuals influenced subsequent ontologies and approaches of improvisation in music therapy in the UK, including psychodynamic music therapy, drawing on psychoanalytic theory, the relational turn and the growth of music-centered music therapy. In addition, there have been further developments influenced by the new musicology (Small, 1998) in community music therapy and culture-centered music therapy, with a consideration of musical ecology (Stige, 2002). The complex relationships between these differing approaches are summarised in Figure 18.

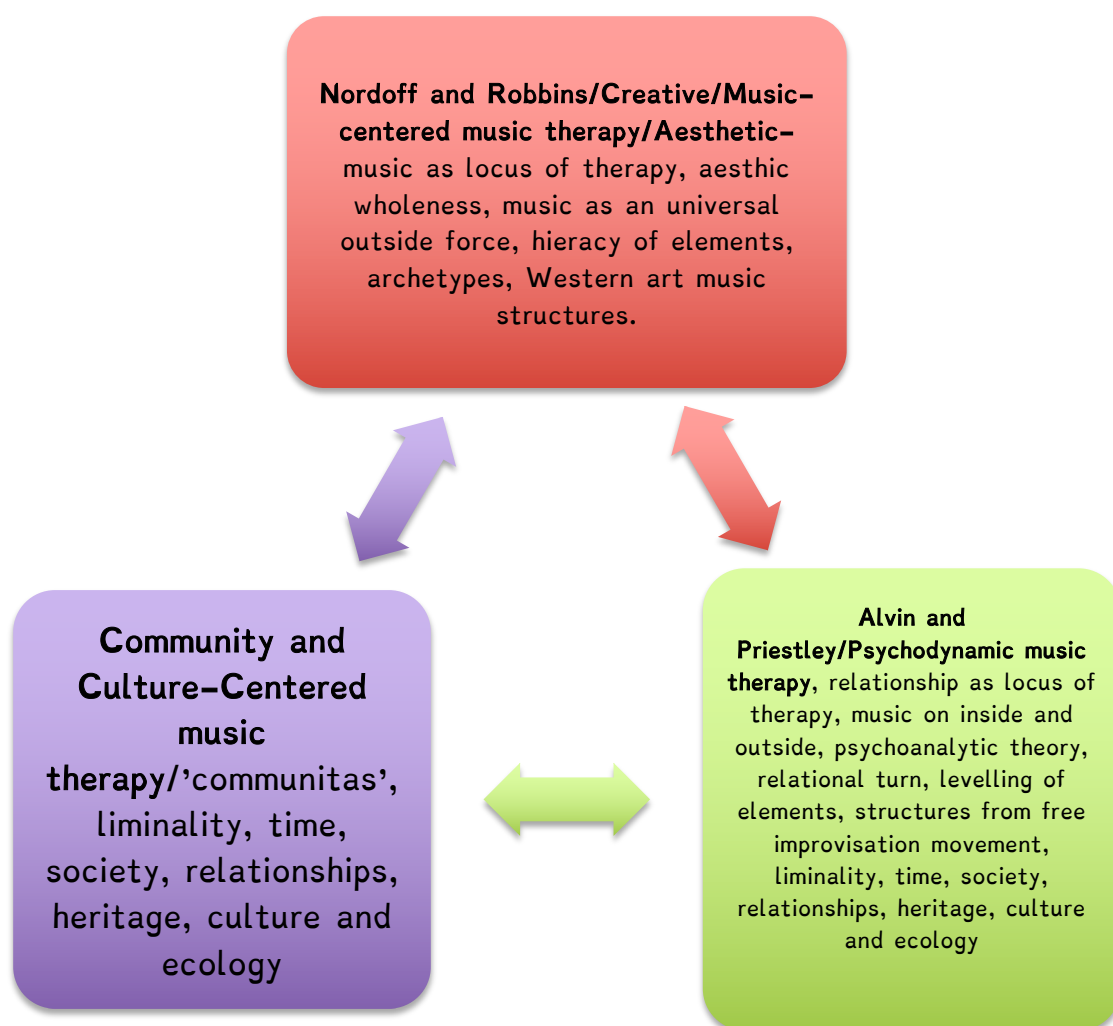


Figure 18: Summary of some ontologies of clinical improvisation in different theoretical approaches of music therapy in the UK.

This variety of thought demonstrates that there is no one form of ontological meaning in clinical improvisation, but that it is multifaceted and multi-layered, engendering many viewpoints.

2.6 Teaching and learning improvisation

A review of teaching and learning in improvisation gives a firm grounding in order to answer the research questions of the nature of the lived experience of learning to improvise. Sections 2.6 – 2.6.8 focus on teaching and learning in improvisation. There is a limited range of literature which examines the lived experience of learning to improvise, therefore this part of the literature review will include classroom textbooks (2.6.13). Since 2018 there have been some important contributions to literature in this area, such as Johansen *et al.* (2018), and these later studies are included in discussion Chapter 9. Section 2.6 is structured in two parts, figure 19 shows sections 2.6.1 childhood play with sounds to Kanellopoulos and a Bakhtinin view of learning, figure 20 illustrates section 2.6.9 – 2.6.14 from Alvin's approach to teaching improvisation in music therapy to experiential learning.

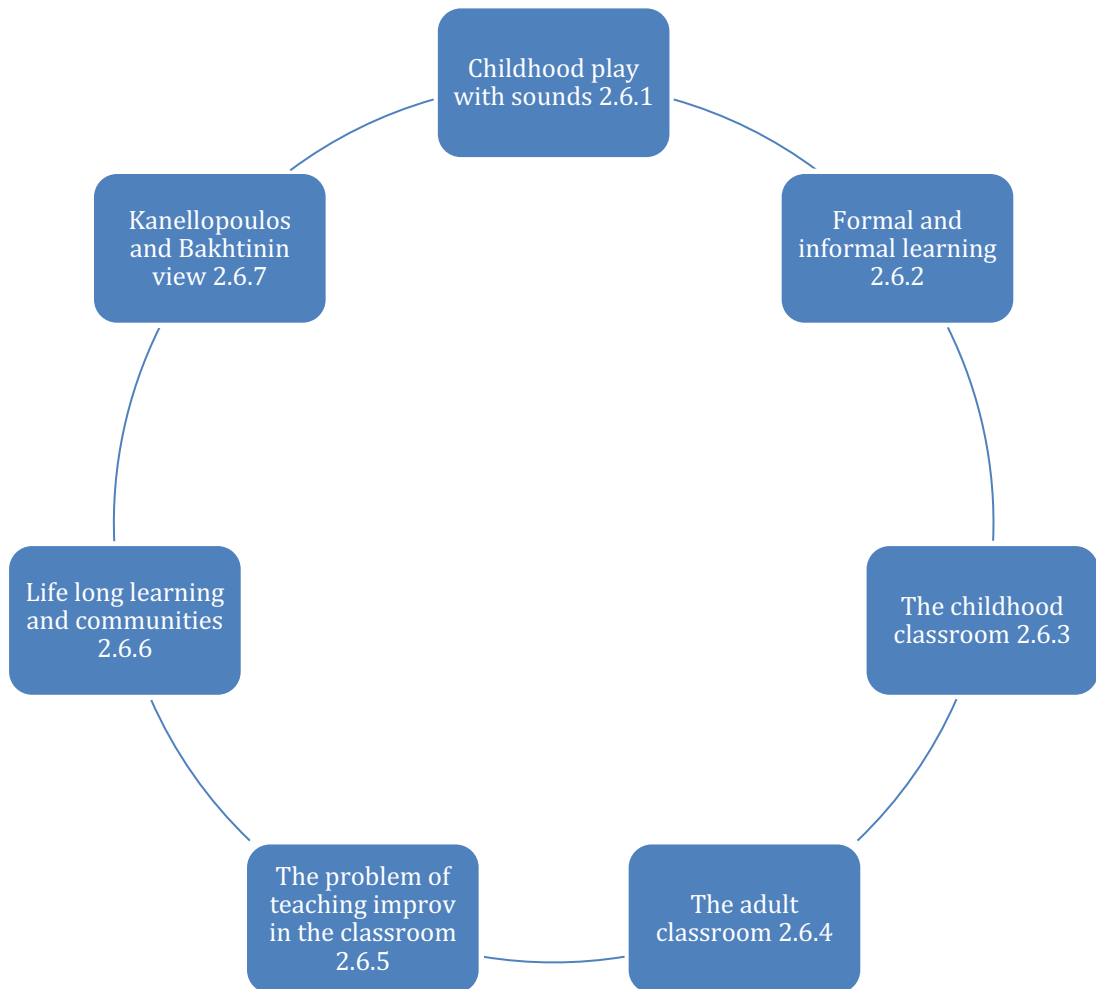


Figure 19: Sections 2.6.1 – 2.6.7 of first literature review

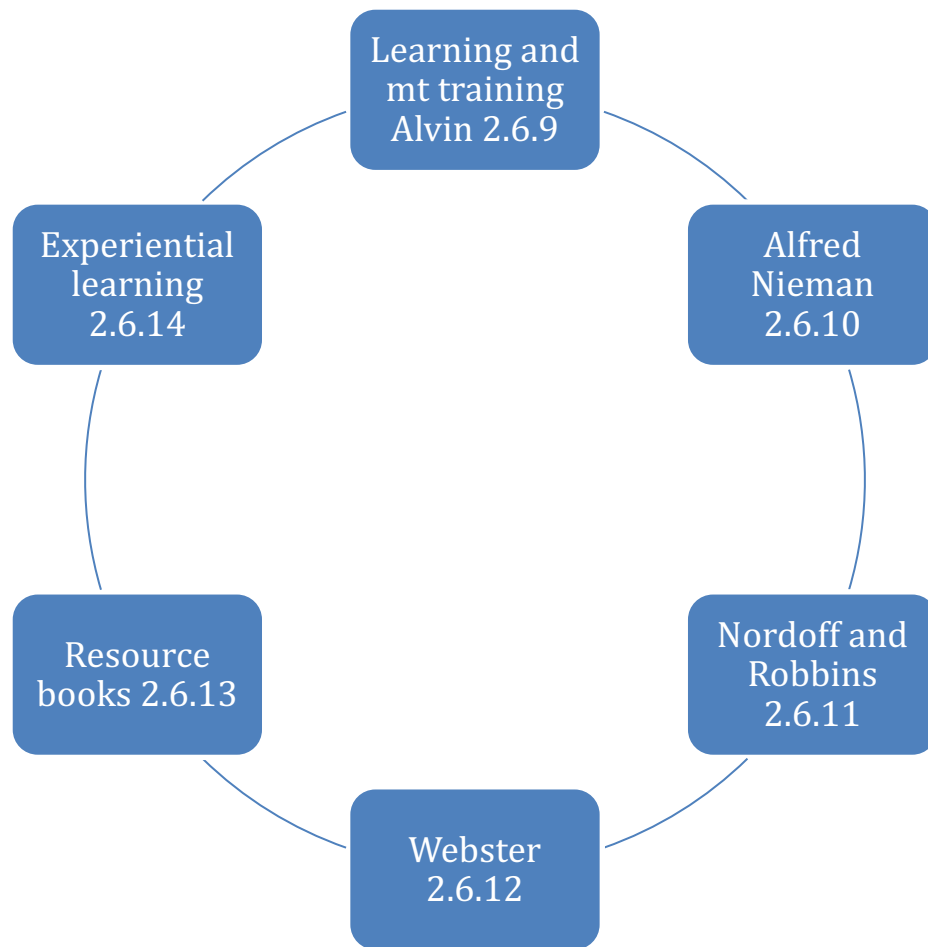


Figure 20: Sections 2.6.9 – 2.6.14 of first literature review

2.6.1 Childhood play with sounds

Childhood play with sounds can be understood as an explorative form of musical improvisation, an innate developmental activity, which can take place with or without intervention of formal education (Marsh and Young, 2006). Play in childhood is linked to social,

cognitive, emotional and sensory development (Piaget, 1978; Singer and Singer, 2009; Aras, 2016; Whitebread *et al.*, 2017). Relationship to sound begins at the very start of life; hearing, one of the first senses experienced in utero, develops around eighteen weeks (Lacanuet, 1996), and infants in the womb can be aware of both internal and external sound worlds, often responding with movement (Barrett, 2019). In the first months of life, infant and caregiver take part in a dialogue of sounds and movements, this has been discussed in Section 2.5.7, and can be understood as improvised and musical (Trevarthen and Malloch, 2000; Trevarthen, 2009). As early as six months infants become aware of the elements of music, exploring timbre and naturally playing with sounds (Papousek, 1996). In Moog's (1976) developmental model, infants at five to six months begin creating babbling, and later, at six to twelve years, children spontaneously create songs. Moorhead and Pond (1941–1951), in a study of children aged two to six years old, found that when

left to freely create their own music, children used sung and spoken chants, sang spontaneous songs and sounded out instruments, with accompanying physical movements. In a further developmental model Swanwick and Tillman (1986) propose a 'spiral of musical development' (Bunt and Stige, 2014, p.81), drawing on the analysis of over seven hundred children's compositions and improvisations. In this musical development is viewed from birth to four months with exploration of sounds and instruments as objects, moving to personal expression (ages four to nine) and after age seven becoming involved in formal established musical activities. They suggest this can have repercussions for classroom music teaching, where the teacher can observe and encourage the individual growth of the child through musical development and creative activities. However, it is possible that the focus on formal music activities at seven and above is related to influence of adult guidance and schooling rather than the child's actual preference or creative

expansion. As Burnard (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006) and Bunt and Stige (2014) underline, these sorts of developmental studies can exclude the child's voice and lack a social or cultural perspective. In response to this, Burnard (2000a) examined how twelve-year-olds ascribed meaning making to their compositions and improvisations, with findings related to time (temporally situated), body, relationships and space (the environment).

2.6.2 Formal and informal learning

Formal learning is characterised by teacher-directed learning in any setting. Informal learning can be understood as student-directed, taking place in any context, where directed intentionality is focused on the act of music making rather than learning. Thus, formal and informal both involve: geographical context; the method of teaching; who directs the learning, student or teacher; and intention (Jorgensen, 1997;

Folkestad, 2006). To understand formal and informal learning in improvisation it is important to acknowledge a ‘social–cultural perspective’ of music education, that ‘there are all kinds of musical learning’, such as with a teacher or mentor, in social situations or in listening to recordings with peers (Folkestad, 2006, p.3).

2.6.3 The childhood classroom

Influenced by developments in music during the twentieth century (see Section 2.4), such as the serialism of Schoenberg (Perle, 1972) or jazz (Ward and Burns, 2001) educationalists in the UK and continental Europe began to embrace improvisation in formal childhood education. An example of this is the ‘creative music education movement’ (Paynter and Aston, 1970; Paynter, 1972, 1976a, 1976b, 1982, 1992). In this, teachers encouraged creativity through arts exercises (Schafer, 1967; Dennis, 1970, 1975; Konowitz, 1973; Walker, 1976, 1983). For example, Paynter and

Aston (1970) suggest a series of improvisation activities for the classroom, with the use of pictures, drama and dance. Critiques of the movement refer to its lack of reference to historical styles (Kanellopoulos, 2009). Despite this, the movement did make initial attempts to explore creative musical freedom and opportunities to improvise within formal classroom settings.

The creative education movement briefly influenced UK mainstream education from the early 1970s to the 1990s, for example in the first GCSE syllabus in 1988, but perhaps was considered too radical or to lack academic and stylistic content, and in the early 1990s music curricula were changed back to incorporate traditional music theoretical teaching which focused on composed works, such as the analysis and reproduction of Bach chorales (Green, 2002). However, there is anecdotal evidence that some of this generation influenced by the creative education movement are now

adults working as arts professionals and are responsible for a resurgence in an interest in the study and performance of improvisation within the UK (Lawson, 2018).

In a systematic review Larsson and Georgii-Hemming (included here because it is a review of past papers, 2019) found twenty primary classroom studies, between 2000 and 2015, on the teaching of improvisation with common features including the importance of ‘creative intention ... and musical experience’ (p.8). Typically, the studies were in two pedagogical categories: ‘teacher directed with a structured approach to improvisation’ (p.1) including technical goals, such as developing melodic skills (Brophy, 2001, 2005; Beegkem 2010; Whitcomb, 2010; Coulson and Burke, 2013) or secondly, ‘teacher directed with creative approaches’ (p.1) emphasising self-expression and development of interpersonal skills (Burnard, 2000a; Hickey, 2009, 2015; Higgins and Mantie, 2013; Monk, 2013). In addition,

Rabinovitch *et al.* (2013) found that improvised musical games in the classroom can increase empathy in group interaction and Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) found that improvisation develops creative thinking, musical flexibility, originality and syntax (understanding of musical structures). In the review, Larsson and Georgii-Hemming (2019) stress the need for further studies in children's education in improvisation and development of techniques in the classroom; they place emphasis on the potential for improvisation as a means to develop critical thinking and creative exploration. This demonstrates a need for further studies in this area.

2.6.4 The adult classroom

The literature on teaching improvisation in the adult classroom is also sparse, reflecting individualised approaches, and descriptions of course content. For example, Kratus (1991) describes creating seven levels

of improvisation learning, from initial ‘exploration’, to acquiring ‘styles’ and ‘development of individual voice’ (pp. 38–40). His levels are useful as a starting place, but as Hickey (2009) comments, they tend to compartmentalise learning too robustly. Other educators who have designed improvisation courses for the adult learner include Ford (1995) with learning outcomes such as improved collective decision making and enhanced communication, and Azzara (1999) who highlighted the use of aural technical exercises in the development of improvisation skills. Similarly, Sansom (2006) describes running a course in which students were invited to play in small groups and reflect on internal processes and Borgo (2007a, 2007b) emphasises the reflective process as unlocking improvisational skills.

Learning aims in the adult classroom are similar to those of the childhood settings, with one key difference: adult educators have emphasised the

importance of flexible teaching, student-directed learning, verbal reflection, experiential learning and reflective thinking, stating that this provides students with a greater understanding of internal processes and how they function within music (Beckstead, 2013). For example, in Schlict's (2008) course description she recalls utilising musical exercises and listening material to encourage reflection. Her study (influential on this research) is unusual in that she includes student voice, with descriptions of transformative experiences, such as finding 'true colours, a musical renaissance, and discovering a spiritual aspect' (Schlict, 2008, pp. 13–14). In this, the students' observations suggest transformations and changed relationships to music.

2.6.5 The problem of teaching improvisation in the classroom

Formal teaching in schools and universities in specific genres, styles and idioms, such as jazz, has often

placed emphasis on learning technical skills before creative development (Murphy, 2009). However, this can produce students who are technically capable, but homologous in their expressive approach (Prouty, 2004; Ake, 2009). Louth (2012) discusses this problem, stating:

No matter what music is chosen for study its incorporation into institutional settings of any kind will necessarily result in students' understanding being mediated by formal categories and nomenclature (Louth, 2012, p.4).

Usefully, Louth makes four suggestions to overcome this, drawing from informal learning practice: learning aurally; learning about the historical context; encouraging students to create their own improvised ideas; and making recordings and transcriptions. Green (2002) agrees; in a study of the informal learning of rock musicians she found many of these practices (such

as jam sessions or peer rehearsal groups) can be successfully incorporated into the classroom giving a richer learning experience and reducing the chance of over-systematisation of the music.

Furthermore, Hickey (2009) critiques some formal models such as Kratus (1991) as placing skills in a false hierarchy, such as the importance of technical skills over creative. This can result in students being proficient in technical aspects but neglecting to develop expressive voice. In contrast, Dyson (2007), in a study of how jazz musicians learn, found that improvisation initially occurs through the creative process of imagined sounds translated to technical motor activity, and it is only after the development of creative skills that theoretical information can be absorbed. This confirms Hickey's (2009) suggestion that teaching begins with creative skills, followed by technical abilities and a return to creative skills, allowing opportunity to develop an expressive voice.

Thus, the learning is socially-contextual, and technical skills acquisition and creative development can become cyclical. A student who is learning to improvise can find their own creative pathway, whilst simultaneously acquiring technical knowledge.

It has been suggested that the teaching and learning of improvisation through formal approaches and contexts can overly systematise improvisation. The blending of formal and informal learning methods can be one way to overcome this, with a balance of teaching and learning between creative and technical skills. However, there could also be a use in exploring a different perspective as demonstrated by Kanellopoulos (2011a, Section 2.6.7).

2.6.6 Lifelong informal learning in communities

In many traditions, improvisation has been learnt informally, through membership of communities. In an

ethnographic study, Berliner (1994) explores how jazz musicians develop across the lifespan, with multi-angled learning taking place in contexts such as jam sessions with peers, mentoring with older musicians, attending performances, listening to recordings and memorising of repertoire. Berliner considers it important that musicians achieve a high level of technical skills, honed social interaction and an immersion in the social-cultural context (Monson, 1996). Green (2002, 2008), in examining the learning of pop and rock musicians, found informal practices such as rehearsing with peers, playing to recordings and being in bands to be highly valuable to development. Similarly, Louth (2006) studied the lifelong informal learning and lived experience of professional jazz musicians and free improvisers, finding that learning is motivated and embedded socially within community and networks. In addition, she found that in informal learning through communities, the activities of practising, performing and listening naturally overlap

and musicians often play more than one instrument and are influenced by a variety of styles. In addition, musicians report experiences such as heightened moments of insight with transformative revelations and development of embodied learning such as muscle memory.

The literature shows that improvisation can be learnt through informal practices. This type of learning can be understood as community, multi-angled and immersive, approached through differing modalities. I will now explore the debate between technical and expressive skills in improvisation.

2.6.7 Kanellopoulos and a Bakhtinian view of learning in improvisation

Kanellopoulos (2011a, 2011b) proposes an understanding of education in improvisation through a Bakhtinian (1981) view. Kanellopoulos relates Bakhtin's notions of

the ‘dialogic, oughtness of freedom and unfinalisability’ (Kanellopoulos, 2011a, pp. 113–114) into a potential pedagogy of improvisation. Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher, had an influence on literary theory and linguistics in the latter half of the twentieth century. His theories, such as ‘carnival’, explored play and boundaries between official public life and popular culture (Stensæth, 2007, 2017, p.127; Bakhtin, 1981).

Kanellopoulos acknowledges the complexity of Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘dialogic’ (2011a, p.113), but applies an interpretation to the intersubjective communicative nature of improvisation. He considers improvisation to highlight the difference between self and other, and social-cultural contexts. This relates strongly to a music therapy perspective, drawing on theorists such as Ruud (1998), where improvised music is always socially and culturally situated (see Section 2.5.9), and Pavlicevic (1997, 2000) and Ansdell (2014) view of communicative musicality in improvisation and

play as a central form of relationship development (Winnicott, 1953). Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogic' diverges from some music therapy theory with the use of the psychodynamic; as Kanellopoulos points out, the idea of communication towards the other, for Bakhtin, contains no connotations to the unconscious mind, and is a wholly conscious act. However, here Kanellopoulos does provide a useful stress on the intersubjective nature of learning in improvisation. This is also underlined as a prominent facet of learning by other music improvisation educators in both music therapy and performance, such as Wigram (2004) and Rose (2012).

Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of the 'oughtness of freedom' (Kanellopoulos, 2011a, p.120) he comments that in improvisation, as opposed to more structured or pre-composed forms of music, the student encounters a heightened sense of 'responsibility and autonomy' (2011a, p.120); they are tasked with constantly moving

the music forward whilst simultaneously having the freedom to create and express musical intentions. This, he suggests, could potentially be one of the key features of learning in improvisation, managing musical 'freedom and obligation' (p.120).

In the concepts of 'unfinalisability and irreversibility' the student is faced, through learning improvisation, with the constant onward motion of time and the 'uniqueness of each moment' (p.124). Improvisation for Kanellopoulos relates to the relentless nature of time, and improvisation only coming to a 'temporary' end if it is deemed so by an 'audience' (p.126), suggesting that entering into improvisation may give a heightened awareness of the moment and sense of time.

These are large philosophical concepts and drawing on Bakhtin is an interpretation from Russian literary philosophy applied to improvised music. However, I have included this, since Kanellopoulos begins to touch on

the complexity of the experience of learning to improvise, and how it might have repercussions for wider experiences (such as obligation and freedom).

2.6.8 Summary

In Sections 2.6.1 to 2.6.8 it was demonstrated that learning to improvise can be lifelong, beginning with children's play with sounds. The literature showed that learning is multifaceted, both informal and formal, can be teacher- or pupil-directed, with a tension between technical and expressive skills. The section also briefly explored Kanellopoulos's (2011a, 2011b) use of Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic to explore the nature of improvisation, viewing learning as a communicative intersubjective process.

2.6.9 Learning to improvise in music therapy

training: Alvin

This section examines Alvin's educational approach to improvisation in music therapy. Alvin considered that students should first have a high level of musical skills and emotional communicative ability before training as therapists. With the qualities of

empathy; anchoring and grounding; motivation; validating; affirming, being able to create a safe space, be emotionally available and able to attune (Haneishi, 2005, p.96).

An important aspect of Alvin's (1965, 1966) teaching was a focus on the study of the elements of music (see Glossary: melody, harmony etc.) as essential to understanding the 'sensory, physiological and psychological responses of the child' (Alvin, 1975, pp. 73–71). However, there are few accounts of students' experiences of Alvin's teaching, and there appear to be

none which directly relate to improvisation. An exception is Odell-Miller's recollection of a mixture of feelings in response to Alvin's teaching:

Juliette Alvin inspired me by her drive. She was very to the point and very focused about music. My first response to that was that it was a bit constraining in that she was very definite about her ways of working. If you didn't fit into that model – I think I probably did most of the time – but if you didn't then she was very critical. So she would say things like 'That was dreadful music' or throw you in the deep end in some clinical situation and then pull whatever you had done to pieces. I'm sure that helped me in some way but at the time I found it quite painful and difficult (Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002, p.61).

Apart from Alvin's books and case studies, there is little documentation related to her teaching and of

improvisation. This may be because the majority of teaching at the **Guildhall School of Music and Drama** was carried out by the composer **Nieman**.

2.6.10 Nieman

A contemporary of **Alvin**, **Nieman**, although not a music therapist, was highly influential in the teaching of clinical improvisation, at both the **Guildhall School of Music and Drama**, and the **Goldie Leigh Hospital** with **Nordoff and Robbins** (Nieman, 2015). **Nieman** had an interest in the avant-garde, free improvisation movement (see **Glossary**) and twentieth-century forms of music; he was notorious for his challenging and creative classes. According to **Priestley** **Nieman's** teaching style was both challenging and encouraging; students were urged to move out of comfortable and familiar music and explore new ground. His classes were designed to use technical exercises to enable students to discover atonality, avoiding the use of

tonal conventions such as octaves. In addition, solo improvisations were given a title, recorded, listened back, and commented on (Darnley-Smith, 2013). The teaching was initially piano-based, leading to opportunities to play tuned and untuned percussion. Nieman's approach to improvisation was removed as far as possible from Classical and Romantic constructions of compositional rules, with a levelling of the elements and, crucially, emphasising the interpersonal and emotional expression of the improviser. The influence of Nieman on the teaching and learning of clinical improvisation has been little documented but cannot be underestimated.

2.6.11 Nordoff and Robbins

The work of Nordoff and Robbins was previously discussed in Section 2.5.5. In teaching improvisation Nordoff and Robbins considered it important for therapists to record notes and make audio recordings

(Robbins, 2005, Nordoff and Nordoff, 1998). *Creative Music Therapy* (Nordoff and Robbins, 2007) contains six case studies and audio recordings; the teaching described is contextual, including notated examples and methods of working and an emphasis on technical skills, genres, styles and idioms such as scales, modes or the Middle Eastern idiom. A further text, *Healing Heritage*, documents transcripts of Nordoff's improvisation teaching, from the use of scale to musical archetypes and the children's tune (Robbins and Robbins, 1998). These resource books should be considered from the ontological point of view of music as a universal force originally influenced by Zuckerkandl (p.80), and used with caution within the historical setting of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, some of the comments on the use of genres and the universal archetypes may not be appropriately culturally considered or situated (as previously discussed in Section 2.5.5, p.81). It is also possible that the recreation of genres and styles, outside of

the actual cultural context for which they were originally intended, can be problematic, since cultural appropriation may occur. Indeed, Strange (2014) cautions against utilising the music of past composers without taking into account the musical and cultural identity of therapist and client.

Students learning clinical improvisation with Nordoff and Robbins took part in contextual piano-based learning, and supervision was given as a group. Although piano-based at this time, Nordoff and Robbins education currently stresses the inclusion of all instruments in training programmes (Nordoff and Robbins, 2020). In writing about Nordoff's approach, Robbins offers that he always sought to enable students to have high levels of technical facility. He states:

It was his hope that his students could release in themselves, and so experience and develop, the

creative sense of immediacy and expressive freedom that was so characteristic of his own clinical work (Robbins and Robbins, 1998, p.67).

The music therapist Eilser further remarks on the confidence Nordoff inspired in his students:

Paul brought us his approach to improvisation in his step-by-step way of teaching. Little by little it all gathered momentum and you began to feel you could do it too. Paul's emphasis was on learning to feel and hear sound, learning to listen. (Eilser in Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002, p.59)

Later in the twenty-first century, Verney (Ansdell and Verney, 2010) comments that contemporary students should have a heightened awareness of small details in the music, and responses of therapist and client. In her teaching at the London Nordoff and Robbins centre, she describes devising musical exercises designed to

elicit experiential and personal observations. She offers that the most significant skill in becoming a music therapist is to develop acute listening (p.957) alongside precisely facilitating the development of musical goals. The concept of goals (such as extension of melodic invention) is set within a creative or music-centered approach. This is in contrast with the experience of students who have studied in the Alvin tradition where therapeutic goals may be regarded as non-musical, i.e., increased attention span or eye contact (Bruscia, 1987).

In summary, learning to improvise in the Nordoff and Robbins tradition requires a high level of technical facility with a musical flexibility, spontaneity and high level of listening skills (as do all trainings in music therapy). However, in Nordoff and Robbins there may be more emphasis on a knowledge of Western art music with a hierarchy of the elements of music, an understanding of an ontology of music as an outside

universal force acting on the individual, a good facility in recreating different genres, styles or idioms and the ability to create musical goals.

2.6.12 Webster

There is little literature which deals with student experience in the learning of clinical improvisation, and this is a contribution of the present study. However, one exception is Webster (1988) who describes the process of transitioning from musician to music therapist. She writes about learning keyboard atonal improvisation through playing to themes (presumably at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Nieman) and the emotional effect these classes had on her:

However, I was the last one of the group to play, and by the time my turn arrived I was a nervous wreck. I found that improvising atonally meant that one's harmonic language was stripped of all

its cliché's idioms, borrowed styles and patterns, and what remained was a person communicating something directly about themselves through their own musical language. I was stunned at how exposing this proved to be, and was not at all enamoured by the prospect that the people listening to my music would have a 'hotline' through to my inner self, which I spent so much time hiding and protecting (Webster, 1988, p.18).

For Webster the improvisation classes are 'nerve wracking and exposing' (p.18), but at the same time they highlight that improvisation can be a medium of communication, bringing personal issues into the open. Section 2.6.13 will now explore textbooks in music therapy and improvisation. As will be seen, there is a lack of critical discourse, research studies or student voice.

2.6.13 Resource text books

A significant historical resource for understanding improvisation in music therapy is Bruscia's (1987) *Improvisational Models of Music Therapy*. In this publication, seven categories of music therapy are described (as at 1987) including *creative* (Nordoff and Robbins) and *free improvisation* and sixteen approaches to improvisation, such as 'musical psychodrama' Moreno (p.347), and 'continuum awareness', a model by Boxhill (p.384). Some of these models are still in use today, with contemporary developments; others are rather obscure and have fallen into the history of the profession.

Bruscia further details his improvisational assessment profiles (IAPs) which 'provide a model of client assessment based upon clinical observation, musical analysis and psychological interpretation' (Bruscia, 1987, p.403). These profiles provide a framework for the analysing the role of the elements of music and

autonomy of musicians within improvisation. However, some of the language used is overly complex, vague or difficult to define; as a result, the profiles provide a subjective interpretation of the music without reference to specific semantic information such as keys, pitches or rhythms. For example, the ‘salience’ profile and scale (p.409) examines the prominence of an element of music with a scale from ‘receding to overpowering’ (p.441). This does not provide thorough definitions of the terms ‘receding’ or ‘overpowering’, leaving these to the clarification of the therapist.

Bruscia also offers sixty-four clinical techniques, such as ‘synchronizing – doing what the client is doing at the same time’ (Bruscia, 1987, p.535). These techniques have proved to be valuable to improvisation in music therapy (Hadley, 2004), and have been further developed by Wigram (2004) and Carroll and Lefebvre (2013). Wigram’s (2004) practical guide to musical and clinical techniques focuses on a musical relational

perspective, beginning with simple one-note improvisations to complex melodic thematic music. He describes methods such as 'mirroring' (p.83) which is akin to Bruscia's 'synchronizing'. In addition, Wigram provides audio piano and notated examples of the exercises and gives suggestions for group improvisation activities and two methods of improvisation analysis. Further to Wigram, Carroll and Lefebvre (2013) document their teaching in clinical improvisation at Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada. They collect improvised music techniques together, in five stages: 'establishing contact, eliciting, structuring and redirecting responses, and intrapersonal and interpersonal levels' (Carroll and Lefebvre, 2013, p.12). Dividing techniques into these therapeutic phases gives the student a preliminary platform and a strong guiding structure. However, actual musical examples, either audio or notated are missing; in addition, students have found some of the language used to describe musical techniques difficult to access (it was inherited

from Bruscia); changes to this language would enhanced the educational value (Beer and Dignan, 2015). Overall, Bruscia's (1987), Wigram's (2004) and Carroll and Lefebvre's (2013) texts provide good guides for the student in clinical improvisation through a relational perspective. However, it is clear there is a need for further literature in this area to focus on the development of teaching and learning, especially in light of new research in other disciplines, such as in music psychology and Wilson and MacDonald's (2015) model of choice making in improvisation and performance.

There is a small number of musical texts, articles, guides and chapters which focus on clinical improvisation skills. Bunt and Hoskyns (2002) articulate the development of the musical journey for the music therapist, beginning with 'creating an initial musical connection' (p.190) to the elements of music and relational methods. Of particular interest to the

improvisation student is Chapter 12 (Raphael, Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002), which gives specific musical technical exercises (notated) such as the blues, turnarounds, vamps and listening to different kinds of music. In a similar vein is Wetherick's (2006) conference paper on how to practise improvisation skills, with helpful exercises and musical ideas.

Lee, together with a small handful of authors, has provided detailed texts on the use of songs, improvising in genres, styles and idioms, including advice for the use of orchestral instruments (Lee and Houde, 2011; Pun and Lee 2015; Lee, *et al.*, 2015, 2016). There has been some criticism of the theoretical accuracy of Lee's texts, and assumptions he, with the other authors, makes of composers' styles (such as J.S. Bach, or Finzi). Saul (2015) highlights that many of Lee and Houde's accounts of music (in the 2011 text) relate to the author's tastes, rather than objective notions for the trainee music therapist.

Further texts focus on exercises for specific instruments, looking at topics such as piano chord sequences, basic accompaniments and score reduction such as Massicot (2012), guitar skills (Soskensky, 2005; Meyer *et al.*, 2010; Oden, 2013; Krüger, 2014) and voice (Austin, 2001, 2008; Uhlig, 2009). Historically, there has been a lack of literature on the therapist's use of instruments other than the piano, guitar or voice. Oldfield, *et al.* (2015) provide a useful alternative text on the practical use of orchestral instruments such as bassoon and saxophone. In my music therapy blog I have written about use of my own primary instruments of trombone, bass guitar and melodica, with guest authors on violin, saxophone and recorder (skylark arts, 2019b), and Partesotti *et al.*, (2018) have discussed the use of digital instruments. Other texts examine the therapist's development of musical voice through their primary instrument, and implications for musical identity and working as a music therapist (Schenstead, 2009, 2012; Berends, 2014). It can be noted that in

response to the Covid-19 pandemic, online video tutorials in clinical improvisation (Gattino, 2020), and literature which addresses music making using zoom (MacDonald and Birrell, 2021; zoom 2021) has arisen. The literature addresses issues such as remote working and time-latency, this area is still in its very early infancy.

As can be seen, there is a lack of literature which deals with teaching and learning of improvisation skills in music therapy. Historical writing focuses on the individual approaches of music therapy pioneers (Alvin, 1965; Nordoff and Robbins, 2007). The resource books either place emphasis on relational music therapy (Bruscia, 1987; Wigram 2004; Carroll and Lefebvre, 2013) or genres and technical skills such as use of scales and intervals (Lee and Houde, 2011). There is a need for further texts which approach the teaching and learning of improvisation in music therapy from differing ontologies, such as that of ecology, improvisation as

on a spectrum with composition or as a process of choice and freedom for the practitioner (Section 2.4.2). A summary of some resource and textbooks is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Resources for teaching and learning in clinical improvisation

<p>Relational</p> <p>Bruscia, 1987/ Wigram, 2004/ Carroll and Lefebvre, 2013 / Hadar and Amir, 2021/ Frank and Gilboa, 2021.</p>
<p>Technical skills</p> <p>Nordoff and Robbins, 2007/ Robbins and Robbins, 1998/ Raphael, Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002/ Wetherick 2006</p>
<p>Decision making</p> <p>Wilson and MacDonald, 2015 / Rodolf 2018.</p>

Genres, styles and idioms

Nordoff and Robbins, 2007/ Robbins and Robbins, 1998/ Raphael, Bunt and Hoskyns, 2002/ Lee and Houde, 2011/ Pun and Lee 2015/ Lee, *et al.*, 2016

Piano

Wigram, 2004/ Massicot, 2012

Guitar

Soskensky, 2005/ Meyer, DeVillers and Ebnet, 2010/ Oden, 2013/ Krüger, 2014

Voice

Austin, 2001, 2008/ Uhlig, 2009 / Pujol Torras, 2017/ Meashy, 2020

Instrumental

Oldfield *et al.*, 2015/ Schenstead, 2009, 2012/

Gilboa and Almog, 2017/ Skylark arts, 2019b/ Gilboa and Hakvoort, 2020

Music Technologies

Partesotti, Peñalba and Manzolli, 2018/ Crooke, *et al.*, 2019

Musical identity

Schenstead, 2009/ Berends, 2014/ Hadar and Amir, 2018

Creating improvisation online using online platforms

MacDonald and Birrell, 2021; Tamplin 2021;
MacDonald, *et al.*, 2021

Online video tutorial

Gattino, 2020/ McCaffrey, *et al.*, 2020

2.6.14 Experiential learning

Experiential learning can be defined as learning through experience and process, which becomes integrated into the self (Kolb, 1984). In music therapy, experiential learning is a common component of all courses in the UK (such as Roehampton University, 2018).

Experiential learning, through individual therapy, groups and supervision seminars, is where improvisation skills can be integrated into other aspects of courses, and students learn through embodied, emotional experience. Prefontaine (2006) describes this synthesised process, in which students are encouraged to experience musical improvisation through body, emotional and relational affective states, learning to speak about and relate within the music, and connect music to an inner authentic narrative. Nygaard Pedersen (2002) has written extensively about experiential training at Aalborg University in Denmark, describing music skills

as essential to the experiential aspect of the five-year undergraduate through to PhD courses. She underlines that key to the training is an integrated model where experiential self-learning is interconnected with music and improvisation skills. Through a mixture of individual therapy, duos and groups, students are encouraged to develop a heightened musicality and techniques associated with transference and countertransference listening through the whole body and self. This is in addition to acquiring semantic musical skills of playing in different styles, responding to outside stimuli such as images, and understanding improvisation on an interpersonal relational level. The focus is on the students' awareness of their musical identity and 'learning to be familiar with their personal improvisational languages – especially in music' (Nygaard Pedersen, 2002, p.171)

This acknowledges that the learning of improvisation in music therapy not only involves the acquisition of

technical music skills, but is an interwoven process with complex interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects. Perhaps here lies a central facet of training: that improvisation is a continuous thread throughout all aspects of training as a music therapist.

2.6.15 Summary

Section 2.6 has highlighted a prominent gap in the literature, where there is a lack of research studies in connection with the teaching and learning of improvisation. The literature is sparse, and mainly focused on descriptions of course contents or ‘how to’ textbooks. A summary of the findings from the literature in Sections 2.6 to 2.6.8 is shown in Figure 21.

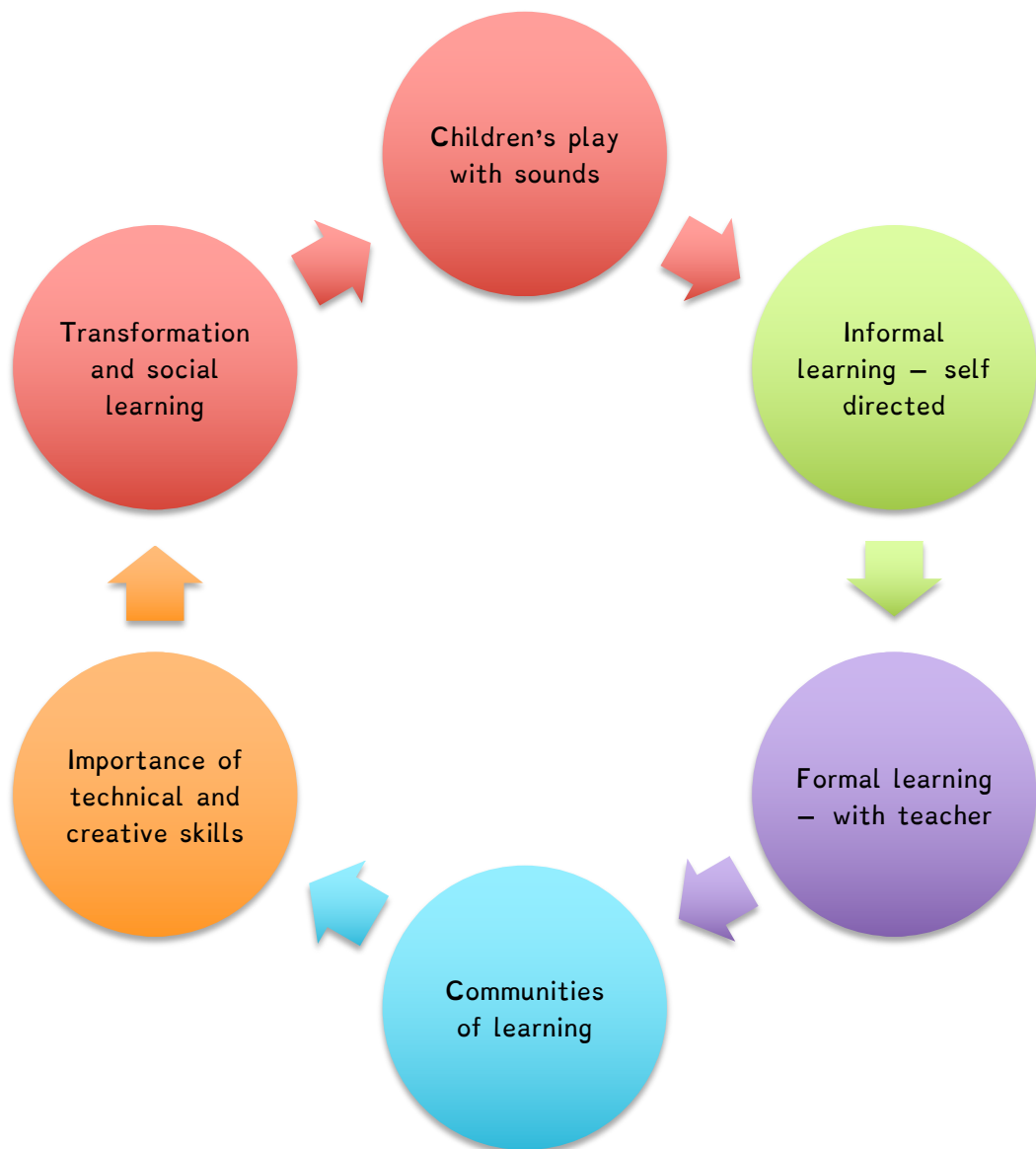


Figure 21: The multifaceted aspects of learning to improvise in music.

The literature on teaching and learning improvisation in music therapy (Sections 2.6.10–2.6.15) also demonstrates a lack of research studies, but in contrast to community and classroom educational

texts, places stress on skills such as heightened listening and awareness of small technical social and personal details in the music (Verney, 2010). A further major difference is that social interaction in music therapy improvisation is often understood through psychological and psychotherapeutic theories (Priestley, 1994). Finally, although experiential learning is inherently embedded in classroom and community education, such as within rock bands or jazz sessions, in music therapy training it is made explicit and strong emphasis placed on learning through the body, voice, emotions and relationships (Prefontaine, 2006).

2.7 Special and flow experience in music and music therapy

This section of the review examines literature on special and flow experience in music, beginning with a brief introduction to the theories of Maslow (2.7.1) and Csikszentmihalyi (2.7.2), followed by literature on first musical encounters, listening and performing (2.7.3), group experiences (2.7.4), learning (2.7.5) and music therapy (2.7.6). This is illustrated in figure 22.

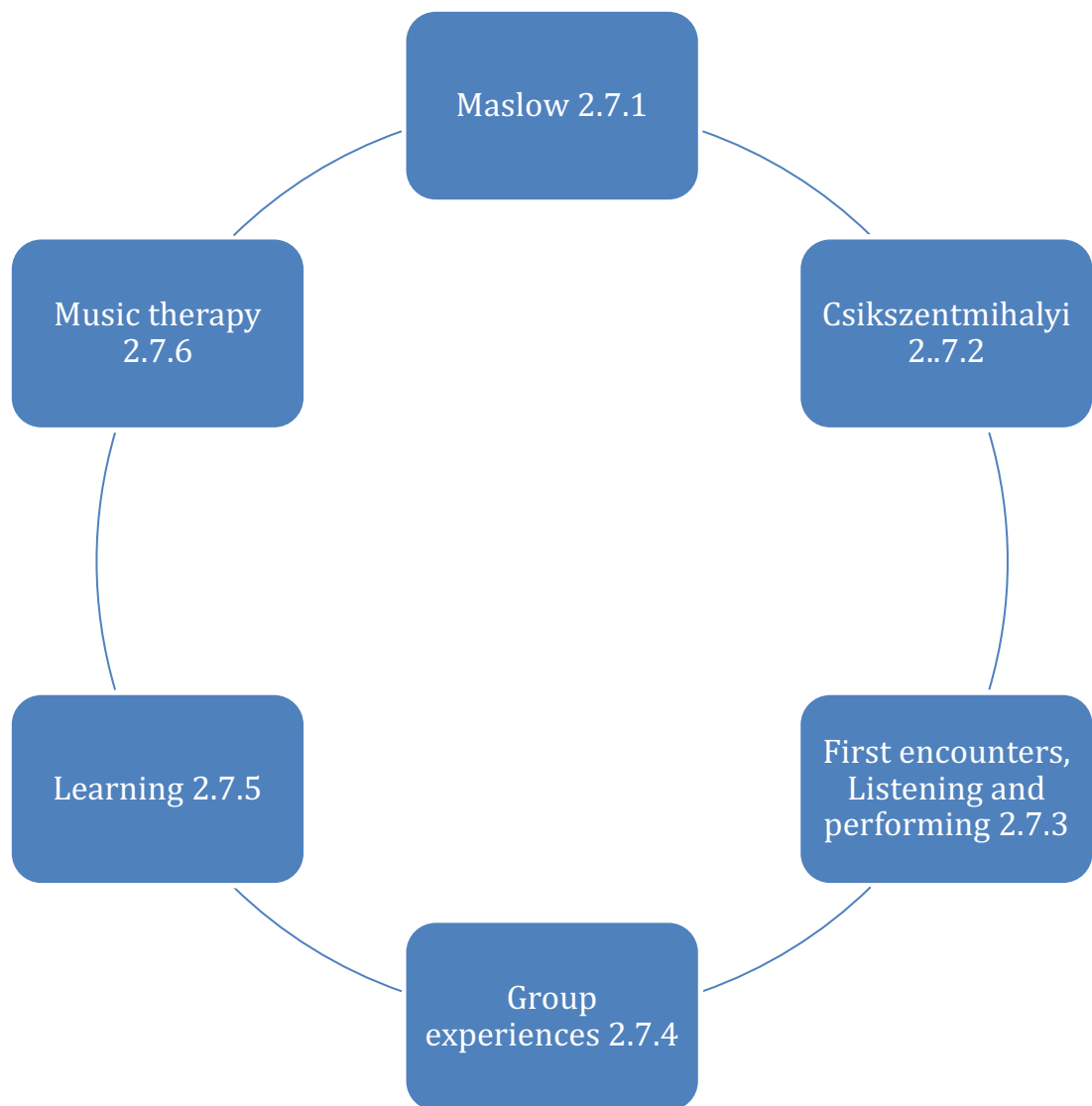


Figure 22: Sections 2.7.1 – 2.7.6 of first literature review

2.7.1 Maslow and peak experience

In the theory of motivation, Maslow creates four levels of a hierarchy of human needs: basic physical; food and water; security and safety; at a higher level; psychological needs such as friendship, love, family and accomplishment, and lastly, as a pinnacle of human development, 'self-actualisation'; fulfilling potential through creative, intellectual or social pursuits (Maslow, 1959, p.43). Leading to self-actualisation are peak experiences, which refer to important moments or events which occur throughout a person's life. Self-actualisation was a ground-breaking theory, which challenged the behaviourist views of infant development, seen as mainly influenced by outside environmental factors (Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1938). However, the hierarchy of needs has been criticised for being overly generalised, lacking attention to complexities of human development. Neher (1991) argues that Maslow neglects to consider the overlapping temporal nature of an individual's needs: he

states:

It is not clear that in the long run, satisfying our lower needs diminishes their urgency or naturally triggers movement into the higher needs (Neher, 1991, p.91).

Neher (1991) and Smith (1973) critique Maslow's lack of environmental and cultural considerations, seeing self-actualisation as solely focused on the individual's inner psychological responses. However, it is possible that Maslow, reacting to the prevalence of behavioural psychology in the twentieth century (Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1938), perhaps deliberately avoiding environmental factors within his work.

2.7.2 Csikszentmihalyi and flow

The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1996) developed the concept of flow, described

as challenges in learning at optimal and threshold levels. Csikszentmihalyi understood flow experience as part of many diverse activities, from composing music to business skills, and linked to personal transformations. In this, music and the arts are central components which 'facilitate concentration and ordered states of mind' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p.72). Capon (2013) and the music therapist Berenger (2015) view flow as a facet of special experience and not a descriptor of the wider phenomenon of self-actualisation. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi (1988) agrees with this, describing flow as a 'specific experiential state' only (p.29) which may or may not lead to self-actualisation.

An absence of flow can be described as 'psychic-entropy' (Faupel, 1989, p.375), where there is a lack of continuity in consciousness, disruption and distraction by internal or external events. Extreme examples of this would be the inability to process painful or

unexpected life trials such as illness or bereavement. Psychic-entropy has been linked to fear, low moods and a lack of motivation (Faupel, 1989). The theories of Csikszentmihalyi have been criticised for being limited (Nietz and Spikard, 1990), excluding the possibility of the spiritual or presence of other in flow. However, it is possible to consider that flow has an innate spirituality and potential for connection with others, which although not explicit, is embedded within the theories. For example, in Hytönen-Ng's (2013) study of jazz musicians in flow, the musicians focus on intense connections with each other and describe mystical musical experiences.

2.7.3 First encounters: Listening and performing

Special experiences across the lifespan are often connected with first-time encounters with music, such as discovering an instrument, performances and recorded music. Individuals describe learning to play

instruments, wonder of first control over sounds and losing reservations in performance. Gabrielsson (2011), in a study of strong experiences in music, found initial encounters to be common, eliciting feelings of merging, heightened emotions and lifelong fascination with the art form. In one example, an elderly woman describes first encountering the organ keyboard as a child:

The first experience was when I was only a few years old. We had a little organ at home, I stood on the pedals and stretched my arms up over my head so I could reach the keys without being able to see them, and played C,D,E,F,G,F,E,D,C slowly and listened for a long time to every tone. It was wonderful. (Gabrielsson, 2011, p.30)

Similarly, Sudnow (1978) in an ethno-biographical study of learning jazz piano describes a 'critical turning point' after four years of learning, when attending a performance by pianist Jimmy Rowles (Sudnow, 1978,

p.73). During the performance he had moment of sudden inspiration through which he gained a deeper understanding of the art form. Sudnow begins to imitate Rowles, increasingly visualises and embodies the music, and his playing becomes more fluid and flexible.

Special experiences and listening vary extensively, but are more likely to take place in informal settings, happen at any age, and vary greatly. Panzarella (1980), in a phenomenological study of peak experiences, found listening to music to be highly important and create a long-standing attachment to the art form. Sloboda (2005) studied the autobiographical memories of one hundred and thirteen people, with positive listening experiences in informal relaxed settings being common. In Gabrielsson's (2011) study of strong experiences, 81 per cent described special experiences whilst listening to music, with a range of responses such as 'physical, perceptual, cognitive, emotional, transcendental and

religious' (Gabrielsson, 2011, p.449).

There is some evidence to suggest that special experiences and listening can trigger impetus to become a performer. Berliner (1994), in a study of how jazz musicians learn, describes the experiences of individuals being compelled to play after hearing live and recorded jazz; the musicians have 'love at first sound' (Berliner, 1994, p.31). Similarly, Sloboda (2005), in the study of musicians' autobiographical memories, quotes an account by a seven-year-old girl on listening to a clarinet duo playing Mozart:

I was astounded at the beauty of the sound. It was liquid, resonant, vibrant. It seemed to send tingles through me. I felt as if it were a significant moment. Listening to this music led me to learning to play first the recorder and then to achieve my ambition of playing the clarinet (Sloboda, 2005, p.183).

This type of experience seems to be common; during performances, musicians have described feelings such as being out of their body, transformations, shifts in consciousness and heightened sensory awareness (Beddeloh, 2003; Kossak, 2008; Burnard, 2009; Gabrielsson, 2011). Monson (1996), in a study of jazz as social communication, explains how musicians develop strong interactional relationships within the music, which can lead to special trance-like experiences. With similar findings, Hytönen–Ng (2013) studied jazz, flow and performance, ascertaining flow to be a main motivating factor for working jazz musicians.

Special experiences can be found in first encounters with music, through listening, performance and be an impetus for pursuing a career as a musician. They provide a motivation to play music and potential locus of transformation.

2.7.4 Group musical performance and special experience

The study of special experiences is contextualised within individualistic societies such as the USA, Germany and UK, where emphasis is placed on development of self (Darwish and Günter, 2003). In contrast, collectivist societies, such as those of China, Pakistan and Japan, place higher importance on group needs. Theories of special experience do not necessarily take into adequate account cultures where group actualisation is highly valued (Garces-Bacsel, 2015). For example, Csikszentmihalyi's individualised flow does not necessarily translate into collective musical cultures, such as that of Arabic music, or the flamenco of southern Spain, where essential to the success of a performance is the achievement of group ecstatic states (Racy, 1998; Matteucci, 2013).

However, Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.42), after observing people dancing to rock music, does consider a further development of 'social flow' in which collective co-

ordination is important. In addition, psychologists such as Sawyer (2006) and Walker (2010) have examined group improvisation, creativity and special experience, finding that key to flow is ‘group challenge and competence’ (Walker, 2010, p.2).

With the exception of studies such as Neuser (2015), comparing social flow in group vocal improvisation to non-improvised music, and Hytönen–Ng (2013), who discovered that flow increased interaction between jazz musicians, there is generally a need for further studies which examine social flow in improvised music. This raises questions beyond this thesis, such as: is improvised music always a potential source of social flow? Are those experiences different from other types of music making?

2.7.5 Learning

There are few studies which focus on special experiences and the learning of music. Custodero (1999, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2012) argues for the central place of flow within music education involving independent choices and learning. Riggs (2006) similarly argues for the importance of flow, calling for a move from traditional teacher-directed to wholly student-led focus. She suggests a new model, with the leading elements of student 'identity – experience – insight and inspiration' (Riggs, 2006, p.13). However, this seems to suggest that the experience of flow is prioritised over the learning musical outcomes. Freer (2006) additionally comments that Riggs's model lacks real depth of explanation and connection to Csikszentmihalyi's flow, requiring more explicit detail as to how the model may be implemented by a tutor.

Burnard (2009) also argues for a consideration of flow in music education. She suggests that graduate

teacher trainees study literature on peak experience transcendence and flow using reflective writing. In music education and improvisation Kingscott and Durrant (2010) suggest a pyramid model of learning, with self-realisation at the pinnacle; however, in a similar way to Riggs, they do not fully explain the ideas. The focus on the development of the individual through specific transformative experiences contrasts with the aesthetic music-focused philosophies of educationalists such as Swanwick (2002), Regeiski (2005) and Reimer (2009) who focus on musical instruction (directed by the teacher) and musical knowledge as a means of development linked to culture (Philpott, 2012). However, what may be required is a consideration of both aesthetic and transformational experience pedagogy, where music education is recognised as having the potential for both teacher and pupil transformation (Freer, 2006), but can equally have value as teacher-led knowledge, gaining musical understanding and leading to pupil development.

2.7.6 Music therapy

There is a small amount of literature that deals with special experiences in music therapy; these have similar features to that already described, such as moments of intense emotional connection with others, the feeling of losing sense of time and a heightened sensory awareness. In a ‘Guided Imagery in Music’ study – a specific form of music therapy which involves listening to carefully planned recorded programmes (Bruscia, 2002) – Grocke (1999a, 1999b) researched pivotal moments, combining phenomenological interviews of clients with structured analysis of music. Crucially, she found common themes emerged, such as strong emotions, physical reactions and new insights. One participant describes the life-changing imagery of the session:

[My pivotal session was] the one where I found my voice. The music started. I was sitting at the piano in an orange dress. I have always hated

orange. It was a strong dress. The orchestra and I were working together. They were giving me a sense of identity. I was able to play what I wanted to play, and this was a powerful experience. (Grocke, 1999b, p.297).

This special experience has profound repercussions for the participant; she describes feeling more confident, able to make clearer decisions and the session being a significant moment in life.

Music therapy special experience studies often focus on the interpersonal relationship between client and therapist. Amir (1992, 1996, 1999, 2001) investigated meaningful moments in improvisational music therapy, interviewing four clients and therapists, finding new insights, transformation and growth. In addition, Amir found that both the clients and therapists felt increasingly free to express themselves, with intrapersonal experiences encompassing: ‘a sense of

freedom, spirituality, intimacy, insight, integration and being whole'. (Amir, 1996, p.115).

Similarly, Robbins and Forinash (1991) discuss moments of intense musical perception in music therapy, how flashes of 'sudden insight, recognition and knowing what to do are found' (p.53). This occurs when both the client and therapist are totally absorbed in the music, and opportunities are opened up for discovery. In a much later related study looking at intersubjectivity, Pedersen (2007) examined counter transference (see Glossary) experienced by therapists working in adult psychiatry. Pedersen understands these times as when the therapist feels the emotional and physical experience of the patient in their body. She strongly links changes in the improvised music to these occurrences, stating that:

the changes in the musical expression releases the body sensation ... strong emotions of the

therapist ... indicate something specific is emerging ... serves the countertransference and leads the music therapy process in new direction (Pedersen, 2007, p.19).

Here, the special moments are first experienced in the therapist's body and emotional being, and then uttered through the music. De Backer (2008) investigated 'moments of synchronicity' (p.91) between psychotic patients and therapists. He describes how patients often present with fragmented and repetitive playing which seems to be disconnected. Moments of synchronicity take place firstly through the music, in shared musical play, with silence, phrasing, joint timbre, melodic and rhythmic variation, creating a shared 'attunement' which leads to autonomy. Drawing on Stern's (2004) theory of the present moment in psychotherapy, where joint intersubjectivity is created in moments of shared experience, Ansdell, Davidson *et al.* (2010) investigate present moments in music therapy

with patients with psychotic states. They argue that music creates an environment where these can be temporally 'expanded to provide relational and therapeutic change' (p.21).

Finally, in a study which has had some influence on the design of this project (e.g., playing music with research participants), Ahonen and Houde (2009) hypothesise that improvisation can lead to self-actualisation. They invited music therapy students to improvise with a professional musician, followed by interviews and recordings analysis. Students reported intense concentration, growth and increased self-awareness with the potential for self-actualisation.

Overall, it can be seen that the study of special experiences in music therapy is valuable, opening up channels of inquiry on moments of intense emotion and heightened awareness. In contrast to research carried out in other disciplines (Sudnow, 1978; Custodero,

1999; Gabrielsson, 2011), music therapy research in special experience has emphasised the relationship between self and music, and self and other. Questions around the nature of these relationships are ongoing, encapsulated by Ahonen and Houde who state:

How can we explain the connectedness that so quickly took place between two strangers? What was its nature? And what kinds of conditions were needed for it to take place? Finally, what is the role of the *other* on our individual journeys of self-actualization? (Ahonen and Houde, 2009).

2.7.7 Summary

This section examined the study of special experiences in music. Special experience can be defined as specific intense moments which involve strong emotions, being absorbed in the moment, clear cognition and opportunity for change (Laski, 1915). A significant

influence on the study of special experience has been Maslow's peak experiences and theory of self-actualisation, in which emphasis is placed on individual fulfilment through a hierarchy of needs.

Special experiences in music are to be found in first-time encounters (Gabrielsson, 2011), performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Jeddelloh, 2003) and learning (Custodero, 1999). Education literature suggests that special experience can be key to advances in learning, insight and creativity (Riggs, 2006), but studies sometimes focus on the experiences themselves rather than the actual outcomes. Music therapists have considered special experiences in music therapy, focusing on intersubjectivity and relationship to self and music; for example, Grocke (1999a) found life-changing moments can occur for clients when taking part in 'Guided Imagery and Music' and Amir (1992) discovered that both clients and therapists were able

to find freedom in self-expression during meaningful moments in music therapy.

An examination of this literature has given a basis for investigating the second research question on special experiences and the learning of improvisation. It has highlighted how specific moments in listening, learning, performing and therapy can produce individual change and transformation and be opportunities for growth.

2.8 Conclusion of literature review

This was a narrative literature review which examined the lived experience of learning to improvise, consisting of; ontology of improvisation in music (2.4), ontology of improvisation in music therapy (2.5), teaching and learning (2.6), and special experiences (2.7). Ontology was chosen as a focus because it encompasses the nature of being (Heidegger, 2014), rather than epistemology, as the 'theory of knowledge' (Kant,

2014). This was because it was considered that an understanding of ontology in improvisation would inform an investigation into experiences of learning.

The review was undertaken through searches of relevant electronic databases, papers, books and journals using keywords and phrases. In section 2.4 three differing ontologies of improvisation in music were found in the literature: improvisation as formulaic theory (2.4.1); composition and improvisation (2.4.2); and as degrees of freedom and choice (2.4.3). Although this list is not exhaustive it demonstrates the wide variety of ways in which improvisation can be understood. This study examines the lived experience of music and music therapy students, therefore in section 2.5 literature connected to ontology of improvisation in music therapy was explored. It was found that there are also a variety of ontologies of improvisation within the profession of music therapy including: improvisation through a psychodynamic and

relational lens (Section 2.5.3, 2.5.6); creative and music-centered (Section 2.5.5) and community and cultural-centered (Section 2.5.7). This literature demonstrates that improvisation is not a fixed phenomenon but can be conceived of very differently depending on the situatedness of the musician, theoretical and ontological understanding of music, and cultural and professional contexts. This creates an important underpinning of the study, allowing for a broad ontology and definitions of improvisation, which can encompass the wide variety of experiences of the participants.

The literature review also explored teaching and learning in improvisation finding that learning can begin with childhood play with sounds (Section 2.6.1), and in adulthood take place as both formal and informal (Sections 2.6.2–2.6.6). It was found that there is an inherent tension between the learning of technical and expressive skills which can create a diversity of

approaches to teaching (Section 2.6.5). Section 2.6.7 explored Kanellopoulos's use of Bakhtin's theories with an emphasis on intersubjectivity, autonomy and responsibility gained through the learning of improvisation.

Included in sections 2.6.10–2.6.15 was a review of literature focused on teaching and learning of improvisation in music therapy. The literature demonstrated influential historical, but a small selection of approaches, from Alvin's focus on the elements of music, to Nordoff and Robbins use of the genres, styles and idioms (within a Western art music context, Section 2.6.11), and the employment of experiential learning (Section, 2.6.14). Due to the small amount of literature, an exploration of resource and textbooks was included (Section 2.6.13). The review highlighted a distinct lack of music therapy literature related to student voice and experiences of learning to improvise, with the exception of brief descriptions such

as Webster (1988). This showed that there is a need for further literature which addresses the teaching and learning of improvisation in music therapy, especially documenting student voice, and approaching improvisation from differing theoretical and cultural ontologies.

The final section of the literature review examined special experience in music and music therapy (2.7). The literature demonstrates that special experiences are an important aspect of musical experience. Special experiences, drawing on Laski (1915), Maslow (1959) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990), were found to occur in a variety of musical contexts from; first time encounters (2.7.3), performing and groups (2.7.3, 2.7.4), listening (2.7.3), and learning (2.7.5). Special experiences were found to be common in jazz performance and improvisation, especially in relation to flow, with an increased motivation to pursue a career as a musician (Hytonen, 2013). Nearly all of the literature in this

section (2.7) was set within an individualistic society context (see Glossary), only in a consideration of group flow (2.7.4, Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Sawyer, 2006; Walker 2010) was there acknowledgement that special experiences can be collective. The literature on performance and listening tended to focus on the nature of experiences themselves, and outcomes, such as development of creativity or changed world views. Within the music therapy literature (Section, 2.7.6) there was a different emphasis on intersubjectivity and relationship between self and music. This contrast highlights the different ontologies and approaches to music within the differing professions of music psychology and music therapy.

This literature review demonstrates that there is a significant gap and need for further study on the lived experience of learning to improvise. It shows that within this a consideration of differing ontologies, teaching and learning and special experience are

important aspects. The review has provided a solid grounding from which to explore the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

In this chapter I present the methodology and method of the study. Due to its being an account of the research process, it is written in the first person.

In the first half of the chapter is methodology: phenomenology (3.1–3.3), arts-based research (3.4–3.4.2), improvisation studies (3.5), interpretational phenomenological analysis–methodology (3.6) reflexivity (3.7) and hypertextuality (3.8–3.8.3). Section 2 presents methods including: primary aim (3.10), change of focus of study (3.9), research questions (3.10), sampling (3.11), methods (3.12), bracketing (3.13) and ethics (3.14).

3.1 Phenomenology as philosophy

This study investigates the lived experience of learning to improvise; therefore, the approach of phenomenology seems to be an appropriate philosophical and

methodological choice. It is based within the context of the history of phenomenological qualitative studies in music therapy. Phenomenology, and the understanding of consciousness, forms the theoretical and philosophical basis of the research. Phenomenology is a continental philosophical movement of the twentieth century, with the foundational figures of Husserl (1859–1938), Heidegger (1889–1976), Sartre (1905–1980) and Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). Husserl sought to understand human experience as a transcendental phenomenon of consciousness and intentionality. He viewed consciousness as a perception through personal inner and outer aspects of the individual, but always with an essential common essence (Husserl, 1998, 2001; Chelstrom, 2006). In contrast, Heidegger viewed phenomenology as an interpretative ontology of the study of being, with consciousness as always set-in relation to the world, about the individuals perception of the world. Employing the term ‘Dasein’, he described how an

individual can achieve fullness, but only in the context of human experiences such as death, birth and love (Heidegger, 1996, p.39).

Sartre, a contemporary of Heidegger, expanded on existentialism, understanding the self of an individual to be constructed and defined by actions, with responsibility and free will (Owlcation, 2016). Merleau-Ponty (2012a) viewed the body and senses as central to the construction of consciousness: through time; body as orientated in activity and space; and relations with self and other. The strength of phenomenology as philosophy is that these differing perceptions of understanding of consciousness allow focus on specific phenomena such as humour, happiness or grief (Wheeler, 2005). This makes phenomenology an appropriate and useful underpinning for this study, as it can inform the lived experience of learning to improvise music. Phenomenology is a preferred choice, because it allows the examination of each participant's

perception of experience, whilst also encompassing the subjective view of the researcher. This will be discussed later in Section 3.6 through interpretational phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

3.2 Phenomenology as methodology

The study is a small-scale interpretational phenomenological design, in which I attempt to make sense of the participants' perception of experience. All phenomenological studies can be considered as 'reflective phenomenology', in which the researcher uses their own experiences to understand a phenomenon. Examples of types of phenomenological studies include: 'empirical' (Moustakas, 1994, p.1), which is a combination of purely descriptive and interpretative; and 'transcendental', which is also descriptive, but aims to explore 'intuition and reflection' (Wheeler, 2005, p.323). This study draws on the theoretical bases of Giorgi (1975) and Colaizzi

(1978). Giorgi developed a stepped method for phenomenological analysis which focused on gathering rich descriptions in interviews. This was extended by Colaizzi who used member checking, returning the transcript to the participants, the purpose of which was to give opportunity for validation or ‘provide an opportunity for respondents to assess and confirm overall adequacy of ... data’ as well as generating any additional data (Bradbury–Jones et al., 2010, p.28). However, as Sandelowski (1998) highlights, there may be an inherent power dynamic where participants feel the researcher is the ‘expert’ (p.467), or participants may misremember what they have said in the interview. The issue of power–dynamics is further discussed in Section 7.6.2, when it arises within the context of the research music.

3.3 Phenomenology, music therapy and qualitative research

Phenomenology as a philosophical underpinning, methodology and method is frequently found in music therapy qualitative research (Wheeler, 2005). This is because phenomenology affords the study of lived experience which could be considered central to, and enhance, an understanding of interactions, music and process for client and therapist. Music therapy studies vary, for example: drawing on Ferrara's (1984) phenomenology of music analysis (Amir, 1990, Forinash, 2000), or Giorgi's (1975) descriptive phenomenological analysis, focused on the researcher's descriptions of phenomenon (Thompson, 2017), to the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (dos Santos, 2018). Further music therapy examples employing phenomenology include Pothoulaki et al., (2012) looking at the benefits of music therapy for cancer care patients, Grocke (1999a) who researched pivotal moments in 'Guided Imagery in Music' and Dillard

(2006) with an investigation of the experience of countertransference for music therapists. All of these studies demonstrate that there is a strong precedent for the use of phenomenology within music therapy research.

3.4 Arts-based research and performative social science

This study is situated within the practices of Arts-Based Research and Performative Arts Social Science (PASS) (Jones and Leavy, 2014). In this study, influenced by Ledger and McCaffrey (2015) I consider Arts-Based Research as an open method, which requires an additional phenomenological underpinning, in this case phenomenology. However, it is important to note that the arts in themselves can also be considered as a standalone methodology, providing a different way of knowing, including sensory, embodied and cognitive experiences (McNiff, 2008; Vieger,

without the need for reference to further philosophies or knowledge bases (McNiff, 2008; Viega, 2016).

PASS has a theoretical basis in relational aesthetics, where art is understood as a social practice which can engage audiences in active participation combined with a strong emphasis on performative aspects (Bourriaud, 2002). In recent years Jones has updated his definition of **PASS** to emphasize the ‘cross-pollination between the arts and humanities’ using the simpler title of **Performative Social Science (PSS, Jones, 2021, no page)**. Through this lens, performance is viewed as a creative form to be worked through and shared continuously with traditional (e.g., galleries) and non-traditional audiences such as in social media, Twitter and blogging.

The use of creative arts in social science and arts-based research has a history in anthropology and

sociology (Harper, 2002, 2003). *Photo elicitation* (using photographs to prompt further comments from participants) was one of the first arts media employed in qualitative interviews (Collier, 1957; Radley *et al.*, 2005). Creative arts media, such as visual arts, poetry, dance and music, can enrich qualitative research through gaining a deeper perspective of a topic (Frith *et al.*, 2005). These generate data which has rich layered meanings, touching on the emotional, social and expressive nature of humanity. The arts can be used to generate or disseminate data effectively, providing a means to communicate research findings in alternative ways to written text or spoken language. For example, Lee (2002) studied patients' medication histories, creating an exhibition of clothes made out of discarded medication. This kind of integration of creative arts into social sciences generates new possibilities for the development of qualitative research (Rouse, 2013).

3.4.1 Music and arts-based research

Music has been one of the least utilised art forms in arts-based research. The reasons for this are two fold: first, its nature is un-referential, and meaning can be subjective and allusive (Langer, 1942), and second, until recent times, meaning in music has traditionally been viewed as aesthetic, without attachment to human interaction or social experience (McClary, 2000; Daykin, 2004). However, there are a few examples of researchers who have used music. For example, Allett (2010) conducted a study with metal music fans (see Glossary) to draw out a deep expression of their experiences, finding that listening to music in interviews was a prompt for emotional, sensory and affective memories. Other studies demonstrate new creative research methods in improvisation, including Pras and Cance (2014), who examined special moments in music, inviting performers to improvise, watch back a recording and make comments, and Pras *et al.* (2015)

who explored shared understanding between improvising musicians.

Music, due to its non-referential and traditional aesthetic meanings, has been seldom used in arts-based qualitative research. However, this situation is slowly being remedied, and there is a move towards acknowledging its usefulness in understanding lived experience. The use of music improvisations combined with qualitative interviews is a method and methodology contribution made in this study.

3.4.2 Music therapy and arts-based research

In music therapy there is a rich history of using musical examples or clinical work within research studies.

However, as Austin and Forinash (2005) consider, few of these can truly be considered arts-based research, since music infrequently plays a main role as data, analysis or dissemination. However, there have been a

handful of studies which employ arts-based methods as central to the project (Austin and Forinash, 2005; Estrella and Forinash, 2007; Aldridge, 2008; Ledger and Edwards, 2011; Lindvang, 2013; McCaffrey, 2013, 2014; Vaillancourt, 2009, 2011; Beer, 2015; Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015). These are mostly music-centered, using music as the main medium; for example, Schenstead (2012) in a heuristic study focused on improvisations and reflective writing to explore her relationship to the flute; Viega (2013) developed a music-centered songwriting assessment, drawing on the hip-hop songs of adolescence, creating performance-based dissemination songs, and Gilbertson (2015) used hand casts to explore the phenomenological embodied and sensory experience of therapists' keyboard playing in music therapy (Gilbertson, 2015).

Ledger and McCaffrey (2015) state that arts-based research cannot be considered an epistemology, but it is important that the researcher should state their

theoretical and epistemological basis as well as their rationale for using the chosen arts medium.

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge (Shand, 2003), or how we know what we know, which is different to ontology, which can be considered the study of being (Heidegger, 2014). Arts-based research requires a specific rationale for how knowledge may be gained through arts processes; this is because it is difficult to make meaning explicit through the arts alone. As employed in this study, an epistemological basis such as phenomenology provides a good grounding from which to investigate the lived experience of a phenomenon (McCaffrey, 2013). Other epistemological contexts include heuristic, which focuses on in-depth reflection and examination of self in relation to the experience or art form (Mousakas, 1990), and hermeneutics (Mariña, 2005), originating within theology, where emphasis is given to a detailed analysis and interpretation of text (or art). Central to hermeneutics is a consideration of historical context of

text, culture or experience, and how this is changed or interpreted in relation to reader or researcher (Estrella and Forinash, 2007; Bleicher, 2017). A further epistemological focus used in arts-based research is constructivist in which meaning is created through previous experience and background of the researcher, combined with their cognitive responses and physical sensations together with their situatedness within society (Ledger, 2010; Ültanir, 2012). As can be seen, phenomenology is the most appropriate epistemological stance for this study, since its meaning is drawn from the lived experience of the participant, expressed in an arts-based process of improvisation combined with verbal interviews.

3.5 Improvisation studies

This project is positioned within the new discipline of *improvisation studies*, which seeks to explore improvisational processes in the arts and related

disciplines. The development of this fresh area of study has opened up new ways for music psychologists, visual artists, musicians, dancers, actors, arts therapists and social scientists to utilise creative arts research methods (Kara, 2015; Caines and Heble, 2015; Lewis and Piekut, 2016; International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, 2019). Throughout the course of this research I have been part of the UK-wide multidisciplinary group *Concurrent*, examining improvisation research across the disciplines of dance, drama, music and visual arts (The University of Edinburgh *Concurrent*, 2015). Membership of this research group has enhanced my understanding of improvisation in different modalities and given confidence in valuing the use of improvised music and drawing graphic scores as part of a qualitative research study.

3.6 Interpretational phenomenological analysis

This study employs interpretational phenomenological analysis (known as IPA; Smith *et al.*, 2009) which focuses on the lived phenomenological experience of the participant, whilst the researcher interprets the experience. Other analysis methods such as narrative inquiry were considered. However, narrative inquiry involves discovering a story, with the joint creation of meaning between researcher and participant, but does not uncover specific psychological states (Polkinghorne, 2007). I also considered *thematic analysis*, a commonly-used method in qualitative research which has been employed in music therapy; for example, Hoskyns (2013) used the six-step method of Braun and Clarke (2006). I reflected that thematic analysis might well be appropriate for this study, as it could have provided a means of pulling out small details in the data.

However, at the time of creating the design of this project Braun and Clarke considered thematic analysis to be an open method and requiring a theoretical and

methodological underpinning. It is interesting to note however that since 2019, they have changed this stance to giving the newly titled reflexive thematic analysis a phenomenological and methodological frame (Braun and Clarke, 2019). I chose IPA in 2016 because it focused on specific aspects of lived experience, was framed within phenomenology as methodology, and it could potentially uncover the complexity of the lived experience of learning to improvise.

IPA is an interpretational method, and therefore by default the researcher's feelings, emotions, experiences and lived world will be apparent, making the analysis a joint creation of the participant's and the researcher's lived world. Smith *et al.* (2009) recommend that the IPA researcher should keep 'interpretative noting' parallel to the analysis, in which they document the 'process of engaging with the transcript' (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.83). However, in consideration my impact as a

researcher upon the data I also used reflexivity as a methodology within the study.

3.7 Reflexivity as Methodology

A further methodological aspect of this study is reflexivity, defined as the researcher's awareness and acknowledgement of their experience, cultural context and impact on the study (Etherington, 2004). I distinguish the term *reflexive* from *reflective*, understanding reflexivity to be 'locating yourself in the picture' (Fook, 1999, p.11) and reflection as the process involved in reaching the location. Music therapists are required to have a good ability in reflective thinking, and this is an area in which I trained.

Through reflection and reflexivity, the researcher addresses unknown subjectivity or influences on the research. This is important when using qualitative analysis methods such as IPA (Clancy, 2013), since there needs to be a methodology which allows room for

the researcher to make explicit their responses and lived world. This also facilitates thinking around how the researcher's experience impacts or is integrated into the analysis. I kept consistent reflexive notes as part of my interpretations of the participant's lived world. Examples of these reflexive notes are documented throughout the thesis in boxes of italic text.

3.8 Hypertextuality as a methodology and method of inquiry

Hypertextuality is a central aspect of this study and is found within the meta-structures of the research design (Section 3.9), data analysis (Section 7.2), act of writing, researcher reflexivity (Section 3.7), and phenomenology of learning to improvise (Chapter 10). According to Landow (1992), Atzenbech and Nürnberg (2019), hypertextuality can be understood as a method of inquiry which enables the researcher to see patterns, managing messy structures, considering it a

type of cognitive augmentation. Whereas qualitative research is often thought about as linear, either iterative such as in thematic analysis, moving along straight lines back and forth between data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019), or employing bracketing, for example in IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2007), putting aside one data set and moving onto the next. Thinking hypertextually opens up possibilities for embracing complexities within a qualitative research study. I consider this especially the case in arts-based research where a multiplicity of ideas can be represented through a variety of different medium. Furthermore, I have been influenced by the educationalists Wiggins and McTighe (1998) who consider hypertextual thinking to be key to learning, where students ‘uncover’ (page unknown) their own content, and discover their own thoughts. Taylor and Carpenter (2005) write about this in the context of art education, that through a ‘minds-on approach’, students can learn to reflect, explore and create their

own inquiry's, this occurs in a process of, 'contemplation, reflection, reading and writing' (p.18). This idea of 'uncovering' speaks to the research process in qualitative inquiry, where the mind of the researcher, or perhaps more commonly the neurotypical mind, does not focus solely on one aspect, moving to another, but is constantly shifting around all the stages of a project in order to uncover meanings. Hypertextual thinking has been a key aspect to the method of inquiry in this project. As discussed by Ansdell (2014), and Ruud (2020) in a sociological and ecological view, music and music therapy are always lateral, made up of numerous complexities namely, the room, instruments, client and therapist, social and cultural situatedness. Similarly, I have considered the design of the research project: how the complexities of relationships between the varying aspects of the study might be thought about as a hypertext. To understand hypertextuality it is important to consider historical

and contemporary contexts, I will now expand on these in **Section 3.8.1**

3.8.1 Historical view of hypertextuality

Hypertextuality is associated with the development of computers and the *World Wide Web*. In 1965, philosopher and technologist Nelson envisioned the concept of a vast network of linked non-sequential texts stored on interrelated computers. He defined hypertextuality as:

... non-sequential writing-text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularity conceived, this is a series of text chunks, connected by links which offer the reader different pathways (Nelson, 1984, **Section 2**; out of print, cited in Ensslin, 2007, p.11).

Although a discussion of the effect of hypertextuality in new technology is beyond the remit of this thesis, it is worth briefly noting some of the historical criticism. Tuman (1992) predicted that the age of the hypertext would create a generation of readers unable to concentrate on one text at a time, and Ryan (2001) considered that content would still remain controlled by the software engineer. I believe there is some truth in these predictions, and there is evidence for the millennium generation, for example, of individuals experiencing differences in reading behaviours through the constant use of the internet (Kilian, *et al.*, 2012). However, this anxiety over the modern technological world of the hypertext does not take into account that it is actually an ancient historical and literary phenomenon.

The hypertext has always been a challenge to linear texts and ways of thinking (or even ways of being), a

space of experimentation and play. In literature, hypertextuality can historically be found in medieval poetry, where literary forms explore the combining of older texts to generate new. This process, known as ‘centonisation’ (Caldwell, 2016, p.141), was a preoccupation found not only in medieval literature but in music, where forms such as the motet (a vocal piece in two to four parts with organum and a cantus firmus line in the tenor voice, see Glossary) were compiled from sections of older works: for example, the thirteenth-century French refrain *Father Creator* or *Pater Creator Omnium*, created from previous musical material. Hypertext is also found, for example, in glossaries of the middle ages; annotations of the Bible and Jewish Talmud; and the Persian and Arab fairy tales of *Shaherezada* – in which literary devices such as several texts on a single page are employed, and the reader chooses the point of entry (Iskandarova and Allamurodova, 2018). During the Western art music Baroque period, hypertexts are found in the form of

labyrinth poetry, literary forms which embody both linear and circular movement (Doob, 1992). In nonconformist novels and experimental fiction, the hypertext evolves as the playful rearrangement of materials, with collages and visual devices, such as in the famous ground-breaking text, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) or the twentieth-century novel *Patchwork Girl* (1995) (Hawley, 2017).

3.8.2 Hypertextuality, structuralism and post-structuralism

My focus upon hypertextuality has involved the use of concepts related to structuralism and post-structuralism; this deliberation is to be found within the argument for music as data (Chapter 7) and the phenomenology of learning to improvise (Chapter 10). I will now therefore introduce some of these central concepts.

Hypertextuality has theoretical roots in structuralism and post-structuralism. Structuralism, originating with Saussure (1915, cited in Bhatt, 1988) and developed by anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss, was primarily the understanding of spoken language or linguistics formed within a system of semiotics; signs and symbols, employing the terms the *signified* (concept) and the *signifier* (sound-image). For example, *book* would be the concept, and the verbal sound attached to *book* its sound-image. Structuralism relied upon the cultural situatedness of language to give meaning, for example in Barthes (1979) *Mythologies*. Post-structuralists such as Derrida, Barthes (in his later years) and Genette (1997) argued that meaning could also be found in written forms. They explored the idea of the text not as a fixed object, but an interactional forever-changing social phenomenon, always set-in relation to other. Barthes usefully expresses this:

A work is a finished object, something computable, which can occupy a physical space ... the text is a methodological field. One cannot, therefore, countup [*sic*] texts, at least not in any regular way; all one can say is that in such-and-such a work, there is, or there isn't, some text. The work is held in the hand, the text in language (Barthes, 1981b, p.39).

In this he differentiates between the *work* and the *text*. The work is conceived of as the physical book, with a fixed meaning and presence; the text is an arena of play in which meaning ebbs and flows. The text is inherently *intertextual*, within a cultural context and literary history where meaning is co-created between the text and the reader. Barthes further explains that hypertextuality can be thought about as an extension to and external expression of intertextuality. This means that in hypertextuality the reader has their own emotional, social and cultural

leanings and physical control over the construction of the text. Thus, hypertextuality is an important aspect of post-structuralism.

3.8.3 Hypertextual design and thinking

Hypertextuality was interwoven in the design. The musical and verbal data were equally important, with a parallel process of transcription and analysis. Music analysis (see Chapter 7) was added at a later stage. Graphic scores were created from the music, and written transcripts from the words, comments on the scores were made, transcripts of interviews were member checked, and phenomenological music and IPA analysis employed. For a visualisation of this design see figure 23.

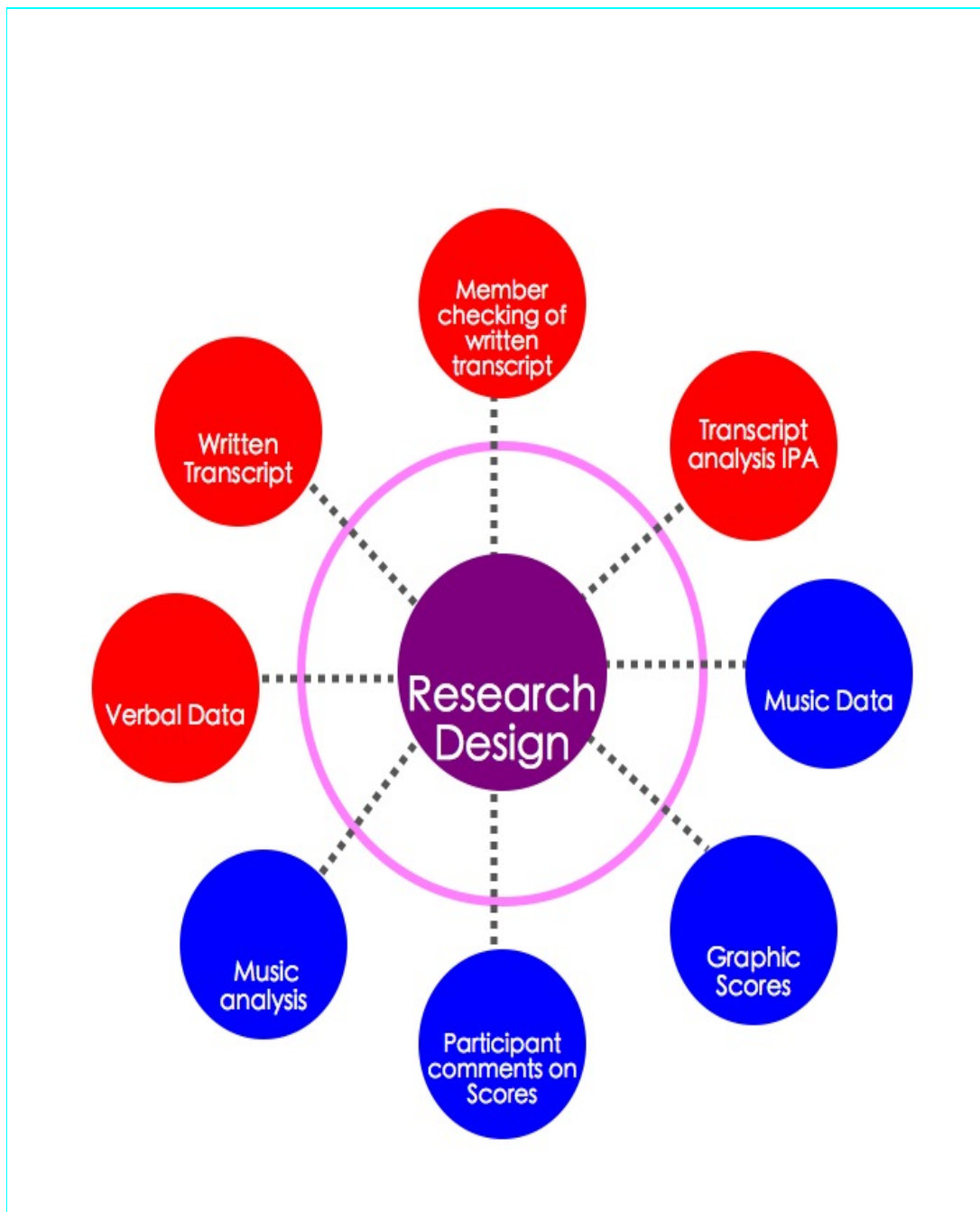


Figure 23: Hypertextual design: research design elements are shown as circles, pathways as dotted lines. Musical data is shown in blue, verbal data in red, combination of the two is purple.

As can be seen in figure 23, this design engenders hypertextual thinking. The researcher is able to think across and around nodes, for example moving from the music analysis to the transcript analysis, onto the graphic scores. This visually demonstrates how hypertextuality might be considered a way of thinking about and making an inquiry in qualitative research.

3.9 Change of focus of study

I had initially planned to investigate the nature of learning in improvised music with a focus on flow experiences (Section 1.2.2, 2.7). However, following a focused discussion at the BAMT (2016) conference in Glasgow with Berenger (2015), who had studied peak experience of free improvising musicians and my completion of Section 2.7 of the Literature Review, I moved away from the initial emphasis on flow. This was because I felt the concept was too narrow to

encompass the lived experience of learning to improvise. Berenger (2015) postulated that flow is an aspect or precursor of peak experiences, but not always present. I was further convinced by a wider reading of the literature such as Gabrielsson (2011) who gathered accounts of strong experiences in music, in which flow was not consistently present. Therefore, flow was replaced with a broader focus, using the phrase *special experience* to incorporate definitions and terminology employed historically by psychologists such as Maslow (1959) and Laski (1915) discussed in Section 2.7. The first set of research questions connected to this focus were:

What is the nature of flow experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

How do students express their experiences of flow and learning to improvise music?

These questions were later changed to relate the new research focus, see below in section 3.10.

3.10 Primary aim and research questions

The primary aim was to investigate the nature of experiences students have when they are learning to improvise music. The second set of research questions is as follows:

- 1. What is the nature of experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?*
- 2. What is the nature of special experiences that students have when they are learning to improvise music?*

The semi-structure interviews used the following two questions:

1. Can you tell me about your experiences of learning to improvise?

2. Have you had any special experiences when learning to improvise?

The questions were left deliberately open; it was my intention to begin each interview enquiring about the participants' general experience of learning and improvisation. With the second question, I asked if they could recall any special instances related to the topic. To try to avoid pre-influencing the participants (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000), I did not offer any definition of the words improvise, experience or special. Instead, I was interested in the participants' subjective responses, interpretations and their versions of narratives on the day of the interview, aiming to generate a wide range of responses to the questions. All research documents associated with the method

and design of the project can be found in Appendices A, B and C.

3.11 Sampling

Students from postgraduate music and music therapy courses were invited to take part on a first come, first served basis. Purposive sampling (Lavrakas, 2008) was used to preclude the possibility of researcher or academic staff bias in choosing participants. Ten participants were recruited in line with recommendations to keep studies small by Smith, et al. (2009) and the precedent with other similar research Rose (2017). The sampling process is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Sampling Process

<p>Step 1 – Programme leads of postgraduate courses with a strong improvisational component e mailed, asking for permission to send out open e-letter of invitation to students, e-letters sent out</p>
--

Step 2 – Student respondents e mailed, information sheet, right to withdraw, data management, consent form, and dissemination plans for data sent (see Appendices A and B)

Step 3 – Follow up e mail, arranging time and place of interview

3.12 Methods

The research methods involved in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews combined with improvisations, transcriptions, graphic scores hand drawn by the researcher in response to the music, member checking, and analysis of spoken and music data. The research methods through 9 steps are outlined in table 3.

Table 3: Methods

<p>Step 1: Reflexivity as method</p> <p>From the initial stages of the study, researcher keeps different reflexive materials: a research journal, reflexive notes taken before and after interviews, creative expressive materials made in response to the research process and research blog (Skylark arts, 2019a).</p> <p>Extracts from the reflexive materials are found in boxes of italic text throughout the body of the thesis and Appendices F and G.</p>
<p>Step 2: Verbal interviews:</p> <p>1 hour semi-structure interview, 2 questions, researcher leaves verbal space and uses language with a psychotherapeutic leaning.</p>
<p>Step 3: Improvisations:</p> <p>Participant and researcher improvise together within the interview, the participant initiates music at any</p>

time, selection of percussion, keyboards, guitars, melodica used– researcher supporting musically or leaving musical space (see Section 7.6.1 on the musical research relationship).

Step 4: Audio recordings:

ZOOM H3 / ONENOTE SOFTWARE MACBOOK

AIR– recordings stored confidentially university one drive, hard copies locked box and locked room at UWE.

Step 5: Storage:

The data stored long-term at UWE research repository. This is in accordance with university data guidelines management (UWE Bristol, 2021).

Step 6: Transcripts of interview and member checking:

Transcripts are returned to the participants for member checking (Giorgi, 1975; Colaizzi, 1978).

Participant invited to change any aspects of the

transcript or make further comments. Research makes changes.

Participants responded by either adding a small number of comments, no comments at all, or asking for omissions for further confidentiality.

Step 7: Graphic Scores and member checking:

Researcher hand-draws graphic scores in response to the improvisations (see Chapter 6 and Appendix I).

Sends recording of music and score to participant.

Participant listens to music and looks at score, adding any further comments on their experience of learning to improvise to the score.

This was intended as a transcription and interpretation of the music to create a member checking process. Although this process took place, it the drawings become a reflexive tool rather than a member checking process. For details of this see Appendix I.

Step 8: Interpretational Phenomenological

Analysis of verbal transcripts

IPA was employed with an idiographic commitment to analyse verbal transcripts (Section 3.6, Appendices D and J).

This analysis was carried out through, preliminary emersion, emergent themes and patterns in themes, looking for ‘patterns across all cases’ (Smith et al., 2009, p.101) and creating super-ordinate themes (see Appendices D and J).

Step 9: Phenomenological Music Analysis

An adapted version of Ferrara’s (1984) phenomenological music analysis was used to analyse the improvisations.

This analysis method was added at a late stage, after the completion of the IPA and graphic scores, when it was realised that a deeper analysis of the music data was required. The IPA and graphic scores alone did not give enough micro-details in relation to the participants lived experience of learning to improvise. (Chapter 7, Appendix E).

3.13 Bracketing and essence

Within this study I reflect the complexity of the participants' experience; this includes using a bracketing exercise and considering the concept of essence. As Wheeler (2005) suggests, 'bracketing and search for essence' are two main facets in phenomenological research (p.321). In bracketing, the researcher is encouraged to consider their orientation towards the subject, separating this off (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher identifies their ontological stance

and examines internal and external experiences of the subject before the research is undertaken (Gearing, 2004). However, as in all qualitative research, I consider that it is difficult to ever be truly objective, or to completely separate off the researcher's experience from that of the participants. I acknowledge that this is a weakness in the study. In addition, IPA requires that the researcher use their own interpretation in the understanding of the participants' lived experience, through a double hermeneutic. In light of this, I refer to the bracketing process as partial-bracketing. To achieve this, I have written a personal narrative describing my experiences of learning to improvise, (see Section 1.1), which was undertaken before beginning the interviews. I have also utilised reflexive writing and artistic exercises throughout the study.

The concept of the essence of a phenomenon is derived from Husserl, who saw phenomenon 'as having a

central structure or essential characteristics' (Dahlberg, 2006, p.11). Wheeler (2005) highlights that people can experience essence in different ways, but there is always a central characteristic of phenomenon which can be uncovered in research. In this study I uncover some of the features of the phenomenon of learning to improvise, but also consider that this changes within context, culture, identity, musical background or emotional response. In this I have been influenced by Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2012b) who describes changes to individual perception in the experience of looking at art. Thus, it is possible that the experience of learning to improvise will always be different for each individual, and rely on sensory, embodied and contextual responses.

3.14 Ethics

A successful application was made to the faculty of Health and Applied Sciences research ethics

committee, complying with the University of the West of England research ethics policy (see appendix 2). Data was stored in accordance with the university's research data management policy (UWE 2021a, 2021b). All obviously identifiable information was removed to prevent participants being known, this included: geographical locations, place of study, some information on instrumental preference, and some names tutors. A member checking process was undertaken to prevent the unwanted or identifiable sharing of sensitive material, for example information about participants life events. No information or data in this study was shared without the participants express informed consent. The study was low risk and did not explicitly involve participants with mental health needs or who were vulnerable or lacked capacity to consent. A risk assessment was carried out and plans put in place to minimise hazards, including equipment and instruments, unforeseen psychological damage for participants and travel and lone working for

the researcher (see risk assessment forms in appendices). Psychological risk was taken into account and each participant was made aware of the availability of counselling facilities at their institution. In addition, contact details for Professor Leslie Bunt (Director of Studies) were given to participants in case of any grievances in connection with the research. The study was not linked to student assessment.

3.15 Summary

This was a phenomenological arts-based research study (Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015). It was situated within performative arts social science (Jones and Leavy, 2014) and improvisation studies (Caines and Heble, 2015). The study utilised IPA and phenomenological music analysis (Ferrara, 1984). Interpretative phenomenology was the preferred methodology because it facilitated the understanding of a specific phenomenon in consciousness and lived experience

(Moustakas, 1994). The study was based on the theoretical member checking concepts of Giorgi (1975) and Colaizzi (1978). Reflexivity was employed to attempt to reduce researcher bias and influence (Fook, 1999). Through reflexivity the researcher's cultural and musical narratives were made explicit and considered (Chapter 1, Etherington, 2004).

The original focus of this study was flow experiences and learning improvisation (section 1.2), but after completion of the first literature review this was considered too narrow (Section 3.9, Chapter 2). It was instead changed to a broader scope of lived and special experiences in learning to improvise.

A table outlining the nine steps of the method is shown in section 3.12. The method consisted of purposive sampling with ten postgraduate music and music therapy students who took part in semi-structured interviews combined with improvisations.

Participants were recruited through speculative letters to UK HE programme leaders of post-graduate courses with a strong improvisation element. Verbal data was analysed by IPA ,followed by phenomenological music analysis for the improvisations. In this the music and verbal data were considered equal partners. Graphic scores were drawn by the researcher in response to the improvisations (Chapter 6, Appendix I). Transcripts of verbal interviews, recordings of the music and scores were sent back to participants for member checking. The ethics and data storage procedures were all carried out in line with UWE university regulations.

Dissemination has begun to take place through relevant conferences, journals and research events (Appendix H. The findings from the IPA analysis question one will now be discussed in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Interpretational Phenomenological Analysis Findings: Identity, Relationships, Emotions and Learning

In order to answer the research questions, I undertook an IPA, as outlined in Chapter 3 (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The analysis revealed four large and one smaller **SO** themes. All titles of themes are drawn from language of the participants. The four **SO** themes were as follows:

- Identity
- Relationships
- Emotions
- Learning

In addition, the smaller **SO** theme identified was entitled:

- Flow

In this chapter, I present four **SO** themes, which focus on the first research question, as follows:

What is the nature of experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

Chapter 5 focuses on the second research question, exploring IPA related to special experience and flow:

What is the nature of special experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

Chapter 5 is presented separately in order to make a distinction between the two research questions. In the three IPA findings chapters (4, 5, 6), literature is used from the first review (2). Chapter 9 is a discussion of the IPA, combined with the music analysis findings (7), material from the literature reviews (2 and 8) and any up-to-date relevant literature up to the year 2022.

Further short extracts of the IPA analysis can be found in Appendix D. This study adheres to the University of the West of England research ethics policy (UWE Bristol, 2021b, see Appendices A, B and C). In order to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, I have allocated a pseudonym for each individual. Since the profession of music therapy and the improvised music scene is relatively small in the UK (BAMT 2017; Lume 2017), to greatly reduce the possibility of personal identification I have employed random bird names. In addition, within the body of the text I have allotted colours, and all quotations and words from participants will be shown using the relevant colours. This is to give prominence to participant voice within the text, and to ease recognition of participant for the reader. The allocated pseudonyms and colours are as follows in participant order:

Dunnock – (light blue)

Linnet – (red)

Oriole – (light pink)

Bullfinch – (dark pink)

Wren – (orange)

Swallow – (blue)

Curlew – (purple)

Goldfinch – (green)

Starling – (brown)

Chaffinch – (grey)

I now present and discuss the findings of the four large SO themes: identity; relationships; emotions and learning. To give a sense of immediacy and aliveness, all the findings will be presented in the present tense.

4.1 Identity

The first SO theme is identity, including the following sub-themes shown in Figure 24.

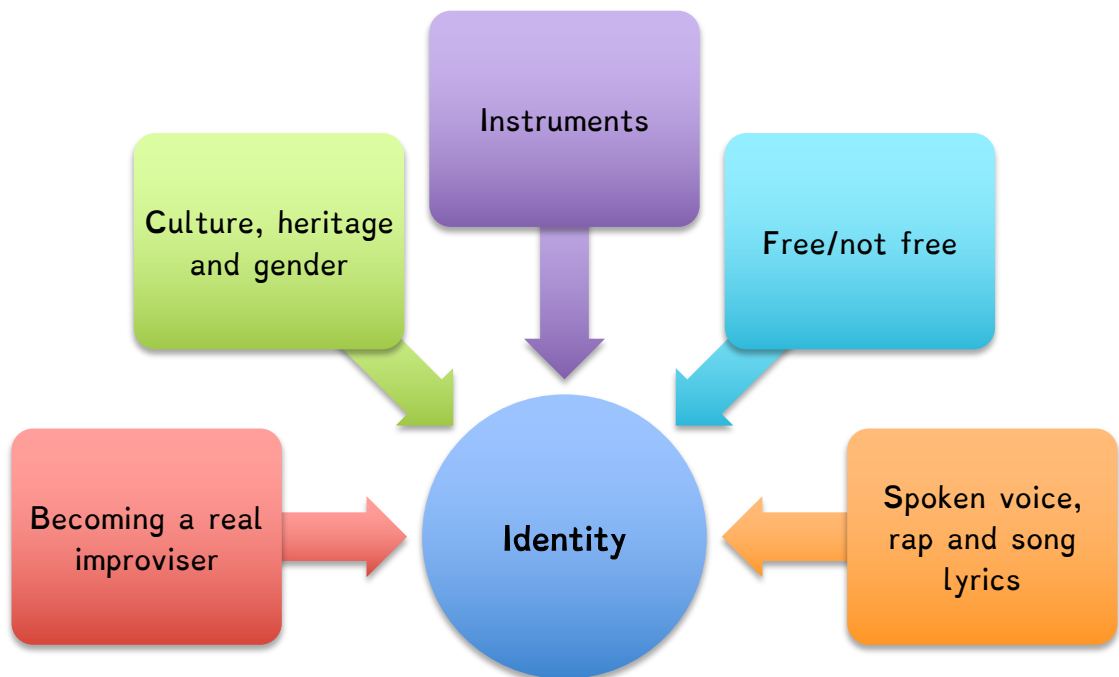


Figure 24: The SO theme of identity.

The subject of identity and musical identities (MacDonald, *et al.*, 2002) was newly generated by the IPA data analysis. This was not part of the first literature review, therefore few references to literature on identity are included in Chapter 4. To remedy this, I undertook a second review focused on

musical identities; this is presented in Chapter 8, and will be included in the discussion in Chapter 9.

4.1.1 Becoming a real improviser

The title of this sub-theme is taken from a dialogue with Chaffinch, who expresses a desire to become a real improviser. The content is drawn from Dunnock, Starling, Swallow and Chaffinch, focusing on the development of identity as improviser. This sub-theme is large; therefore, it is divided into the further five emerging themes, entitled:

Pro[claiming] identity

Identity and supportive relationships

Instrumental voice and identity

Realisation of choice

Rebellion

4.1.2 Pro[claiming] identity

Participants make public declarations of their identities as improvisers. Chaffinch comments how immediately following her very first experience of solo improvised performance she added improviser to her online Twitter identity. She states:

... I am just trying to be me, I put composer on my Twitter bio, I put improviser on my twitter bio.

(Chaffinch)

Similarly, Starling and Dunnock recount recent experiences of performing, which provide opportunities to announce identity. As peers, teachers and the audience act as witnesses to the participants' musical activities they confirm and affirm the new identities. This would suggest that both personal and public proclamations are important to becoming an improviser.

4.1.3 Identity and supportive relationships

In this sub-theme, identity is developed through the support of mentors and audience. Mentors are usually understood as older professional individuals who give guidance and advice. Ramani et al. (2009) list the qualities of an 'effective mentor as someone who has knowledge, interest in the mentee and the time and ability to listen' (p.404).

The mentor and audience are supportive, motivational, and act as witnesses, confirming the new identities. In the case of Dunnock, a jazz guitar teacher-mentor gives support in terms of focused attention and time. With this enabling relationship Dunnock is able to transition from what he terms big guy, which he states is a less confident, overweight version of himself, to jazz guy, a respected musician. The mentor plays an important role giving Dunnock focused attention and opportunities to improvise. This is different from his difficult relationship with his father, and the mentor

almost becomes an alternative father figure. In this Dunnock seeks out a non-parental adult to take on a guiding role, a normative aspect of development in adolescence (Beam et al., 2002). Later, when he has left college and is starting to perform, the audience (the people) take on a similar role, providing him space to be heard, encouragement and giving focused listening.

This suggests that supportive relationships with mentors and audience can be important in enabling growth in confidence and self-esteem helping to develop a new identity.

4.1.4 Instrumental voice and identity

Instrumental voice can be defined as an individual's unique timbre, musical choices and expression. The development of improvisation skills provides a flexible musical space in which to discover voice. In this study,

Dunnock, Starling and Chaffinch all express the desire to develop unique musical sounds. Dunnock states:

I would kind of just, want to do my own thing, like have my own kind of voice if that makes sense?

(Dunnock)

Equally, Chaffinch expresses a fervent desire to explore:

... in that sense that I am not trying to sound like anyone. I am just trying to be me and that's a shift on a personal level I think that I kind of [pause] yeah that my kind of relationship with music has changed, and my relationship with my voice, yeah has changed so it is much more, I am not trying to sound like anyone else any more. (Chaffinch)

This is strikingly similar to the account given by Webster (1988) of learning to improvise in music

therapy, where she feels she is communicating something directly about herself, with her own musical language (p.18). Thus, the development of an instrumental voice could be linked to growing identities as improvising musicians, as participants become in touch with their own unique sounds, so identities grow and become more established.

4.1.5 Realisation of choice

Vital to becoming a real improviser is realisation of choice. Starling comments:

I think recently realising ... I am not just a pianist. ... that whole aspect of your personality is like interested in trying new things and experimenting in being here and being very curious is, there is a lot of sitting in a practice room for eight hours a day, to learn the piece for the concerto that is happening in a week. And that

creates, I don't know, maybe that's how you get improvisers? (Starling)

Starling comes to a slow realisation that she doesn't want to be a classical pianist but has a strong desire to improvise. Chaffinch describes choosing not to perform the flute music of what she terms as dead white French Romantic composers, but seems to have a realisation that she can, instead, purposely perform contemporary improvised music. For these participants there almost appears to be something like a revelation, that it is possible to make the choice to become an improviser. These choices could be developmental: the recent journey from adolescence to young adulthood (Chaffinch, although older, also describes becoming an adult musician). Or alternatively, with a consideration of the historical devaluing of improvisation in Western art music (see Literature Review, Section 2), it may be a realisation that in contemporary times it is valid to

pursue a career in improvised music. This point will be explored further in the discussion in Chapter 9.

4.1.6 Rebellion

Choice can be linked to rebellion. The choice to stay away from the practice room (**Starling**), or not play the music of *dead white French composers* (**Chaffinch**) or play atonally on the lap harp (**Swallow**) may suggest rebellion against previously learnt musical techniques, genres and styles. These three participants rebel against learning and performing Western art music, but each finds vastly differing musical expressions – jazz, electronic music and free improvisation. This suggests that learning to improvise may be in some way linked to rebellion against existing forms of playing and being in music.

In the light of this it is possible to think about becoming a real improviser, as participants discover

who they really are within music: making their own choices, rebelling against previously learnt musical constructs and possibly becoming new versions themselves. Chaffinch comments:

I am just trying to be me. (Chaffinch)

The second sub-theme of culture, heritage and gender will now build upon these ideas.

4.1.7 Culture, heritage, gender

In this theme culture, heritage and gender are interwoven into music experience. This is prominent in the cases of Wren, Swallow, Starling and Chaffinch.

Starling and Chaffinch both express that they originally wanted to train as composers, but that the cultural, gendered and societal *restriction* to

women as composers (Davidson and Edgar, 2003) resulted in their decisions to work mainly in the related profession of improvised music.

Furthermore, Chaffinch, as a woman of colour, recognises that the traditional French classical flute repertoire is not of her musical heritage; thus, through rejecting it and seeking to play music with a large improvisational component, she is practising music which resonates with her culture and identity. Chaffinch comments that she would have never made it as a classical flautist, and this perhaps contains a meta-comment on the boundaries she feels a woman of colour might face in entering into the predominately white, male world of classical music. Taking on an identity as an improviser is entering a world which she perceives as having fewer boundaries, or hierarchies. This suggests that influence of culture and gender can strongly affect

the decision to the pro[claim]ing of identity as improviser.

Swallow has grown up with specific cultural norms performing in national competitions. As a child, adolescent and young adult, she has learnt the lap and concert harps, involving reading from notated music with a focus on tonality, key and pulse.

Linking to the previous theme of rebellion, Swallow describes training in improvisation in music therapy as offering her *a new way of looking at music and permission to break the rules* (Swallow). Through the teaching, she begins to discover a way out of the restrictions of traditional ways of playing. She states:

I think I've enjoyed the freedom of not having that instruction, and not just being able to just. Yeah I want to just 'rahhhh' [laughs]

there is something in me today just 'rahhhh'.

(Swallow)

Learning improvisation unearths in **Swallow** what she describes as: *a different child*, a palimpsest (see **Glossary**), in which she is both remembering herself as a sweet child and imagines herself as a rebellious child in the present. Here, **Swallow** seems to experience the past and present simultaneously. Learning improvisation provokes a transformation from timid to disobedient, affording a different way of being, or reaffirming a self-identity that was lost or never expressed.

In the case of **Chaffinch** her relation to culture, heritage and gender has some similarities; she deliberately steps away from an imposed culture of classical Western art music, to instead embrace her cultural identity and heritage in music of aural traditions. **She** describes learning religious music

through harmonium lessons at the age of four.

These lessons are focused on learning by ear and memorisation; she considers that her skill in playing by ear has its foundations in these early lessons, and improvising aids her in connecting with this past aspect of her cultural heritage.

As can be seen, the two women experience learning to improvise as a means of pushing away or reconnecting to culture, heritage and gender. The nature of improvisation (i.e., play, choice, freedom) gives them permission to explore different ways of being. In this, their culture, heritage and identity remain the same, but their experience is altered. In cultured-centered music therapy, Stige (2002) comments that music is always 'situated in cultural experience' (p.207), and that improvisation is important because it 'affords' (Gibson, 1979, p.1) many potentials for interactions between people, culture and heritage. In these cases, it seems that

Chaffinch and Swallow discover the different means of interrelating to their culture, heritage or gender. It is as if through learning improvisation they are given permission to express a different performative experience of the self.

In contrast, Wren uses improvisation to situate himself within cultures. However, he uses the word *culture* in a differing way to Swallow and Chaffinch, describing *culture* as the various arenas of music he has experienced (*first circle of culture* refers to 1980s rock power ballads). Importantly, joining differing 'musical tribes' (Tarrant, *et al.*, 2002, p.134) such as songwriting, electronic music, DJing and rapping, enables Wren to develop as an improvising musician. He learns many types of improvisation skills and continually evolves as a musician through learning in different musical context and cultures.

The findings in this theme suggest that culture, heritage and gender can influence the decision to pro[claim] identity as improviser. It also suggests that learning to improvise can afford different performative experiences of the gendered self, can help reconnect or disconnect to cultural and heritage and create a way to situate oneself within a ‘musical tribe’ (MacDonald *et al.*, 2002, p/?).

4.1.8 Instruments

The third sub-theme within the **SO** theme of identity is instruments. Participants frame their musical identities in connection with instruments; this has two emerging themes:

- Instruments form improvisation experience
- Instruments form identity.

4.1.9 Instruments form improvisation experience

The physicality and situated tradition of instruments evokes a specific phenomenological experience of music, which affects the participants' learning and execution of improvisation. Swallow's identity with, and lifelong learning on, the lap and concert harps has created deeply embedded cognitive, physical and emotional schemas.

Cognitively, her experience of music is situated within a specific UK folk tradition and Western art music. Physically, the lap harp is dominated by keys, controlled by gross hand and arm movements between strings and levers. When learning to improvise atonally, she has to find ways of altering these existing schemas, moving and thinking differently. In one instance, Swallow describes an improvisation in personal therapy when she is challenged to put the lap harp pegs in a random order. She states:

I get there's one session where I really did, where we played, erm my therapist said you know. That's lovely was that from memory? And it wasn't it was just random, and that's when she did say, just let's you know just randomly, we'll put the pegs up where ever and we'll have a go, and I really enjoyed it.

(Swallow).

Emotionally Swallow *enjoys* the experience of playing without an intentional key, finding it completely liberating:

I could just be free and not have to think musically where and what I was doing.

(Swallow)

Through learning to improvise she is breaking with previously learnt traditional instrumental schemas.

The experience of **Swallow** shows that instruments can sometimes present difficult challenges to improvising; musicians have to contend with prelearnt factors such as embodied motor skills and movement, ways of thinking, or existing (historical and contemporary) preconceptions of how an instrument is played. However, **Dunnock**, **Linnet**, **Starling** and **Chaffinch** all describe learning a new instrument in order to learn to improvise. **Dunnock** recalls learning to improvise on the jazz guitar, creating new instrumental schemas, and then very successfully transferring freshly acquired improvisational skills back to the older instrument (double bass). This demonstrates that it is possible to overcome barriers to improvising on an instrument, either through the (sometimes painful or liberating) reshaping of cognitive, physical and emotional schemas, or through the medium of learning a completely fresh instrument, in which new skills can then be generalised.

4.1.10 Instruments form identity

Dunnock frames his musical identity based on the learning of two instruments. As an adolescent, he learns the classical double bass, but this becomes associated with a negative overweight self, feelings of judgement and a difficult relationship with his father. Alternatively, learning the jazz guitar, the physicality of being overweight seems to be replaced by the embodiment of the guitar (he describes having a guitar strapped to his back). It is, perhaps, as if he exchanges the psychological defence of body weight for an instrument attached to the body, providing a new physical, as well as social, emotional and cognitive sense of identity. In this way, musical identity could be connected to the learning of instruments.

4.1.11 Free/not free

The findings in free/not free demonstrate that learning to improvise can elicit sensations of freedom and a shift away from feeling judged and restricted in music, potentially creating a new sense of identity. It is possible that the freedom occurs as a result of increased musical opportunities for autonomy and choice making. Dunnock recalls being musically judged, as a teenager, on his classical double bass playing by his father. However, this changes after taking up jazz guitar: following paternal disagreements, he would withdraw into his room and improvise; this was like he was *getting rid of shit*. The learning of a new instrument provides a relief from judgement, and accessing improvisation seems to give him a cathartic release, a way of managing the difficult emotions. Considering the overlap between two themes, this emotional aspect will be further explored in the sub-theme of *improvisation helps release emotions*, Section 4.3.1.

In addition, within the theme of free/not free there are specific experiences connected to training in music therapy. Linnet describes feeling judged by tutors but also feeling free in the experiential groups. She states:

... Yeah and our [experiential group] sessions were being filmed as well so [pause] erm. Yeah I think initially it was just, a lot of it was, my experience was consumed with, 'this isn't good enough', sort of internal voices, 'this isn't good enough'. 'What am I doing'? Feeling quite erm, what's the word, limited, or rigid? Like I was not free enough. I felt really rigid and fixed when I improvised before the course. I still felt that way whilst in my first year, but the course has definitely helped free me up and relate to music more creatively. (Linnet)

Similarly, Swallow comments that the course *helped her to lose her inhibitions*. For Dunnock, music therapy training is another *layer* to his newly found identity. With this, he emphasises that he wishes to *give away the freedom*; he expresses a desire to share the experience of freedom with music therapy clients.

Nettl (1974) considers improvisation to be about degrees of freedom for the performer, as spontaneous material is created on the ‘building blocks’ (p.13) of composed or reworked music. Freedom can similarly be found in ‘participatory discrepancies’, the very small micro decisions made by musicians in ‘beat, groove or texture and timbre’ (Keil, 1987, p.7). In the learning of improvisation, as Kanellopoulos (2011a) emphasises, drawing on the Bakhtinian concept of ‘oughtness of freedom’, there can be an increased sense of musical ‘responsibility’, combined with a new freedom to

express 'music intentions'. 'Responsibility' is felt through the need to 'keep the music going' with demands to be wholly 'present' (Kanellopoulos, 2011a, p.119). With Swallow and Linnet there is a sense of increased freedom, gaining in creativity through increased choice making. Furthermore, in the example with Dunnock, in the absence of judgement, he has the beginnings of a new experience of autonomy, with a musical accountability, and it is potentially this that creates a stronger sense of self.

4.1.12 Spoken voice, rap and song lyrics

The fifth sub-theme within identity is spoken voice, rap and song lyrics. Bullfinch describes how she generally experiences anxiety and struggles to *speak up* in groups but learning to improvise in a music therapy experiential group has given her confidence. She states:

*... it helped me like with confidence yeah,
raising my voice. (Bullfinch)*

In addition, Bullfinch recalls a turning point in a personal therapy session, where the therapist invites her to think about *speaking up* in groups:

I remember in personal therapy ... I was finding conversations difficult ... or kind of raising my voice again and being heard ... I remember my therapist related it to like, 'well think about music', because I said I find it easier to just jam with someone [laughs]. And then it just made sense. So like yeah, the kinda interactions in music help with social non-musical things. (Bullfinch)

Bullfinch finds musical jamming easier than talking, and the therapist suggests she equate talking to

improvising music. This gives her a new way of relating verbally which benefits other aspects of her life, social groups and family gatherings. Sutton (2001) suggests that improvisation, even though non-referential in nature, has much in common with verbal conversation, such as motivic material, forms of beginning and ending and turn-taking. Thus it is possible that through learning to improvise Bullfinch practises some of the skills required in verbal interaction.

Additionally, it may be possible that an increased confidence to speak in the experiential groups could be linked to identity development. The groups may have created increased opportunity for self-reflection and reflection from others, allowing Bullfinch intensified awareness of her own voice and self. This theme explores how learning to improvise can increase confidence in social

situations and the use of spoken voice, and build identity.

Wren recollects as an adolescent rapping and acting as a rap-master of ceremonies (the coordinator of a show). Rap can be understood as a form of improvised song and speech (but sometimes written) often found in the context of giving voice to marginalised peoples (Short, 2013). Wren similarly uses rap to achieve social acknowledgement; where his identity has previously been one of taking part in *destructive behaviour*, with rapping he becomes highly regarded and feels he has a voice in the community. Additionally, he experiences rap as *cathartic and healing*, and as a means of processing difficult emotions and experiences in his childhood and adolescent years. This use of rap is strongly underlined by Short (2013) who emphasises the therapeutic use of rap in music therapy, as clients have the opportunity to

share and express their stories through the medium. Thus Wren seems to experience rap as a way of developing voice and identity and as a therapeutic act.

As a young adult Wren uses improvised song lyrics as a medium for emotional support and identity development. For Wren, songs and lyric writing have been a major part of his life. He states:

... songs helped me understand myself, understand my own feelings, ... I was detached, detached as a youngster, you know, so music was the one thing that kind of kept me attached, to anything really and erm kept me attached to wanting to express myself positively, creatively, rather than destructively. (Wren)

*Then when I play a whole song and I know I
can play the whole song I am beyond playing it
I know I'm playing it to hear it to myself.*

(Wren)

He uses the creative process to find a cathartic healthy release. This suggests that in a similar way in the use of song, improvised rap lyrics can be a means to build confidence and a means of development of identity and emotional regulation.

4.1.13 Summary

In the theme of identity, participants state that becoming improvisers gives them opportunities to experiment with new ways of being and developing new identities. They engage with improvisation as a *legitimate* practice (Chaffinch), embracing mentoring relationships, developing instrumental voice and having experiences of choice and rebellion within

music. Identity and learning to improvise is linked to roles within culture and gender, formed by instrumental experience, and creates opportunities for freedom from anxiety and judgement. For one participant it opens up prospects to build confidence in use of her voice in social situations, and for another, improvisatory rapping and songwriting create a stronger sense of self.

4.2 Relationships

The second SO theme covers relationships, encompassing the sub-themes of musical connections with peers, friends and mentors, music therapy experiential groups and loss of musical relationships. See Figure 25.

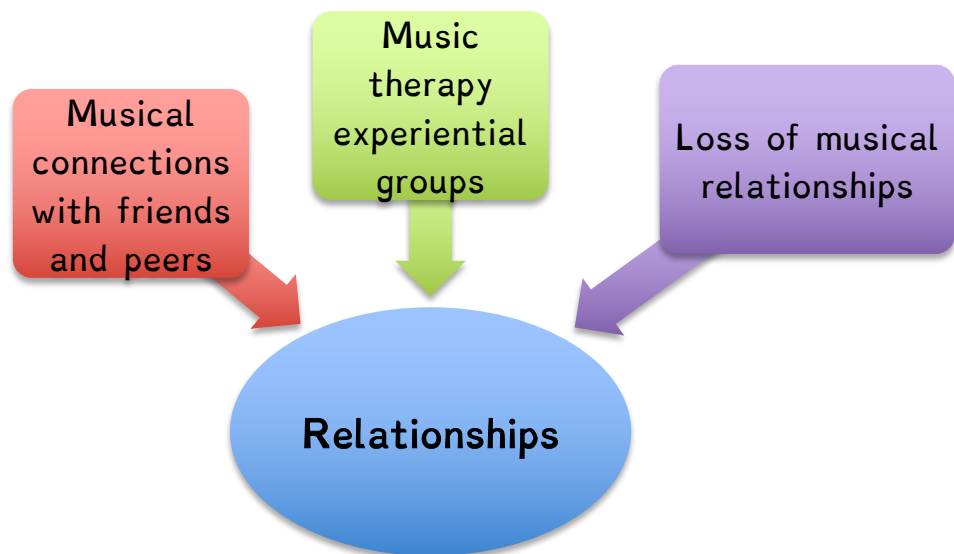


Figure 25: The SO theme of relationships.

4.2.1 Musical connections with friends and peers.

The first sub-theme of *Musical connections with friends* has some crossover with the sub-theme of *identity and supportive relationships*. However, here the emphasis is on the nature of musical connections with friends and peers, rather than identity development through mentoring relationships. Friends are understood as close associations, and peers as others at the same age and social status but not directly in relationship.

Dunnock describes differing relationships vital to his growth as an improviser, that with a close friend (who he also calls *jazz guy*) and with heavy metal musical peers (*shred head guys*). Friendships, for Curlew, are intimately interwoven with improvisation. He describes at length a group of influential, musical lifelong friends formed in adolescence. This group is tremendously important

to Curlew; it is where he first began to experiment with improvisation through informal gatherings and jam sessions. He comments:

I'd say my good friends are all people that I generally, you know really are people that I have improvised with and played with in the past. (Curlew)

These lifelong friendships, which initiate Curlew's learning and development as an improvising musician, have a quality of depth and connection.

He comments:

... and there would some people that I've played, made music with and I got a real, essence of someone I think and of their personalities. (Curlew)

The nature of improvised music and learning to improvise, which can be exposing and revealing in relationships, affords an opportunity for deep lifelong friendships to be formed. Even though Curlew comments that over the years it is difficult to sustain these relationships, this shows that improvised music making in groups can create situations in which individuals become truly vulnerable and known to one another. Curlew goes on to describe further significant peer relationship: at university he meets a pianist friend: the *amazing improviser*. This relationship too has a large impact on his development, giving him the impetus to improvise for his final exams at university.

In music therapy, relationships are central to improvisation. As discussed in the literature review (section 2.5.6), the forming of crucial early relationships is understood to be found in 'communicative musicality' and 'affect attunement' as

infant and caregiver communicate and adapt to each other through the modes of bodily movements, vocal sounds, feelings and touch (Trevarthen and Malloch, 2000, p.3). These relationships take place through ‘dynamic form’ (Pavlicevic, 1997, p. 118), or the musical interplay between people and ‘vitality affects’ (Stern, 1998, p.53).

Hytönen–Ng (2013), in a study of flow experiences in jazz musicians, found that intense experiences of ‘collectivist’ and ‘merging’ (p.64) were common amongst musicians performing jazz in small groups. Of the musicians she interviewed she states:

... the connection between performing musicians suggests an intensity seldom found in other areas of life. It surpassed normal friendships recalling relationships between lovers or family members in its closeness and intensity (Hytönen–Ng, 2013, p.65).

It is suggested that these relationships with friends, formed through improvised music making, can be considered to be of an exceptional deep connection nature. These examples strongly suggest that the relationships can be central to the learning of improvisation and can be connected to the social and personal development of the individual, as well as to the improvisational musical development.

4.2.2 Music therapy experiential groups

The second sub-theme within the SO theme of relationships is music therapy experiential groups.

Experiential groups are usually psychodynamic music groups using improvised music, designed to give students an experience of group dynamics, and reflection on how they relate in groups. Experiential

learning takes place through process, which can then become integrated into the self (Kolb, 1984; Pedersen, 2002; Prefontaine, 2006).

Linnet and Bullfinch describe learning to improvise in experiential groups on the music therapy trainings as highly exposing, anxiety provoking and uncomfortable, but also an opportunity for the development of social and communication skills.

Linnet recalls first experiences of improvising in a small experiential group, feeling overwhelmed exposed and *stripped naked*. She comments:

I was sort of starting to realise things about myself [pause] that were quite 'ohh' this is weird, and there was just something more exposing in the music than for me, than for anything else really erm. And I think particularly in those group improvisations,

there was just no way you could hide, and there were times when I thought I just want to storm out the room actually. (Linnet)

Linnet finds the group extremely uncomfortable; she literally wants to *storm out of the room*.

Importantly, during the interview she reveals she is recently bereaved, and improvising puts her too closely in touch with grief she doesn't feel safe enough to express. Additionally, she feels judged by tutors, and perhaps anxious that she is not good enough to be on the course.

In this group, Linnet experiences the improvisations as intimidating, too close and overly revealing. It is important to consider that experiential groups are training environments designed to challenge students through group dynamics and can commonly be experienced as unsettling. They take place in a formal training setting, which may add to the

feelings of pressure and discomfort. It is interesting to compare Linnet's first experience of learning to improvise in a small group to Curlew's, where improvised music was created amongst a small informal group of friends: the nature of the music remains the same, but the setting and intention behind the groups creates the difference in experience. However, despite the difficulties, Linnet still experiences improvised music as a way of creating connections with peers. After playing music in the interview, she states improvisation is:

... to have that communication with another person, it's just a form, just a form of connection. (Linnet)

Similarly, Bullfinch finds that the experiential groups are opportunities for *special connection* with others. She comments:

The improvisations that I've had in here with my class mates have been really special. In our ... group. We've had some improvisations ... just really interesting to see how something starts off with like fifteen of us in the room, and then it. There's been times where you can, I've like felt myself in that group then you also kind of link with what other people are doing. (Bullfinch)

She describes how the groups give her more confidence in social situations, and the impetus to speak and initiate in other musical settings.

Bullfinch has previously trained and worked as a band session musician, and she underlines how this requires high levels of social interaction, such as flexibility, quick 'attunement' and awareness of group dynamics, with good technical ability. During the interview she employs differing language to describe ways of relating in music. This strongly

reveals the importance of social interaction in small music groups for Bullfinch. See Table 4.

Table 4: Musical interactional language employed by Bullfinch, with my suggested interpretations drawn from music psychology literature

Feeding off – to ‘*match*’ or ‘*augment*’ a musical idea, imitating and developing (Wigram, 2004, p.83; Wilson and MacDonald, 2015, p.1034)

Adapting – changing one’s own musical idea to fit with another person or environmental situation

Locking – to fit tightly together with another’s music (a common term used to describe the interaction between bass and drum players, Pickett, quoted in Oliveros, 2004, p.58).

Linking – to fit loosely together with another’s music

Connection – a musical relationship

Jam/Jamming – spontaneous music created together in a small group jazz context.

Offering back – an exchange of musical ideas (e.g., in joint songwriting).

Making it up – to improvise

Mindset – having the mindful intention to *adapt quickly and feed off others* (i.e., the flexible skills required when working as a *session* musician).

It is interesting that the use of language employed by Bullfinch has much in common with relational approaches to improvisation. For example, the first phrase *feeding off* is suggestive of music psychologists Wilson and MacDonald's (2015) concept of 'augmenting' where a musician 'adopts

an idea from another player' and 'diverges' the sounds (p.1034); this is highly comparable to the technique of 'matching' in music therapy, improvising music which is similar to that of the client but contains some differences (my simplified paraphrase, Wigram, 2004, p.83). Further to this, it might be stimulating to undertake a future study looking at relational language used by improvising musicians, the meanings implied, and how these are different and similar across professions, potentially building upon the study by Wilson and MacDonald (2005a) which examines the use of discourse in jazz and freely improvising musicians to construct musical identities.

In summary, the experiential groups on music therapy trainings can be the very first-time students experience free improvisation. Because of the nature of improvisation (i.e., risk and choice) and setting of the groups (some psychodynamic)

they can be challenging, produce feelings of high anxiety, provoke discomfort and be experienced as overly exposing. However, in contrast, experiential groups can provide opportunities to develop and practise social skills and speaking, which can have positive repercussions for other areas of a student's life, such as family gatherings and wider musical settings.

4.2.3 Loss of musical relationships

The third sub-theme within the SO theme of relationships is loss of musical relationships. This theme demonstrates that sounds, experiences and people, the relational and temporary nature of improvisation can accentuate loss. As an adolescent, Curlew had developed intimate bonds with a group of *good friends* with whom he regularly improvised. Throughout his life, their loss is keenly felt, as the relationships are difficult to maintain;

the consequence of forming such close musical bonds is to feel their absence acutely. The instruments I bring to the interview (a large bag of percussion and an acoustic bass guitar) elicit strong feelings of loss in Curlew. The afuche cabassa reminds him of an ethnographic professor, and the bag of percussion, children he has worked with in the past; he comments that the improvisation we play together makes him feel *sad* (this is further explored in the music analysis, Section 7.4.6a). Loss of musical relationships also arises for Linnet, when a fellow student leaves the experiential group, and the group ends. Linnet experiences improvised music as *amplifying* feelings of loss. Once the group has ended, she acutely misses being in the room, the moments, the group members and making the music. These examples demonstrate that through improvised music – perhaps because of its emotional expressive nature or fragile temporality – strong bonds can be

formed. However, as a consequence, the absence of those relationships can be experienced as loss.

4.2.4 Summary

The highly interactional and intersubjective nature of improvised music can facilitate relationships.

These relationships are experienced differently depending on the context, previous experiences and perceptions of the individual. When learning to improvise, mentoring relationships are key, helping to develop both interpersonal and musical skills, confidence and self-esteem. Peer relationships can also be highly important, operating at a deep, intimate level, with potential for these to become lifelong. This support of both mentors and peers is crucial for the development of the improvising musician, both personally and musically. In some contexts, such as experiential groups on music therapy trainings, the highly interactional nature of

improvised music can be experienced as overly exposing and revealing, creating anxiety and discomfort. Alternatively, these groups can provide opportunities for the development of social skills, which can have wider implications for the social and communicative life of the student. When encountering improvised music with others for the first time, musicians can form strong intimate bonds. The consequence of these relationships, once no longer active, is that their absence can be keenly felt as loss.

4.3 Emotions

The third SO theme is emotions, encompassing the following five sub-themes shown in Figure 26:

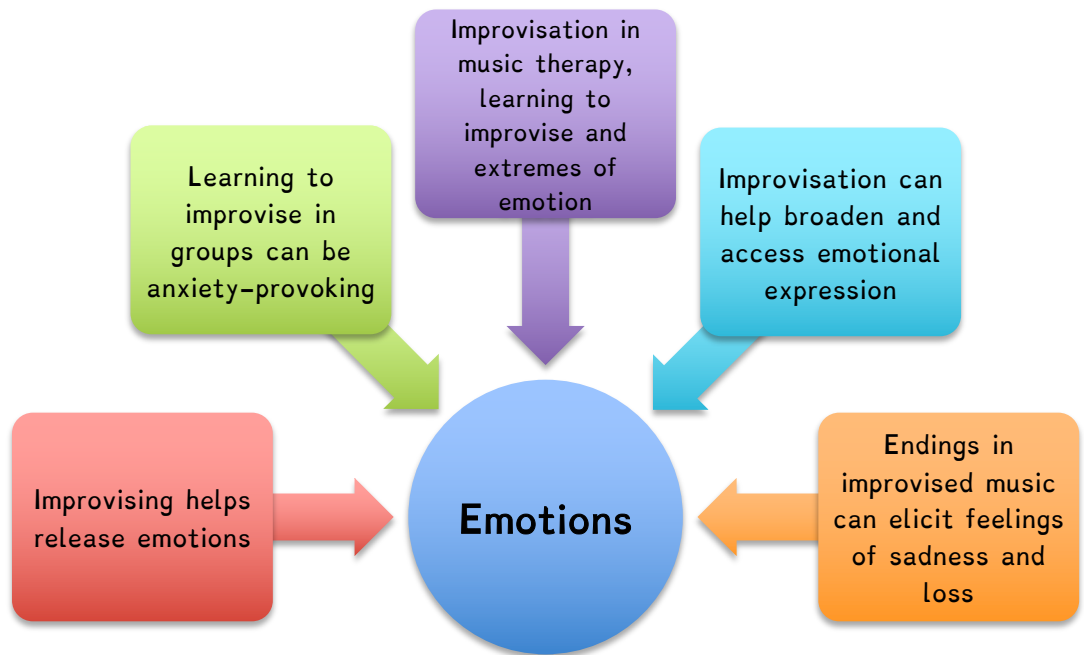


Figure 26: The SO theme of emotions.

4.3.1 Improvising helps release emotions

In this theme, improvising is understood as a means for the creation of feelings and the cathartic release of emotions, where feelings are understood as ‘sensations ‘(Juslin and Sloboda, 2001, p.27) and

emotions defined as short term intensive states (Juslin and Sloboda, 2010). As mentioned previously in the sub-theme of free/not free, Dunnock used solo guitar improvisation to get rid of emotional *shit* and *heavy bad feelings*; interestingly the word *shit* has roots in the old English, *scitan*, referring to separating from the body and to get rid of something unpleasant or unwanted (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019; this dictionary reference used to explore the origin of the word). Dunnock comments:

... I used to just go up to my room and just play like improvise, like just make up stuff using pentatonic, blues pentatonic, it's all I knew at that time so. I used to and I having therapy now, like and I've tracked this trend of you know, uncomfortable, vulnerable thing happens, go up and you know do something and

then it's kind of, whew, then it goes.

(Dunnock)

The act of improvising on the guitar provides a cathartic release of emotion. The room is important: a *safe* place; the guitar and blues pentatonic scales are his *secret thing*. Similarly, Linnet describes improvisation *as always a great release*, a way to process emotions (discussed further in the music analysis, Chapter 7, Section 7.4.3a). This suggests that, for these two individuals, learning to improvise is a direct means of cathartic expression, the creation of feelings and the release of difficult emotions.

4.3.2 Small groups, improvisation and anxiety

Learning to improvise in small groups can be anxiety provoking and exposing. As previously mentioned in the sub-theme on experiential groups, Linnet vividly

describes being highly apprehensive, commenting that relating through improvised music, rather than words, makes her feel exposed and vulnerable: she wants to run away and hide. Interestingly, this is the exact same word (*exposed*) used by Nieman to describe the experiences of his students when teaching free improvisation at the University of London (cited by Darnley-Smith, 2013), suggesting that feelings of exposure may be an inherent aspect of learning and improvisation.

Linnet further comments that the ocean drum (a small plastic drum, filled with metal beads) becomes a haven of peace in this unmasking situation: a source of comfort, and a means to express anxiety and gain emotional regulation (even though the ambient sound of the beads is hard to control). She describes looking into the drum and using it to process the difficult emotions. She states:

So I was sort of moving the drum really, the little beads inside and it was really soft, and then I just remember [pause] shaking it upside down really vigorously like, 'no but this is how it is at the moment, but I can bring it back to here', it just felt like some sort of control over my emotions. (Linnet)

It may be that the ocean drum takes on the role of a transitional object, in which objects represent the space between being alone and being with others – a kind of psychological anchor to manage the anxiety of aloneness and deal with the anxious emotions of separation from others (Winnicott, 1971). Having recently experienced bereavement, these emotions may have been very much at the surface of Linnet's experience. The intimacy of the group may have stirred these difficult emotions before she felt safe or ready to deal with them and

using the ocean drum have given her a method of channelling the grief.

Chaffinch describes a similar anxious experience in a very different musical context. As an undergraduate flautist she joined, without any previous experience of improvising, jazz ensembles at university. She describes the horror of these experiences:

And so I was in the year, sort of learning on the hoof, how to improvise with a bunch of people who been studying jazz, who got accepted onto the course as jazz musicians ... I kind of went in with jazz as a kind of half composed, half improv, there was harmony there was thinks that I could latch onto. And I think at the point in terms of what my ears were open to, I had no idea how to engage with anything more freely than that. So I was

aware of other things going on, but I very much stuck to jazz improvisation, and I was terrified. (Chaffinch)

She goes onto state:

I ran out of class once crying, because I had frozen so much, and I had real performance anxiety about improvising ... I would freeze, and I'd get really emotional, and one time I ran out of class crying over improvising.

(Chaffinch)

Joining jazz groups, she is out of her depth and so scared that she actually runs out of the room crying. Some years on, reflecting back on these experiences, she considers that as a novice improviser, she was at a distinct disadvantage; she had little knowledge of the specialised jazz

harmony and had a preference for learning aurally, rather than through notation and lead sheets.

In both of these accounts the participants had little experience of improvising. The emotions are strong, the use of the words *exposed* and *terrified* indicate feelings of extreme panic. It is possible that the emotions are associated with the fear of right or wrong, being revealed as not having the relevant technical skills or knowledge to play at the same level as others, or they could be connected to the risk of becoming emotionally vulnerable, evoked by the nature of the music (there is nowhere to hide). This suggests that improvised music in small groups can be a difficult experience, especially when first learning. Groups can potentially leave the musician exposed, revealing a lack of technical musical skills, and uncovering difficult emotions which the individual may not want to necessarily communicate to

others. Improvising in groups can quickly unmask an individual emotionally and cognitively, which can be unnerving and extremely anxiety provoking.

4.3.3 Music therapy improvisation, learning and extremes of emotion

In a sub-theme related to learning in small groups, training in improvisation in music therapy is described through a contradiction of emotions. Swallow reacts to the improvisation classes and experiential groups: they are *hell* and she has *enjoyed it*. Towards the end of the year, the improvisation assessment is described as scary. She comments:

we had clinical improvisation assessment which is quite scary at first, ... we had a camera and we had three lecturers and then we were facilitating four ... or what I can't tell you what so ever, I just crumbled, not as bad, I look back at it, but

*at the time I just wanted the ground to swallow
me up. (Swallow)*

The assessment is, in fact, so overwhelming that she is almost unable to carry on.

The experiential groups encouraged Swallow to reflect on personal responses and group dynamics (Pedersen, 2002). Connected to this, improvisation classes involve a heavy focus on relational aspects of music (Bruscia, 1987; Wigram, 2004). It is possible that the pressure of the groups creates feelings of *hell*, but conversely, the opportunity to reflect on self, to explore who she is in relation to others and to develop improvisation skills.

This shows that training in improvisation in music therapy can involve a dichotomy of emotional experience which can be potentially difficult and challenging and pleasurable.

4.3.4 Improvisation broadens emotional expression

In a further sub-theme improvisation is found to be a means of broadening emotional expression.

Starling gives a vivid account of how playing and performing notated piano music often creates tension in her hands and body, producing migraines and painful headaches. She admits that the tension is a result of a natural propensity to angry, aggressive emotional expression on the piano.

Through deliberate work on improvisation skills, she is able to *access*, explore and play with *different emotional expressions*. She states:

... that is the really cool thing about improv. That you do have to access other parts of your personality that you know, you don't use all the time ... (Starling).

Practising improvisation – learning how to musically express different emotional states – gives her a wider range of expression, and a possible means to overcome the inherent embodied tension. She deliberately practises improvising the differing emotional states, which broadens her ability to access these when playing notated music.

Additionally, the practice creates, on an embodied and sensory level, alternative ways of being emotional, which potentially elevates the angry aggressive tension she often experiences (Murphy McCaleb, 2014). It is as if through practising improvising different emotions musically, she is then able to experience these emotions.

This suggests that learning to improvise can intensify experiences of ‘vitality affects’ as previously mentioned, these are the qualities of emotions (Stern, 1998, p.53). As discussed by Pavlicevic (1997, p.118) emotion expression is located in ‘dynamic

form' (the relationship between people, or as in this case, the relationship between people and the thing) and expressed through 'vitality affects'. Thus, it seems that through learning to improvise, Starling experiences a greater access to and stronger experience of 'vitality affects' and emotions.

4.3.5 Endings in improvised music, sadness and loss

Endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of sadness and loss. Oriole comments on the ending of sounds in his experiential groups:

It's amazing how it begins, it usually goes up and peters away and eventually it finishes, and I always have very strong images at the end of often intense sadness at the end of that improvisation, it's just disappeared. Where has

*that music gone we created? It is just gone,
intense loss. (Oriole)*

Similarly, in the same context, Bullfinch states:

*... it's been really interesting seeing how
things just appear and then come into
something big and then they kinda, they always
gradually come to an end as well. (Bullfinch)*

These quotes are a commentary on the nature of improvisation: unlike pre-composed music, which is recorded or notated, improvised music is sounded, finishes and is always gone – the music cannot be repeated and is ultimately lost (unless recorded). Bullfinch merely makes an observation that the music always comes to an end. However, the extreme temporary and temporal nature of the music touches something deep within Oriole; he expresses a profundity of sadness and difficulty

with managing the complete disappearance of sounds. Improvised music can be related to and highlight the temporal capacity of life and death, with death being an ultimate ending and loss. The nature of improvised music can emphasise and be a witness to beginnings and endings, reflecting on the reality of life (Begbie, 2000). I wonder if Oriole found these endings in the group improvisations so painful because they reflected for him issues of death and loss: *the music was just gone, intense loss*. This potentially made the experiential groups a very difficult place to be and extremely challenging for Oriole.

4.3.6 Summary

Learning to improvise can engender the discovery of music for intense cathartic release and emotional expression. Improvised music can then become a psychological transitional object (Winnicott, 1971,

see Glossary), a means to manage difficult emotions associated with the anxiety of being alone and separate from others. Through improvised music, the individual can discover a way of regulating emotional experience and striving for healthy emotional states.

The overall experience of learning to play improvised music in small groups can be one of emotional extremes, terror and apprehension, as the individual is confronted (perhaps for the first time) with relating intimately through music. They may experience reflection, where their emotional life is reflected back to them in music, or be incited to reflect back to others in turn. Therefore, improvised music, by nature intensely relational (Trondalen, 2016), can make the novice improviser feel overly exposed and extremely vulnerable in small group settings. It can be difficult to hide emotional states, and if the individual is unwilling or not

ready to reveal aspects of their emotional selves to others, this can create the desire to escape the situation. Improvised music can amplify feelings, making emotions more difficult to manage and withhold.

In addition, there can be an extreme fear of being discovered as not having the correct technical skills (as in a knowledge of jazz harmony) or understanding of the rules within the musical context. This combination of emotional exposure, intensive relating and technical expertise being laid bare can create anxiety, making initial experiences of small group improvising potentially extremely difficult.

Practising different emotional states through improvising may help widen experience of emotions. The deliberate practice of different emotional presentations (such as *dolce* – sweetly, or *con brio*

– with fire) may help to develop the musician's emotional musical palate and widen their expressive ability. Conversely, it may also give the musician an experience of different ways of being (Pavlicevic, 1991, 1997). This can potentially help alleviate, through an embodied sensory experience, any emotional difficulties the musician has. It is known that emotions are often held within the body, or can present as physical symptoms (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Therefore, experiencing different emotions through the embodiment and physicality of instruments and music (fingers on the keys, vibrations of the grand piano) can potentially create a new emotional sense and help to develop new emotional experience.

Finally, endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of sadness and loss. The temporal and temporary nature of improvisation can mirror deep issues of endings in life and death. When a student

is first learning to improvise music, which has a very free structure, without notation, they may encounter these feelings of sadness and loss associated with the temporary character of the music and find these aspects emotionally difficult to process and manage.

4.4 Learning

The fourth SO theme is: learning, including the following nine sub-themes. See Figure 27:

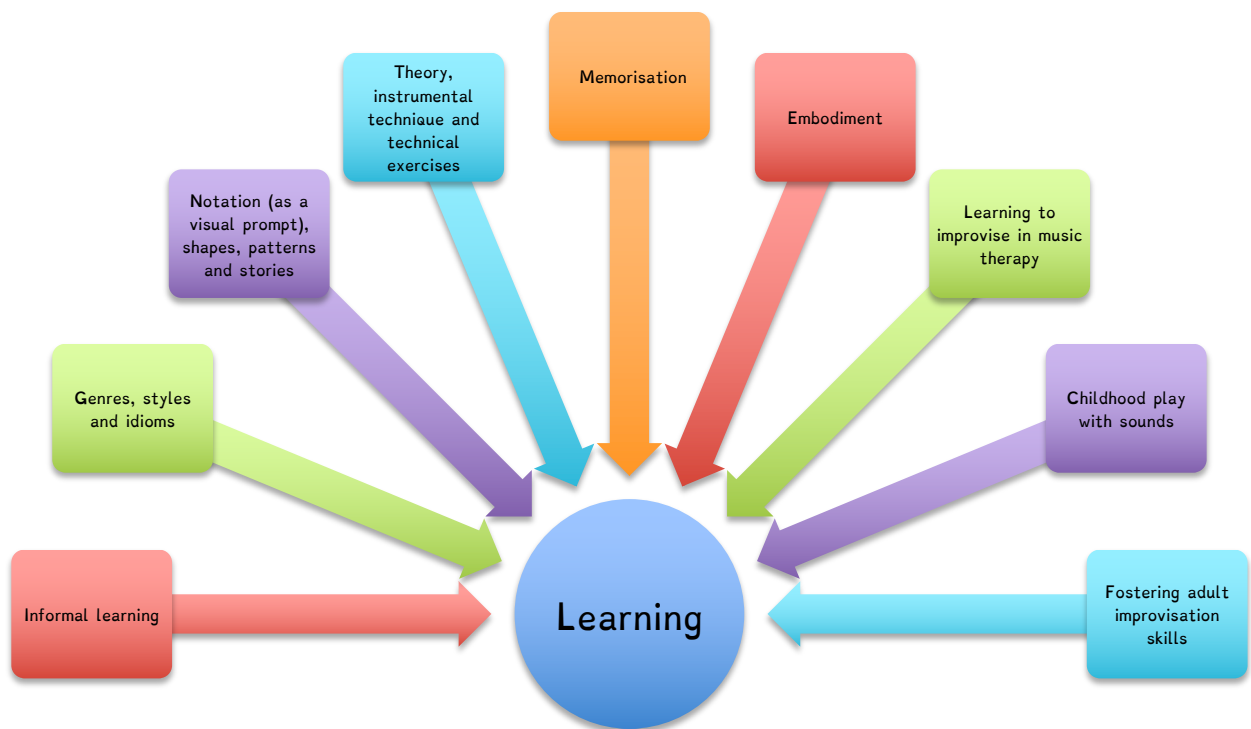


Figure 27: The SO theme of learning.

4.4.1 Informal learning

Informal learning is defined as any self-directed learning that takes place individually or with peers in any context (Folkestad, 2006; Jørgensen, 1997). In this theme, improvising with friends in homes, clubs and jam sessions provides a means of learning to improvise.

Curlew describes playing, as an adolescent, together with friends in each other's homes and the important influence this has on his development as a musician.

Goldfinch recalls learning to improvise with friends. He states:

And then I had a friend who had a house, erm, so we could just after we would play, either at school, or erm, somewhere we would just go to his house. Or we could erm, sit in the living room and you know, turn up the radio and you know, turn up the stereo and just kinda listen. (Goldfinch)

Goldfinch also learns informally by listening in jazz clubs and taking part in workshops with peers. These experiences are integral to his growth as a jazz musician, allowing him the space to freely experiment with improvisation, to experience the expertise of other musicians and to listen to a broad repertoire of experimental improvised music. This suggests that informal learning is important in improvisation.

Furthermore, jazz, free improvisers and rock musicians traditionally learn through self-direction together in communities, through activities such as jam sessions, performance or rehearsals (Green, 2002, 2008; Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996; Louth, 2006).

4.4.2 Genres, styles and idioms

In this theme, participants describe learning to improvise through specific genres, styles and idioms (see Glossary). Goldfinch trains in the complex style of bebop (see Glossary), within the jazz genre. The

training affords Goldfinch a knowledge of jazz theory and harmony, a crucial skill which he is able to transfer to freer forms of improvising. In a similar way, Starling similarly describes learning to improvise through immersing herself in the style of classical composers. She states:

So for me I am pulling technique out of pieces I like, or pieces I enjoy playing, and saying, how can I employ those techniques well? ... so I am thinking like long, beautiful arpeggios that have a melody in the centre. Ok I love that, you know, like Chopin, or whatever, how can you make that up. But don't sound like Chopin. (Starling)

Starling delves deeply into the style and idioms of classical composers, drawing on their technique, shapes and ideas in order to improvise her own sounds. This process of absorbing and adapting the knowledge of style of a particular composer – how they might

employ harmonic language, motivic development or rhythmic structures – broadens her musical expression and flexibility. It gives her an increased confidence and heightened technical ability, which she utilised she returns to play notated music. However, in contrast, Chaffinch experiences improvising through genres, styles and idioms as a barrier to improvising. She had no early opportunities to access jazz education, and therefore when asked to improvise at university she struggles without knowledge of theoretical and practical concepts.

These examples suggest that, before entering into improvising in specific genres, styles or idioms, the musician first needs to have a certain level of familiarity with the theoretical and musical knowledge associated within that arena.

4.4.3 Shapes, patterns, stories and notation

Improvisation can be learnt through visual shapes, stories, verbal prompts, musical patterns or notation.

Starling gives an account of learning to improvise with a teacher attached to an improvisation orchestra.

These orchestras, of which there are several in the UK, are large ensembles which often utilise ways of structuring music such as visual or verbal prompts, conducting or half-composed pieces. She offers:

Well yeah [teacher's name omitted] whole method is the kinda [orchestra name omitted] approach, where they write pieces basically for each other. And it is like that, and it is like a piece, like a graphic score or a text based thing, or even just verbal cues, like we are going to start with this. And so there is an idea for shape out of that kinda piece. You are working within that, and what we have to do is create our own pieces ... And you are thinking beyond yourself, or even if it is

just for you, there is a plan, that's not based on technique, it's based on structure. (Starling)

The material provides a method of structuring music and eliciting responses from the musicians. Music is created through patterns, shapes, pictures and stories, for example, a fictional story, visual prompt or score with a pattern of notes. In contrast to other methods of exploring improvising (such as genres or styles), there is much less emphasis on previous theoretical knowledge. Instead, the musician is required to learn to instinctively respond to others through physical and aural cues. This approach to improvisation learning is strongly inclusive and reminiscent of the teaching approaches in music therapy where there is a strong emphasis on relational aspects (Bruscia, 1987; Wigram, 2004; Carroll and Lefebvre, 2013). Starling emphasises:

that is what I do more with my students when I do improv, like just listen to this for fun, because

kids don't like to play all the time, so they will do like stories, or a kind of, that is actually more accessible especially to people who don't improvise, or who aren't specialists at their instrument ... yes it is less technical, and I also guess just more human. (Starling)

Furthermore, Starling states that *you have to think beyond yourself and outside the instrument, with an awareness of others* in the ensemble and of the musical material. She states that this is very different to learning theory and technique, since there is a more immediate means of self-expression and connection with others.

4.4.3a Notation

Experience of notation can influence development as an improviser. Starling comments that for many years she

was unable to read music, learning by ear and using notation as a visual guide. She states:

I always tried to hide, yeah, you know I think that is why I couldn't read, because for, I think the first fifteen years of my training my teacher didn't know, because I would, I learned by ear a lot especially if the piece was easier, and I knew you had to look at it, so I would just look at it and just play it from ear. (Starling)

Starling has difficulties with reading traditional Western notation, instead experiencing it as *shapes which guide thought*. This seems to be a visual to aural pareidolia – the process of giving meaning to random shapes and patterns. She is stimulated by the visuality of a score and breaks away from the composer's intentions, creating her own sounds. Thus, notation is a sort of visual platform from which Starling begins to explore improvising.

4.4.4 Learning improvisation through theory, instrumental technique or technical exercises

Improvisation can be learned through a focus on music theory and instrumental technique or technical exercises. Oriole recalls a jazz summer school, learning the technical skills of jazz voicings and harmony, which had lasting repercussions on his development as a swing-jazz musician. Berliner (1994) describes this sort of learning as a mastery of ‘jazz vocabulary’ (p.95) in which musicians must learn a specific set of rules in order to achieve fluency in the genre.

By contrast, Starling recounts lessons with a *yearly visiting piano improvisation teacher* who focuses on theoretical techniques to break existing rules. The methods are designed to free the student from traditional harmony and reference to genres or styles. Employing a series of strict atonal and intervallic exercises, the student practises avoiding harmonic conventions. She states:

Lot of interval work, so you can normally play minor seconds and minor thirds, when you can play larger intervals and you can play, you do chord shapes and a lot of contrast. He works with long and short notes right afterwards, so you're completely breaking up the patterns that your arms, and muscles are used to doing, which is really very rigorous and hard. (Starling)

The method here is a deliberate means of breaking up existing patterns. This is similar to the free improvisation teaching techniques employed by Nieman, who encouraged his students to avoid tonal conventions (scales, arpeggios) in order to explore atonality (Darnley-Smith, 2013). Here the musician has to go through a cognitive and embodied 'reshaping' process (term developed for this thesis, see Glossary), in which previously learnt physical schemas and ways of thinking in music theory are relearnt, acquiring new

ways of thinking and moving in relation to their instrument. Interestingly, in music therapy teaching techniques, with technical exercises such as use of intervals and one- or two-note improvisations have been used to help students break away from existing schemas. Examples of these exercises are to be found in the textbooks by Wigram (2004) and Nordoff and Robbins (2007). The use of these sorts of technical exercises and a positioning away from regular tonal patterns can be a difficult process, potentially challenging years of previously learnt physical schemas and theoretical musical constructs.

In summary, it can be seen that learning to improvise through theoretical knowledge and practice of technical exercises can be useful, helping the musician engage in a specific existing musical vocabulary (such as swing-based jazz) or creating new forms of musical theoretical patterns.

4.4.5 Memorisation

Memorisation of music can be a key skill in improvisation. Due to difficulties with reading notation, Starling develops a heightened ability to memorise music. She learns to memorise musical patterns through external associations:

... if the cat does something odd when I am learning a certain section, I seem to lock that in, and so that has always been a big part of my memorisation process. There was always this kind of combination of memory related things, or aural related things. (Starling)

This high level of skill in memorising facilitates improvising, as she is easily able to break off from the learnt material and create her own. Equally, Chaffinch links her aptitude in improvisation to memorisation, having learnt to aurally replicate music and *sing and self-accompany on the harmonium* at four years old.

The experience of **Starling** and **Chaffinch** suggests a special relationship between memorising and improvising. Memorisation indicates a strong aural ability, linking musical intention to action (the musician is able to reproduce sounds). It follows when an individual comes to improvise, they form a mental representation of an imagined musical idea, and are able to accurately enact those sounds in the physical world. This theme elicited some personal reflections see figure 28.

*I took grade two piano (aged eight) without being able to read music. I remember looking at the patterns on the keyboard when the teacher was playing and attempting to replicate them at home, often creating my own music in the process. I didn't read notation until, aged twelve, I taught myself using tutor books. The early piano lessons were fraught with anxiety of being found out or being asked to sight read. In this way **Starling's** story, reminds me of my own. I wonder*

if struggling to read notation is something that often leads musicians to explore improvisation?

Figure 28: Researcher's personal reflection on Starling's interview, 12 August 2018.

4.4.6 Embodied learning, tension and performance anxiety.

Learning improvisation is related to embodiment, defined as learning through the body and integration of physical schemas. Starling uses improvisation as a means to work through bodily tension related to performance anxiety. She experiences tension in her hands and suffers from debilitating migraines around performances. She states:

I think that I've got really small hands, and this has always been a big issue. Because I get quite tense, and the piano is all about releasing the tension because it's an extension, it is very hard to do that, because that tension release, it has

to be instantaneous, and it has to come back and forth, because you kept getting an octave run, or ... problems with locking myself, I think it's confidence issues, psychological issues, but I work through in the improv and so a lot of the techniques I look through are pieces or from teachers. It's those things that help that technique, so I can practise those. (Chaffinch)

She practises improvising on technical aspects in order to help manage bodily tension and anxiety, for example, improvising with a difficult passage provides a means to build up physical confidence in fingering and motor skills and also creates the flexibility to recover from mistakes, reducing performance anxiety (Smilde, 2009).

4.4.6a Embodied learning: moving with dancers

Chaffinch recalls her first regular performance playing flute for an improvised dance company, where she was required to take part in warm-up exercises, move with dancers, and respond musically. Through working with the dancers, she makes a strong connection between music and the body (or rediscovers an old link remembered from a previous interest in gymnastics), learning how to respond with spontaneous music to movement. She states:

I suppose there is something about moving, you kind of take the body as it is, and find your range of movement and it's about expression as well, especially in a dance context, it was about learning to express yourself through the movement of your body. And it was kind of, I suppose in a way it was learning to kind of go with the flow, but also learning how to respond to stimuli. So they'd say like, 'move like this', you know, move

like a tree or whatever, you know. So it was kind of like learning to respond to something.

She uses the phrase *take the body as it is*, suggesting freedom of movement, which further elicits an understanding of improvising and taking *music as it is*, learning how to musically respond to others. It seems that for Chaffinch this work creates a connection between movement, dance and improvising, which has an important role in her development as a musician. This strongly suggests that learning through movement and responding to others' movements can be a useful way of developing improvisation skills.

4.4.7 Music therapy improvisation and learning, challenging concepts of music and relearning skills.

Learning to improvise in music therapy can challenge existing ontologies of music. This is underlined by

Darnley-Smith (2014) who observes that music therapy students in training often have to

‘completely revise their sometimes not inconsiderable experience of what constitutes a good improvisation’ (Darnley-Smith, 2014, p.64)

Oriole discusses the challenge of breaking away from his prevailing use of jazz chord changes and playing with freer structures. His narrative focuses on this struggle: he describes wanting to seek out music therapy workshops and books which *validate* the use of chord changes in music therapy and, with an almost rebellious quality, he posits the question to me – and hypothetically to his tutors – *is jazz allowed in music therapy?* It is obvious that at this point in the course Oriole is finding it difficult to be challenged on his approach to improvising, which he admits, commenting:

It's challenging and it's upsetting sometimes and I find it quite difficult to get this feedback and reflection on what I am doing, but I am getting better with it because I am here to learn, I am here to learn, it is a very different skill set being a music therapist. (Oriole)

It is possible that Oriole feels *upset* because it is difficult to break out of known ways of playing and ontologies of music. His existing mental representations of music, embodied knowledge (Murphy McCaleb, 2014) or sense of self connected to the instrument are already deep-rooted, making it extremely hard to relearn. Oriole is challenged to think about a new ontology of improvised music, encompassing free forms, fewer structural boundaries and an emphasis on relational responses. He states:

It's actually been quite difficult to have such a, I think high level of skill, and to learn almost to

take it apart and play differently in a different way. (Oriole)

Darnley-Smith (2013) comments that music therapy presents us with differing ontologies of ‘music which are placed alongside other forms of music making’ (p.154). In psychodynamic music therapy the emphasis can be on the relational, as the therapist ‘leans-towards’ the client (Merleau Ponty 2012a, p.387, this phrase is used in Section 10.4; in music-centered music therapy there is more of an understanding of music therapy as human-centered with the therapeutic process working through the aesthetics of the music (also see Literature Review, Section 2.5.5). Both of these ontologies diverge from a performance-based practice, in which the aesthetic needs of the music may override other aspects. In this way, Oriole not only contends with freer structures of improvised music, but with new ontologies, which challenge and present him with difficulties. This is the case,

especially when having to relearn approaches to music with different structural boundaries and reshape his expressive and technical skills.

4.4.7a Music therapy improvisation, learning and transformation

Aspects of training in improvisation in music therapy can be transformational. In Curlew case, it is challenging and exposing; for the first time he improvises without focusing on groove-based music (see Glossary) and learns to respond to others through movement, role play and develop a focus on interpersonal connections. Curlew feels that this training has helped him to be loosen up in communication and be more present with others. He states:

I'd be hit by these trumpet lines and these like drums, and how to respond to that, and kind of

like, how to real really come out of myself and be really out of the comfort zone in a a lot ways in terms of not kind of retreating I think from things, like erm you know often, from interactions and being present, there erm that's one of the important things I think I learnt from the course.

(Curlew)

He speaks about the loosening of communication as having a frame in the music (e.g., song or chordal structure) which can be utilised to facilitate spontaneous sounds (described by Wigram as *frameworking*, 2004, p.118). Curlew feels that this helps him to develop a spontaneous and flexible approach to communication, which is experienced as transformative.

Oriole describes his experiences of learning improvisation in music therapy as a locus of personal growth and transformation, labelling this as *musical changing*. Oriole describes how the challenges (e.g., to

break away from chord-changes improvisation to play music with fewer boundaries) evoke a personal change. The specifics of this change are not given, since it is actually during the process of the research interview that he begins to realise the connection between musical and personal process. He states:

... And in therapy on Wednesday I was talking about all the personal challenges that are going on with my personal life and the course and my therapist said, he said, 'well in his opinion, this what I am going through now this growth is the main part of the course, the academic stuff has got to be done as well, that will be done. This is the learning, it's the change inside here and this musical changing is part of it. (Oriole)

For Oriole, the relearning of music skills, and challenges to his perception of concepts of music elicits a personal change. It may be, as with Curlew,

that the loosening of the concept of music and breaking away from the rigid form of jazz key-changes produces a transformation in personal and musical identity.

Finally, Curlew comments on learning to use improvisation to work with different client groups:

... and especially when looking back with videos we watched with clients and seeing how you are in actually in the musical interaction, why you are doing certain things and yeah, just the importance of just like offering something ... so that was another transformative experience, of music and using music, in a different way in a much different way. (Curlew)

The musical offering to clients is experienced as transformational. This may be connected to altruistic pleasure: we often derive pleasure from acts of giving

(Yalom, 2005; Gebauer *et al.*, 2008), or it could be that Curlew felt he was doing something important with his music – something with value and worth – which in turn built his own self confidence (and perhaps identity) and sense of transformation.

Overall, it can be seen that learning to improvise in music therapy can be a locus of musical and personal transformation as students engage with new concepts and ways of being in music, and a means of interacting with others through music.

4.4.7b Training and working as a music therapist and loss of creativity

Conversely, Curlew describes training (and working) as a music therapist as reducing creativity and an *inclination to play* music. He states:

I've heard that it has been difficult for people, to get back into music in a sense sometimes, or they have changed, or lost their creativity in some way and I can see that a little bit why, especially if you were working with clients and if that was once your outlet, and then you are changing to not having that as an outlet anymore and expression.

and

I think I spoke to some different music therapists about this after the course and just that their relationship with music changed and they you know whether they were less inclined to make music and play (Curlew).

Although not specifically about the improvisation training, but the course as a whole, Curlew feels that training as a music therapist can take away creativity.

His *relationship to music is changed*; where once it was an outlet for creativity, now it becomes a vocation, a means to earn a living, and this creates a tension between his own inspiration and the need to produce music for clients. Consequently, it is more difficult to relate to music as an outlet for creative or cathartic expression. There could also be potential for burnout: making music becomes arduous and a work task, rather something to be celebrated and embraced. In this, there is a clear need for music therapists to attend to self-care, including care of the musical self (Davis, 2013). It is clear that Curlew is acknowledging that there is a changed relationship to music when training as a music therapist, and this can have repercussions through a loss of desire to play. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore this area further, it is interesting that learning improvisation through music therapy training and working as a music therapist can so radically alter your relationship with music that musical desire can be lost or reduced.

4.4.8 Childhood play with sounds

Childhood play with sounds is a natural stage of development and can be thought about as an early form of improvisation (Moorhead and Pond 1941–1951; Swanwick and Tillman, 1986; Papousek, 1996; Marsh and Young, 2006). This theme strongly suggests that childhood play with sounds can have repercussions for, and influence, adulthood musical play. It can be understood as an early form of improvised musical play encompassing songs, including recreating and adapting existing songs for the purposes of play, and the use of the elements of music, such as harmony, rhythm and melody and exploration of instruments (Marsh and Young, 2006). For Wren and Chaffinch, childhood play with music is starting point which influences musical experiences throughout their lifespan. Wren recalls being given a guitar at five years old: his learning focused on performing power ballads for his mother; he realises that if he can reproduce a song, *everybody will sing along*. The motivation for learning is based on his

relationship with his mother, and connection through music – perhaps she *sang along* when he played? He also recalls playing with keyboards and glockenspiels/xylophones, attempting to pick out tunes. He states:

I was always trying to play a tune on a like a keyboard instrument, so it was for example small children's xylophones and even sort of like fisher price educational toys what with music involved in them, I would be doing some sort of tune on there, so always trying to work out a melody or a tune really to play. So it starts for me from right back then, that was kind of doing it myself.

(Wren)

Wren's childhood musical experience, at five years old, is melodically centered: picking out familiar melodies and recreating and adapting them. He reflects that using the instruments was akin to *playing with toys*: he

was *happy* when playing, especially when he got the tune *right*; he remembers feeling *entertained* by the music as it *fed back* to him. The basic materials of melody (harmony – actual or implied, rhythm, pitch) become like the child's toy, adapted and recreated in the moment to become whatever the child's imagination, autonomy and desire wishes. As Marsh and Young (2006) state, childhood play with music can be surprisingly sophisticated, as children often play with songs, sometimes through complex rhythmic patterns or melodic alterations, changing them to their own means. Wren was seeking connection with his mother through power ballads; it is possible that the songs functioned as a type of Winnicottian transitional object (1971), experienced as a bridge between himself and his mother, but also defining the boundaries between self and other. This is especially so, since as well as using the songs in relation with his mother he also explores recreating melodies in solitary play, in what might have been an individuation process of gradual separation

(but still with the emotional support and presence of the transitional songs). In adulthood, it seems significant that he turns to songwriting as a profession; the recreation of songs and melodies in childhood becomes adult play. He comments:

Big song kind of thing, theatrical, yeah these songs like, songs helped me understand myself, understand my own feelings, erm for whatever reason I was detached, detached as a youngster so music was the one thing that kind of kept me attached, to anything really and erm kept me attached to wanting to express myself positively, creatively, rather than destructively and I think I was lucky I was slightly lucky that I was intelligent and because that, because I could find something creative, instead of me being erm instead of me being not so intelligent to understand things so therefore only think things don't entertain me as much. (Wren)

It is possible to think about the songs as a lifelong transitional object. Songs become an importantly crucial anchoring in his life: a means of secure attachment, enabling self-expression, reflection and security. The songs, which had been a part of his childhood play transform into the act of songwriting as an adult; the childhood play has morphed into the adult activity.

As Wren discovers melodies, so Chaffinch explores instruments. She recalls playing with keyboards and recorders from the age of four:

I used to have a little Casio tiny one, and then slightly bigger one and then I had a big proper one... I went to Woolworths and bought a ten pence recorder ... and got her (her sister) to teach me what she was learning. So by the time I started the recorder club, I had already self taught myself. I kind of over took her, and my dad

bought me like books and a proper recorder, so I kind of like was self teaching. (Chaffinch)

Chaffinch teaches herself to play music at a very young age. She states:

I was probably reading notation by about six or seven, and I am self taught, and I remember one of the keyboards had books as well, so I remember teaching myself how to read bass clef. I was very much like I want to do this. And yeah so I would probably improvise a little bit with the recorder, just because I had something I could make noise with. And I was probably always singing songs and stuff, I was generally that kid, but with the keyboards I can notably remember, sort of just jamming along and improvising, and you know that demo button and backing tracks. I would put them on and I remember having ones I particularly liked, that I would just sort of improvise over the top

of, on the keyboard. And that was something I just did for play. (Chaffinch)

In the case of Chaffinch, the instruments do not explicitly function as transitional objects, but it is the liberty aspect of childhood play with music which permeates into adulthood. This initial period of free musical play outside of school began to change with Chaffinch as she had formal music lessons at school. The reading of notation takes over, with teacher-led and playing composed music or being in classical music groups. However, later as an adult she rediscovers the liberty of childhood play. She comments:

So, I would kind of go into my room, shut the door and that was it, play with music time. And then that just stopped, and I found it really sort of liberating to have a new instrument to kind of do that with, and even just the flute, I just found it a very liberating time recently to have that

back, and you appreciate more because you know you have far more of that play in general in younger childhood, so it is kind of reliving the liberation of it all. (Chaffinch)

Her exploration as an adult professional musician into free contemporary improvisation and the deliberate learning of new instruments (the fiddle) is linked to feelings of liberation and play as a child. Playing improvised music, as an adult, is rooted in childhood play with music. She states:

Improvisation is a ... legitimate form of music making. In a way a kind of even less play more performance, in a way the play is what got us there but, this is more than play, if you know what I mean ... the starting point was that sort of childlike play thing that exploration, but the point at which its goes somewhere and becomes

something more, I think that has been a thing for me. (Chaffinch)

The childhood play becomes *something more*, with added depth of quality – containing adult life experience, interactions, intentions, feelings, expressions and emotions. It is an act formalised through performance and validated by an audience. As Burnard suggests (2000a), children give significant meaning to music improvisation through their intention, without reference to the values of adults. Similarly, adults can construct their own meanings in improvised music, which could for example be relational, social or cultural.

Thus, we can see in both Wren and Chaffinch that childhood play with music has a direct correlation to adult improvised musical activities. Wren, after focusing on song and melody as very young child, becomes a songwriter as an adult. Chaffinch, in

improvising on the flute and keyboard, works as an improvising musician on the flute. Their adult musical activities are rooted in childhood experience.

4.4.9 Fostering adult improvisation skills

This final sub-theme in learning is taken from the discussion given by Chaffinch on how to foster improvisation skills as an adult. Her detailed comments are best summarised visually in Figure 29.



Figure 29: Comments made by Chaffinch on fostering improvisation skills as an adult.

Chaffinch describes the importance of building confidence in improvisation through on-the-job working. Performing with a community arts dance project gives her the freedom to explore melodic and technical

possibilities on the flute. This is a familiar learning route musician have traditionally taken in jazz: for example, the ethnographer Berliner (1994) explains how jazz musicians conventionally have learnt *on the job*, playing in jazz clubs and small ensembles. Chaffinch further expands that she considers key to nurturing improvisation skills as an adult the ability to take risks, push out of *comfort zones*, *nurture creativity*, utilise existing musical frameworks and learn new instruments.

Interestingly, Chaffinch comments that she has experienced two significant barriers to developing as an improviser: a lack of technical ability – which can preclude being able to express musical intention – and confidence with atonality. To overcome the technical difficulties, she practises composed notated music. The music she improvises does *not challenge her technically*, and without the external stimulus of composed music her technical ability may remain fixed.

Through exploring the music of composers such as George Hüe, Chaffinch is able to not only maintain her technical ability on the flute, but to develop it.

Curiously, it is the composed music which remains in the private practice musical space, which then enables the improvisational act and performance. She also describes struggling with atonality and striving to work towards being comfortable with this. She comments:

So, all my improvisation generally, all the stuff I played at the gig last week, was very much nice tonal consonant, there was a little bit of dissonance every now and then but it was very easy on the ear type stuff. Because I am not there yet with undoing the sort of comfort ability, I've not yet got uncomfortable with the comfort ability of. It is not so much like aurally I find it, it is trying to train my fingers to get away from it, because my fingers are not used to being, then

*again I suppose playing more contemporary music
and getting away more. (Chaffinch)*

Chaffinch appears to want to move into playing atonally, but at this present time feels it is difficult and a limitation. On the flute, through years of practice, her fine motor skills have been developed to always gravitate towards diatonic and modal patterns (e.g., scales and arpeggios) and she has a need to be able to predict and know what is coming next in the music. Her whole previous mental representation and experience of music is tonally or modally based, but she both recognises and desires the need to break out of this particular soundscape; again, pushing the boundaries of her musical improvisational experience and seeking to develop as an adult improviser. As can be seen, fostering improvisation skills as an adult is multifaceted, involving on-the-job training, nurturing creative ideas, taking risk and recognising one's limitations and seeking to overcome them.

4.9.10 Summary

The theme of learning encompasses methods of learning to improvise; learning to improvise in music therapy; childhood play with sounds and fostering improvisation skills as an adult. The summaries for these themes are shown below in Tables 5.

Table 5: Summary of methods of learning to improvise

Informal learning – improvising with friends and peers in homes, clubs and jam sessions – is important, allowing space and time for experimentation in playing and listening.

Learning through genres and styles builds repertoire, increases flexibility and technical skills and can increase confidence in playing notated music. Can act as a barrier to improvising, since you need to have a certain level of knowledge and skill in a specific genre/style before using it.

Visual shapes, patterns, stories or notation can provide prompts for improvising and encourage instinctive relational responses to others.

Learning new instrumental techniques through improvisation can involve a cognitive, embodied reshaping process which can be challenging and difficult.

Aptitude in music memorisation can enhance improvisation skills.

Learning to improvise can release bodily tension related to performance anxiety, aid the playing of notated music and help recover from performance mistakes (Smilde, 2009).

Embodied learning through moving and responding musically with dancers can help develop improvisation skills.

Summary of learning to improvise in music therapy

Can involve a difficult relearning and reshaping process, which challenges existing concepts of music and instrumental, technical and expressive skills.

Learning to improvise in music therapy, with both peers and clients, can be transformational, loosening the student's communication and prompting personal development and change.

Training and working as a music therapist can reduce creativity, where the relationship to music is changed, and it becomes a work activity rather than a locus for creative and cathartic release.

Summary of childhood play with sounds

Childhood play with sounds can have a direct correlation to, and influence on, adult play and improvisation.

Summary of fostering improvisation skills as an adult

Adult improvisation skills can be fostered through:

Workplace performance-related learning

Deliberately taking risks and stepping out of comfort zones

Nurturing creativity through utilising existing musical frames for improvisation

Learning new instruments

Lack of technical ability can act as a barrier to improvisation, restricting ability to execute musical intention and expression.

Practising challenging notated music can improve technical ability and enhance improvisation skills.

Recognising present musical limitations and having the desire to break out of those limitations, can be important to the continual development of improvisation skills.

I will now provide a brief overview of the four SO themes of identity, relationships, emotions and learning. These will then be further explored in Chapter 9, with literature, combining the findings from the data from the graphic scores, special experiences and music analysis.

4.9.11 Overview of SO theme identity

Participants describe the experience of becoming an improviser through assertively proclaiming identity, and simultaneously accepting the *name* from others, such as mentors and audience. In this way, the process of proclaiming – whether on social media, through performance or supportive relationships –

seems to reinforce and build the identity of the participants.

Also central to the process of learning and identity formation is the role of instruments and development of instrumental voice (none of the participants in this study discussed singing voice) which, although it can sometimes prove a barrier because of prelearnt musical schemas and constructs, can also create opportunities for free exploration and discovery of fresh musical expressions. Participants also discuss that the realisation of choice – and ability to rebel against traditional or previous ways of being in and playing music – helps to create a new identity: embracing novel instrumental techniques or new personal constructs of music, such as atonality or freer structural forms. These opportunities afford feelings of liberation and release, in contrast to judgement and restriction previously experienced by some

individuals in music education. For one participant in particular, learning to improvise creates an increased sense of self and confidence in use of physical voice and courage in social situations. Finally, the identity of improviser was influenced by restrictions and experiences of culture, heritage or gender. Participants either used improvisation as a pathway to breaking out of existing forms of musical cultures and traditional gendered dialogues, or utilised improvisation to embrace ‘musical tribes’ (Tarrant, *et al.*, 2002, p.134). Overall, this demonstrates that the IPA findings make a convincing connection between the learning of improvisation and development of new identity.

4.9.12 Overview of SO theme relationships

The findings show that relationships can play a central role in the learning of improvisation. Participants create musical connections with friends, peers, mentors

and audiences, who give vital focused attention, listening, reflection and feedback. This has some similarity with the theme of *identity and supportive relationships*, where other people provide support and motivation in helping the participant to form an identity of improviser. However, in the **SO** theme of relationships, the emphasis is on personal interaction as a facilitating anchor, enabling the participants' continued growth socially and musically. Some of the peer relationships, especially ones formed in small improvisation groups, provide opportunities for developing confidence in social interaction and take on the shape of lifelong and deeply held bonds. However, the findings show that these special connections, once no longer active (or being hard to maintain) can be experienced as painful loss. This could even be considered a type of 'ambiguous loss', where the person is still psychologically present for the individual, but maybe physically absent (Boss 2010). This is the case especially for **Curlew**, where the close

friendships formed through jam sessions in adolescence are no longer active, but there is possibility of having further contact with those friends in the future.

Furthermore, relationships first formed in small-group improvising can be experienced as overly revealing and exposing, as in the example of the music therapy experiential groups.

The findings in this theme demonstrate that supportive relationships can be crucial and sometimes lifelong, but these relationships can also be experienced as uncomfortably unmasking, and when no longer functioning can be experienced as a type of loss. This will be further explored in the discussion in Chapter 9.

4.9.13 Overview of SO theme emotions

The findings show that learning to improvise can elicit extremes of emotions. As mentioned in the dialogue on relationships (Section 4.2), improvising music in small

groups for the first time can potentially be terrifying, as individuals feel highly anxious about having the right level of technical music skills and feel wide open in emotional and relational terms. It may be that the participant is not ready or willing to reveal their inner emotional life to the others, and is uncomfortable and unfamiliar with intimately relating through music. This can make initial experiences difficult to manage.

Learning to improvise can also connect individuals to emotions in new ways, with them experiencing cathartic release, deep connection to music, or broadening of emotional experience through the deliberate practice of expression. Within this, it follows that improvised music can therefore potentially amplify experience of loss, especially because of its natural temporal and temporary nature; it always ends in some way and is always gone. Some participants express that learning to improvise has also given them an acute sense of loss of music and sounds, something which they had

not experienced to a great extent in pre-composed and notated music.

Overall, the theme of emotions suggests an intertwining of emotional awareness, amplification of feelings, experiences of loss and increased expression through learning to improvise.

4.9.14 Overview of SO theme learning

In this theme I have divided the sub-themes differing areas of learning. These are: embodied learning, music therapy training, childhood play with sounds and fostering adult improvisation skills. The findings highlight that improvisation can be learnt through many different approaches according to the setting and preference of the individual. Participants describe learning to improvise through modes such as genres and styles, memorisation, technique and informal small jam groups. All of these ways of learning are emphasised

as valid and useful, and the variety given by the participants is a testament to the breadth of learning modes found in improvisation.

Also included within this theme is embodied learning, encompassing two aspects: the use of improvisation to relieve tension and performance anxiety, and learning to improvise with dancers. Smilde (2009), in a study on musicians as lifelong learners, has already shown that learning improvisation skills can be key to overcoming performance anxiety, experienced as bodily tension, especially in classical musicians. The findings here seem to confirm this, and acknowledge that the pressure and related anxiety of making mistakes in notated performance can be greatly reduced if a musician is able to easily recover through improvisation. Secondly, the findings show that the experience of moving with dancers (with and without sounding instruments) can enhance improvisation skills. There seem to be two mechanisms at work here:

Chaffinch absorbs the gestural–movement communication from the dancers into her own body and translates this into sounds. Secondly this process enables Chaffinch to learn to intimately respond to others across art forms. This is not surprising, since music performance has been shown to encompass embodied knowledge – including gestures and dancing – and ensembles of musicians, especially chamber, can often be observed moving together, synchronised in time (Murphy McCaleb, 2014). This finding hints at a wider knowledge that improvised music may be a natural arena which brings together the mind and body, challenging the Cartesian split (Love, 2003): an idea first posited in the Literature Review (2.4), and explored further in Chapter 9.

A further domain presented in the theme of learning is music therapy training. The findings propose that learning to improvise in music therapy can involve a process of transformation. This can potentially be a

difficult and painful experience, as participants describe having to relearn music skills, or to have their existing skills and concepts of music challenged.

However, through this reshaping, participants develop a *loosening of communication* (Curlew), in which

flexibility, adaptability and musical responsiveness to others is greatly increased. Trondalen (2016) describes transformative moments in music therapy, in which the therapist is required to continually adapt and respond to a client's sounds, movements and ways of being.

This focus on cognitive and intuitive knowledge, combined with micro-adaption and flexibility, may be one of the key skills for the improvising music therapist, and therefore an important learning process for the music therapy student.

In the emerging themes of childhood play with sounds and the fostering of adult improvisation skills, two participants strongly relate their voyages into childhood play with sounds to present choice of

musical vocations. It is clear that there is a strong connection between play with music as children and adult musical expressions.

The final mode in the theme of learning is the practical consideration of fostering adult improvisation skills.

Chaffinch gives a comprehensive account of her continued learning as an adult, encompassing work-based learning, nurturing creativity and acknowledging personal barriers to improvising (such as the need to improve motor skills).

Overall, the theme of learning is rich, giving a vivid picture of different learning domains and modes of learning in improvisation, from learning informally, using pictures and stories as prompts, learning through genres and styles, training in music therapy and improvisation, childhood play with sounds and fostering skills as an adult.

Summary thoughts IPA analysis: Themes of identity, relationships, emotions and learning.

The IPA analysis revealed a complex and nuanced portrayal of the lived experience of learning to improvise, ranging from changes to identity, the importance of – and building of – relationships, extremes of emotions and key factors involved in learning acquisition. I will now present and discuss, in Chapter 5, findings in relation to special experiences, including the fifth SO theme of flow, focusing on the second research question. This will be followed by a presentation and discussion on findings in the graphic scores (Chapter 6) and music analysis (Chapter 7).

Chapter 5: IPA Findings, Special and Long-term Significant Experiences

In this chapter I present the IPA findings on the second research question exploring special experiences in learning to improvise. The study of special experiences has origins in early twentieth-century psychology, linked to unique experiences within religion (James, 1902; Leuba, 1924). During the mid to late twentieth century, as the discipline of psychology grew, it was found that special experiences are more widely spread than previously understood and linked to common phenomena such as listening to classical music, sex, childbirth, falling in love, reading and viewing artworks (Laski, 1915; Maslow, 1959, 1962, 1968, 1971). The qualities of special experiences are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6: Qualities of special experiences (Laski, 1915, Maslow, 1959)

Feelings of loss and gain
Ineffability
Bodily reactions
Changed views
Withdrawal of sensory perceptions
Moments of intense focus
Euphoric emotional reactions
Being absorbed in the moment
Absence of negative feelings
Clarity of cognition
Growth
Creativity
Stronger sense of self

This study employs the term ‘special experiences’ drawing on Grocke’s (1999a, 1999b) definition of ‘pivotal experience’ as ‘emotional and embodied’ (p.2) combined with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) flow theories

which involve ‘fulfilment of established goals’ (p.33) through total absorption in the moment. Historically, psychologists have used many differing labels for special experience; this may be due to changing definitions and language usage; for example, Laski (1915, p.37) employed the term ‘ecstatic’ which although a common term for emotional experience has connotations with drug-use and so has fallen out of favour within psychological professions. Other terms include Maslow’s ‘peak’ (1959, p.43), Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988, p.15) ‘flow’, musicians’ conversational language such as ‘the groove, magic moment or oceanic feelings’ (Hytönen–Ng, 2013, p.2) and musicologist Gabrielsson’s (2011) ‘strong’ (p.27).

The second research question was as follows:

What is the nature of special experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

Three types of participant response were given to the second research question; specific incidences, long term experiences and no response, see table 7:

Table 7: Participants' overall responses to graphic scores

Response A: Five participants recalled specific incidences of special experience (Dunnock, Bullfinch, Wren, Swallow, Chaffinch).
Response B: Three (Linnet, Oriole and Curlew) gave long-term descriptions of periods in their learning which they felt were important. These were labelled <i>long-term significant experiences</i> because they did not relate to specific occasions; this is in accordance with Maslow (1959) and Laski (1915) who define special experiences as <i>precise</i> happenings of phenomena such as sex or childbirth which have long-lasting effects.

Response C: Two (Goldfinch and Starling) stated they had no special or long-term significant experiences at all.

The SO themes of identity, relationships and emotions were present, with an additional SO theme of flow.

The theme of flow (Linnet and Wren) was small; however, it was included it since the flow experiences were differentiated in content.

The transcriptions of special experiences were part of the original interviews. These were subject IPA analysis process (described in Section 3.15 and Appendix J), with some crossover of themes. All accounts of special experience are written in the present tense to give a sense of immediacy and reality. The themes of flow (5.1), flow as spiritual and magical (5.1.1, 5.1.2), flow and group connection (5.1.3), changed sense of time (5.1.4), aspects of flow states can be induced by specific instruments (5.1.5) are now

presented, including reference to the literature in
Section 2.7.

5.1 Flow

The IPA revealed the **SO** theme of flow. This is shown in Figure 30 with accompanying sub-themes:

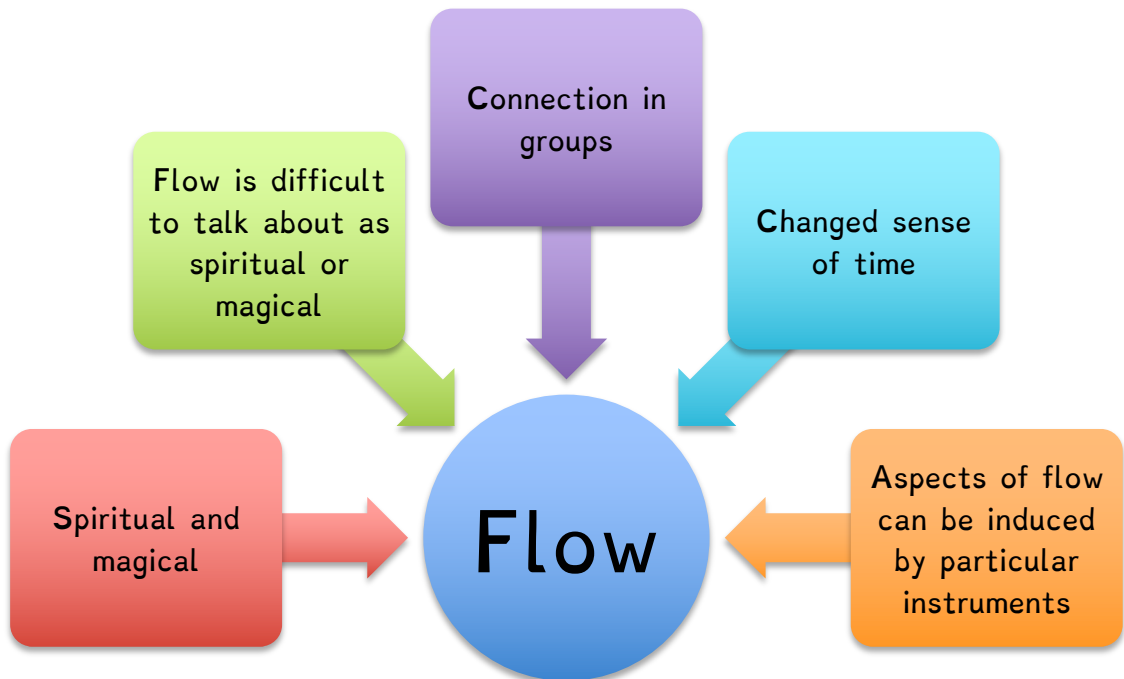


Figure 30: The SO theme of flow.

Flow can be understood as a specific psychological state and an aspect of special experience (see Section 2.7.2). It is important to reiterate that flow is differentiated from special experience. Special experience is understood as an overall concept similar to Maslow's (1968) theory of peak experience, when

specific occasions occur with potential for changed views, growth and creativity. Flow (as defined by Capon, 2013 and Berenger, 2015) is an aspect of special experience, linked to optimal learning and challenge, a changed sense of time and feelings of euphoria. The literature in Section 2.7.2 suggests that flow is not essential to special experience. The theme of flow occurs with two participants, Linnet and Wren. However, despite being a small theme, the experiences are prominent with a lexicon related to flow in literature.

Linnet describes improvising in music therapy experiential groups as taking her to *another world*, as *magical* and *spiritual*, giving a sense of being on another *level of consciousness*. Wren offers a very similar experience, this time in a specific jamming/songwriting group; he suddenly has the impression of *infinite stillness* and synchronicity. He states that this experience is *flow*, *magical*, *deep* and

physical. These descriptions seem to be flow experiences as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1991). The language used is highly reminiscent of other accounts of musicians in describing flow, such as ‘being in the groove, magic moments or oceanic feelings’ (Hytönen–Ng, 2013, p.2). I will now discuss the sub-themes of flow in Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.5.

5.1.1 Flow as spiritual or magical

Linnet and Wren refer to the flow experiences as spiritual or magical. Linnet comments:

... I felt kind of spiritual when I was improvising sometimes, yeah. It just sort of took me to another, sort of level or world, I don't know. It just, that's my strong feeling I sometimes get when I'm improvising. (Linnet)

Wren uses the phrase:

... this is just magic right this moment. (Wren)

The study of special experience originates at the turn of the twentieth century with religious experience, where individuals had spiritual encounters, speaking in tongues, falling to the ground or seeing visions (James, 1902; Leuba, 1924). Even with the mid-twentieth-century psychological emphasis on special experience linked to common occurrences such as listening to classical music, sex or childbirth (Laski, 1915), the magical and spiritual descriptions of special experience and flow have continued to persist to the present day. In Hytönen–Ng’s (2013) study of jazz performance, musicians describe experiences as connected to ‘religious and spiritual’, ‘mystical’ and ‘automatic’ or of ‘acting as channelling a universal music’ (p.77). She observes that this dialogue tends to be elicited by pre-existing world views or religious beliefs. However, she also notes that some other individuals have a ‘rational or ambiguous attitude’ (Hytönen–Ng’s, 2013,

p.77) explaining flow as an ordinary human psychological phenomenon.

It could be that for Linnet and Wren the idea of the spiritual or unconscious evolves from their existing world views or religious beliefs. For example, Linnet's comment that improvising takes her to a *different level of consciousness* may be related to training in psychodynamic music therapy, and the understanding that improvisation can help access the unconscious mind (Priestley, 1994). However, this is not to denigrate the validity of flow or special experiences as spiritual, mystical or magical. For example, in transpersonal psychology strong links are made between the unconscious and spiritual. Assagioli (2012), a contemporary of Freud, considered spirituality to be an aspect of the self, which through experiential practices such as meditation, could be integrated into a whole self or self-actualisation achieved (see peak experience Glossary). Jung (1968) also considered

spirituality to be a key aspect of the self, understanding it to be held within the archetypes of collective consciousness (universal patterns of human thought and behaviour) and unconscious states. Jung viewed spirituality as being accessed through creative activities, analysis or symbolic imagery (Rosselli and Vanni, 2014). Some contemporary therapists and philosophers hold transpersonal views: Rowan (2005) connects to spirituality in psychotherapy, linking to archetypes and peak experiences, and Wilber (2007) has developed an integrative model of psychology, in which spirituality is understood as an imperative aspect of humanity found across cultures. In musicology, the study of the musical and spiritual is increasingly acknowledged as a significant aspect of experience. For example, Atkins and Emery (2014) suggest that the elements of music 'can give rise to the expression of spirituality' and there may be a common form in musical spiritual experience consisting of 'overtaking – losing track of time and transformations' (p.9).

5.1.2 Flow is difficult to talk about as spiritual or magical

Linnet found it difficult to talk about her flow experiences as spiritual. She comments:

It feels silly to say it ... I felt kind of spiritual when I was improvising sometimes. (Linnet)

She perhaps feels embarrassment or is anxious that she will be judged as *silly*. The reasons could be complex; it may be a personal worry or unfamiliarity with discussing spirituality. However, it may also be to do with training as a music therapist. Even though the profession of music therapy has some origins in spirituality – Nordoff and Robbins's (2007) roots in anthroposophy, or Alvin's (1966) reference to music, and the biblical story of Saul and David (1 Samuel 9–31), there has historically been some reluctance to speak openly about spiritual experiences connected to music. Especially in a psychoanalytic approach, the

spirituality of the therapist has in the past been considered to be a private and personal matter, which could unduly influence the client (Streeter, 1999a, 1999b). This has been compounded in the UK by the need to legitimise music therapy as a profession and registration with the Health and Care Professions Council in 1999 (BAMT, 2020). As part of this process music therapists sometimes aligned with a medical model, prevalent at the time, where spirituality was not regarded as an appropriate subject matter for discussion in the workplace. This attitude to spirituality (in 2020) is currently changing, and many professions are now recognising the validity of spirituality in health, including in music therapy (British Society for Music therapy, 2002; Culliford, 2002; Ansdell, 2005). However, in the year of the research interview (2016) Linnet still finds it difficult to talk about spiritual experiences in music therapy; the reasons for this are explored further explored in Section 9.5.5.

5.1.3 Flow and group connection

Wren describes *something synchronitic* occurring between the musicians during the jamming/songwriting session, as if there is a deep sense of connection. He comments:

... wow, this really works right now, I've just acknowledged you playing that, I've just acknowledged you playing those drums, I this is just this is just magic right this moment ... something synchronitic. (Wren)

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) after observing people at a rock concert extended his original individualistic theory of flow to include 'social flow' (p.42), where groups can experience ecstatic states together in activities such as sports and the arts. The conditions for social flow include jointly recognised goals; equal skill between members; challenge; focused attention with a high level of intersubjectivity; co-operation and task

focused (Sawyer, 2006, 2015). Other studies have found evidence of social flow in groups and music, including Neuser (2015) through group vocal improvisation, and Hytönen–Ng (2013) where flow was found to be important to performance interaction for jazz musicians. Furthermore, in collectivist societies (see Glossary), there can be an emphasis on group flow for performance success, such as in the music of the Iranian radif (Racy, 1998) or flamenco of Southern Spain (Matteucci, 2013). Thus, it seems that Wren and his fellow songwriters/jammers experienced a social flow, where there was intense group co-operation, a joint acknowledgement, an equal level of skill and challenge, with a keen sense of interpersonal connectedness.

5.1.4 Changed sense of time

In addition to deep personal connections Wren notes that he felt an *infinite stillness* during the jam session. He states:

It was just a moment of like infinite stillness, you know I was just like looking around everyone and it was just a moment ... (Wren)

A sense of time standing still is common to flow experience. Gabrielsson (2011) in a study of 965 people who had strong experiences in music (including flow), 35 per cent reported sensations of the loss of time. Wren experiences what could be understood as a *Kairos* or *Kairotic* sensation of time, time perceived as subjective and out of linear clock order (as opposed to *chronos*) (Begbie, 2000). This links with Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) theory of flow where music is said to have the capacity to change our relationship to time. Bunt and Stige (2014) comment that music

‘creates shifts in perceptions of time’ (p.67); and Ansdell (2014) further suggests kairos is:

subjective, nonlinear, episodic and opportunistic – gathering our subjective experience into a richly textured point. Sacred, mystical, ethical and aesthetic experiences all need Kairos’s help (Ansdell, 2014, p.282).

The theologian Begbie (2000) suggests music gives us an experience of temporal structure and of our ‘own time-embeddedness’ (p.31) on both a linear level – through Chronos time, and within Kairos, where time is not sensed in a sequential balanced order. Thus, in flow, Wren experiences a changed sense of time standing still and being caught in the moment.

5.1.5 Aspects of flow states can be induced by specific instruments

In this final sub-theme, Linnet describes using the ocean drum to *zone out*. This psychological state could be interpreted as an aspect of flow, and understood as a type of dissociation, described as losing attention to the moment, environment or self (Schooler, *et al.*, 2004). Linnet comments:

I sometimes would sort of find myself, I think particularly with the ocean drum. Really getting sort of in my own world with the ocean drum, like just almost sort of zoning out from everything that's going on around me ... (Linnet)

The ocean drum is a small hollow plastic or leather transparent drum, sometimes with pictures of fish inside, filled with metal ball bearings; it creates an ocean or crashing wave sound as the instrument is moved from side to side or shaken. The visual

movement of the ball bearings combined with the vibrations felt through the hands and ocean-like timbre is typically perceived as soothing and relaxing.

Linnet describes being in experiential groups and *zoning out* with the ocean drum, losing concentration and connection with self, others and environment. The meaning of this is ambiguous; it could either be understood as a means of withdrawing from her environment, using the ocean drum for emotional regulation and management of difficult emotions, or alternatively it could be seen as an experience similar to flow, with the loss of time and connection with the outside world. However, it lacks the intense focus, optimal learning or strong feelings which are usually present in flow. This poses the question: are there some instruments which are more conducive to flow than others? Does the materiality of a particular instrument, such as the mesmerising movement of the ball bearings inside the ocean drum, invite aspects of

flow experience? This would be an interesting area of research for further study (see Section 11.15).

The findings suggest that flow may have been commonly linked to spiritual or magical experiences. It is strongly associated with group experience and changed perception of time, with some specific instruments potentially eliciting flow experience. I will now discuss the accounts of special experiences offered by the participants.

5.2 Introduction to special experiences

I will now present the **SO** themes of identity, relationships and emotions as found in the special experiences of **Dunnock, Bullfinch, Wren, Swallow and Chaffinch**. There is some crossover noted between themes since they occur in the same temporal space. **Special experiences** are defined as specific moments in

time, where there are common sensations (Laski, 1915; Maslow, 1959). Long-term significant experiences are examined separately in Section 5.3.

5.2.1 Special experiences and identity

The SO theme of identity was found in the special experiences of Dunnock, Swallow and Chaffinch.

Dunnock vividly recalls his first improvised performance. He is overcome with anxiety, but this, in response to positive audience feedback, develops into confidence. He comments:

... and then the next thing was an improvisation, like a blues improvisation. I was like, 'ah that's fine you know'. There is going to be no judgement I can just do what I want ... I can do whatever, it's my thing yeah' and that was good, and people came up to me and sort of said like, 'ah that's sounding really good, clapping' and I was like,

'yesss- fantastic.' I just felt really yeah, positive, difficult and positive. (Dunnock)

Dunnock experiences an initial challenge, anxiety over judgement, followed by increased musical autonomy, which elicits feelings of freedom. The positive feedback from the audience gives a sense of accomplishment (where skill is equal to challenge level) and affirms his emerging identity as an improvising guitarist.

Similarly, Swallow describes increasing in confidence; she is invited in a personal therapy session to *break the rules* on the lap harp and to play *randomly* and atonally. Through this invitation she begins to discover an *adult voice* and with increased choice making a sense of musical freedom, with a new expression.

Similarly, Chaffinch is pushed out of her *comfort zone* by a challenge and solicitation, learning through taking part in an improvised vocal workshop with an expert improviser and vocalist known for exceptional creativity

and innovation. This has long-term effects as Chaffinch takes on new work leading to fresh opportunities for development of professional identity.

In Maslow's (1959) theory of peak experience, permanently changed views, an increase in confidence and a more integrated sense of self are features that can lead to self-actualisation. Similarly, Gabrielsson (2011), in the study of strong experiences in music, found new personal 'insights and possibilities' (p.391) to be an important aspect – including feelings of freedom, personal growth and understanding. The accounts of Wren, Swallow and Chaffinch strongly suggest that learning and improvisation can encompass special experience with the similar features of: challenge, overcoming fear and anxiety, with accompanying feelings of freedom, confidence and new insights into identity.

5.2.2 Special experiences and relationships

The SO theme of relationships was found in the specific accounts of special experiences of Bullfinch and Wren. Bullfinch describes an occasion in an experiential group when she wishes to express difficult emotions on the piano. She comments:

... there's other people, maybe about five of us all together, and I really felt like we were having a conversation, and it's something that I didn't want to speak about to anyone like in the room or anything. But I really kind of felt, like I was kind of telling them through the piano, and that I heard, kind of responses back. Overall I felt like there was this kind of understanding, and that I wasn't alone, and then yeah at the end we were, we felt like, well I really felt it, and I feel like they felt it as well. (Bullfinch)

Bullfinch comments she is *not ... alone*, and there is a shared communicative and emotional experience. Wren also relates a small group experience in an informal jam session (SO theme of flow Section 5.1.3) where there is a strong impression of close relatedness through intense musical interaction; he describes this as joint *acknowledgement*.

Special experience in improvised music can often intensify relations between individuals. In music therapy, the study of special experiences focuses on the interpersonal relationship between client and therapist, showing that there can be an increase in intersubjectivity and emotional connection, with new insights and feelings of growth and self-expression (Robbins and Forinash, 1991; Amir, 1992, 1996, 2001; Pedersen, 2007). De Backer (2008) found special experience contained a 'synchronicity and musical meeting' (p.89, note – the same word used by Wren). Ansdell *et al.* (2010), drawing on Stern's (2004) theory

of 'The Present Moment in Psychotherapy' (title), suggests that the nature of improvised music, can – through musical flexibility – 'elicit and extend moments of intersubjective meeting, creating opportunities for relational change' (Ansdell, 2010, p.21). Bullfinch and Wren describe an augmented intersubjectivity. This suggests that special experiences in learning to improvise can involve intense connection and shared experience.

5.2.3 Special experiences and emotions

The SO theme of emotions was found in the accounts of special experiences of Dunnock, Bullfinch, Swallow and Chaffinch. In this section (as in 4.3.1) feelings are defined as passing 'sensations' (Juslin and Sloboda, 2001, p.27) and emotions understood as short term intensive states (Juslin, 2010). I also draw on the 'broadening-and-build theory' (Fredrickson and Cohn, 2008, p.790) in which positive emotions such as joy,

interest, contentment and love are understood to have long-term effects, creating social connection and personal resilience.

In the accounts, Dunnock recalls feelings of anxiety and panic followed by positive emotions, Bullfinch uses the piano to cathartically express difficult emotions, Swallow experiences feelings of freedom and Chaffinch tolerates uncomfortable feelings. Chaffinch states:

... about a year after I had started doing the improv stuff and I went to a workshop with Maggie Nicols and it changed things, big time. One of her exercises she did in the workshop, was where we all had to sing a note and just feel uncomfortable with it, wherever it was and not wanting to change it to fit, and so just generally some of the stuff she did I kind of came away from that and then I went to do a flute course in France, and they had asked me to a workshop in

improvising, the whole premise was you need to be comfortable with getting out. (Chaffinch)

Fredrickson and Cohn (2008) consider that the experience of positive emotions is often linked to ‘novel activities and challenges’, with the potential to ‘enhance attention’ to others and ‘build long-term personal resources’ (p.784). It can be seen in the special experiences of Dunnock, Swallow and Chaffinch that there is an increasing mastery of a novel task (the ability to improvise music) with resultant positive emotions such as enjoyment and enthusiasm which leads to intensified motivation and self-confidence. The account which differs slightly from this is Bullfinch, who recalls using improvised music as a cathartic release to regulate emotions; however, this is also followed by an increased social connection to others in a small group.

The overriding feature of these special experiences (apart from Bullfinch) is that of challenge, which is a central component of flow theory; Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988) write:

... optimal experience requires a balance between the challenges perceived in a given situation and the skills a person brings to it (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.30).

According to these accounts, challenge may also be an important aspect of special experiences, even without flow. The participants experience anxiety and discomfort before conquering the challenge, followed by a sense of accomplishment and confidence (see Section 9.5).

In summary, the findings related to emotions suggest that learning to improvise can elicit special experiences which involve challenge, feelings of anxiety, overcoming

challenge, feelings of freedom leading to positive emotions, increased motivation, self-confidence and social connection.

5.3 Long-term significant experiences, flow, learning and relationships

Linnet, Oriole and Curlew describe long-term significant experiences. There is some crossover in the dialogues of Oriole and Curlew with subject matter previously analysed in Chapter 4. However, I have also included the responses here since they were given in answer to the second research question. The SO theme of flow was found in Linnet's long-term significant experience with improvising in experiential groups as taking her to *another world*, this and has already been discussed within Sections 5.1–5.1.5.

The SO theme of learning was prevalent in Oriole's account, including the two sub-themes of:

- learning through theory, instrumental technique and technical exercises
- fostering improvisation skills as an adult

Oriole talks of playing in an *early jazz group*, attending a *jazz summer school*, and the lifelong development of his skills. He comments:

And that's why going on the [name omitted] summer course opened my ears to what else was possible and I was more relaxed about it and knowing the different way of playing, and I have changed since then. (Oriole)

in the theory side I learnt lots of new jazz scales that I didn't know existed and jazz harmonies ...

I carried on playing with [name omitted] my friend who is a jazz singer... we did more shows for two

years after that, and I was aware I was playing a different style more, more relaxed more swingy...that's probably the major development that's changed my style as a jazz musician anyway. And then just playing, playing a lot after that. Oriole

He recalls initially learning theory and jazz harmony (see Glossary) on the summer school, and learning through performance over a number of years with a jazz singer. Oriole benefits from theoretical training and the practice of jazz harmony and voicings (Section 4.4.4). He hones this craft through practice in live performance with a jazz singer, learning on the job. (found in the sub-theme fostering improvisation skills This will be further discussed in Section 9.4.7–9.4.7e.

Finally, the SO theme of relationships is found in Curlew's account of long-term significant experience. In this he refers to the important formation in

adolescence of the group of close musical friends, who continue to gather over a number of years to improvise together. This aspect of Curlew's dialogue has previously been discussed in Section 4.2.1 and will be further explored in 9.2.2.

Overall, it can be seen that the long-term specific experiences included a dialogue on the importance of flow in music therapy experiential groups, lifelong learning through training in theory and learning on the job in jazz performance, and the significance of lifelong relationships with other musicians in improvised music. All of these aspects of learning and improvisation (with the exception of flow) have been discussed in Chapter 4. These will also be further examined in Chapter 9.

5.4 Summary

In response to the second research question the SO theme of flow was found together with the pre-

existing SO themes of identity, relationships, emotions and learning.

In the theme of flow, five sub-themes emerged:

- Flow as spiritual and magical
- Flow is difficult to talk about as spiritual or magical
- Connection in groups
- A changed sense of time
- Aspects of flow can be induced by particular instruments

The SO theme of flow was small and found in two participants' accounts, Linnet (in long-term significant experience) and Wren (in special experience). However, the findings suggest it may be a prominent experience, with a common lexicon. It was described through a spiritual or mystical language, with attached meaning to their worldview or religious beliefs (Hytönen-Ng, 2013). Flow was emphasised in a group context,

connecting to the concept of 'social flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.42) with intersubjectivity, focused attention, knowledge of each other in the group and skill levels optimal with challenge. There was also a changed perception of time, a common phenomenon in flow, and the use of a specific instruments to elicit *zoning out*. This poses the question as to whether specific instruments may be conducive to aspects of flow experience?

In the theme of identity, special experiences were found to contain challenges which led to new experiences and expressions of self-identity. The theme of relationships revealed an increased intersubjectivity and connection between individuals in groups, through the nature of improvised music and use of musical flexibility. Finally, in the SO theme of emotions, special experiences and learning to improvise elicit anxiety related to challenge, feelings of freedom leading to positive emotions and increased confidence

and motivation. The **SO** theme of learning was present in long-term significant experiences, relating to the learning modes of use of technical and theoretical knowledge and on-the-job learning. In summary the findings suggest that the nature of special experiences and learning to improvise has a specific form consisting of: flow, connection, risk, liberation and new identity, challenge, anxiety and fear, and risk. Flow can be divided into six facets, related to spirituality, instrumental, relationships and time. See figures 31 and 32.

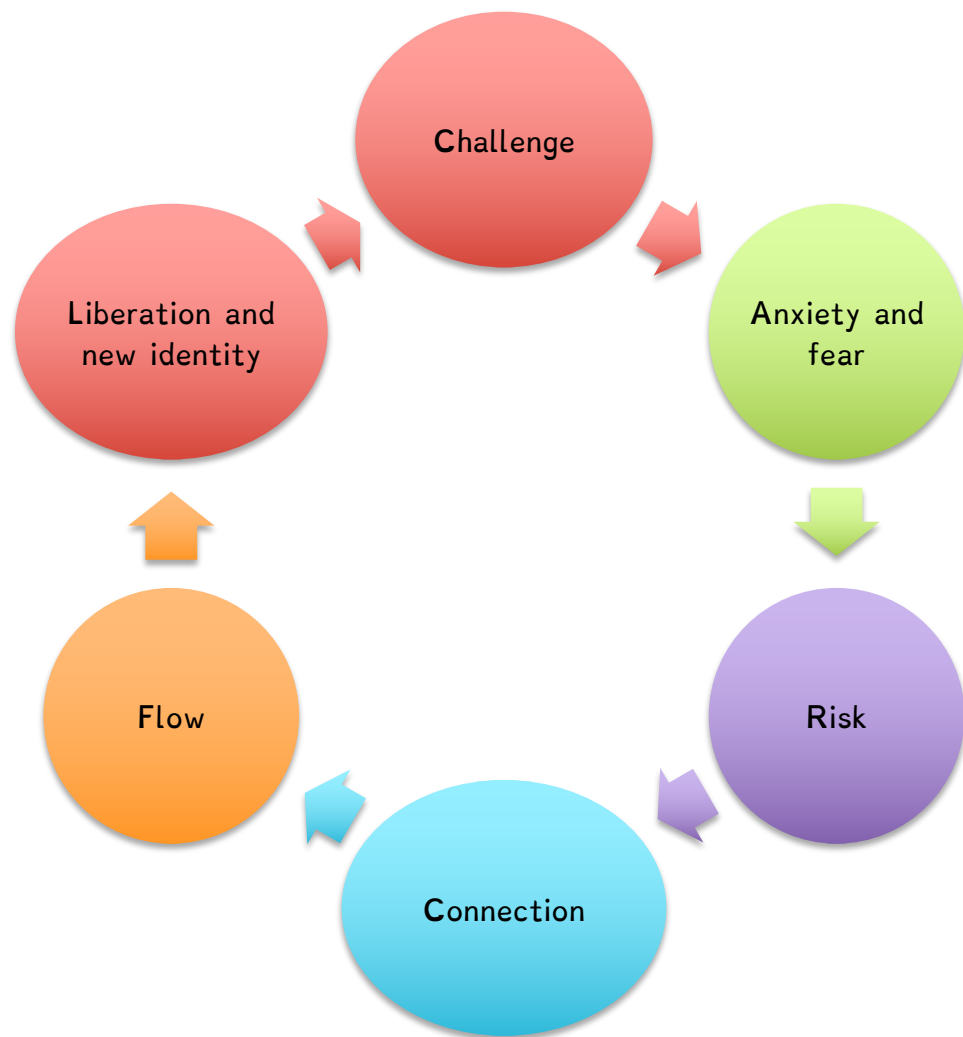


Figure 31: The nature of special experiences and learning in improvisation.

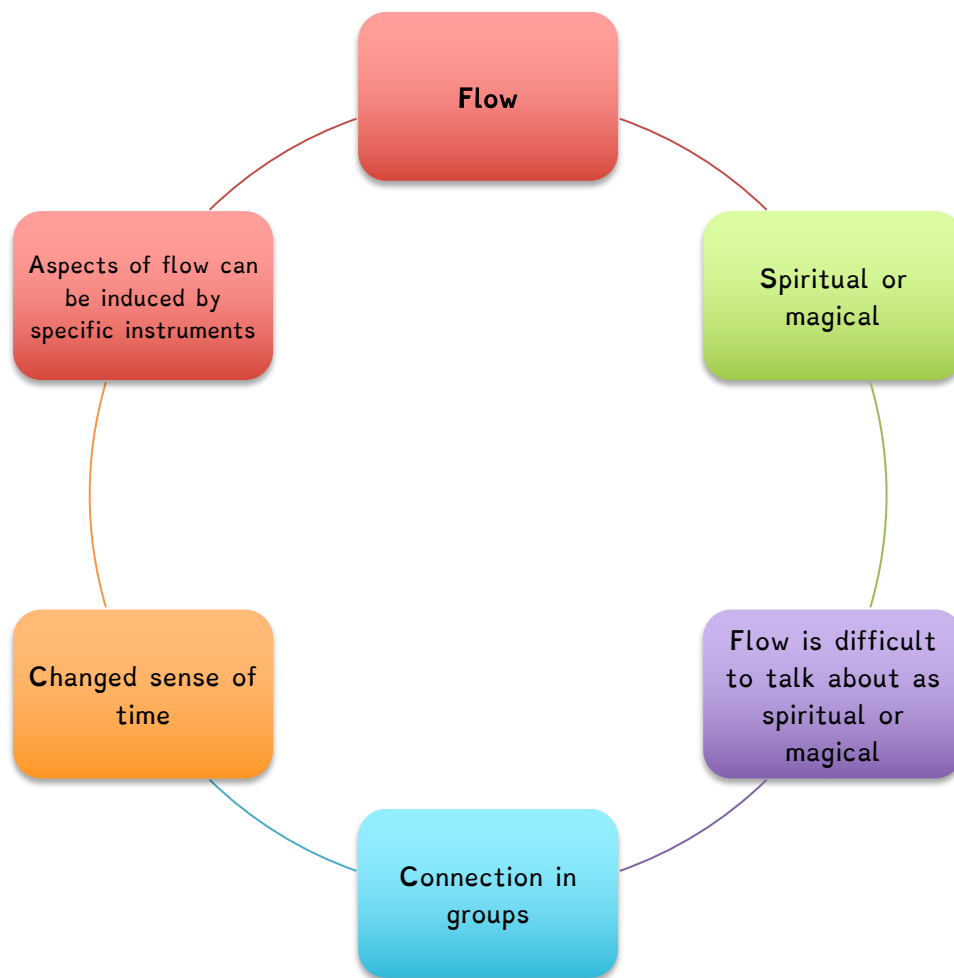


Figure 32: The five facets of flow.

The relationship between improvisation, task, challenge, anxiety and flow will be further examined in Section 9.5. I will now introduce the findings from the graphic scores in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Graphic Scores

In this chapter I discuss the graphic scores as method, and present the IPA analysis of participant comments.

The original intent to use graphic scores as part of a member checking process (Colaizzi, 1978) gradually changed to become free-drawing and a reflexive act.

As the research progressed it came to light that creating the scores myself and attempting to use them as a member checking process, did not give nearly enough autonomous voice to the participants, and the power-dynamic was heavily balanced towards the researcher. For future studies I would recommend that participants be invited to create their own drawings in response to their music, and the data be gathered in this way. However, the scores were still useful as a reflexive tool (Appendix I.2). Further information giving a historical context of graphic scores, the scores as a reflexive act, other participant responses, and illustrated list of graphic scores, can be found in Appendix I, Sections I.1 – I.4.

In chapter 6 I present the IPA analysis of the participants' comments on the scores (Sections 6.1 to 6.4). This analysis followed the same process described in Chapter 3, Section 3.6. It was treated as a continuation of the IPA undertaken on the verbal interviews, as part of the meta-structure. In this way it was possible to see common SO and sub-themes already encountered, as well as new sub-themes. The IPA analysis from chapters 4, 5 and 6 will be discussed in Chapter 9. A full illustrated list of the graphic scores, with a brief history and further details on participants responses can be found in Appendix I.

6.1 IPA analysis of comments on scores

In this section I present the IPA analysis of comments on experiences of learning to improvise made by Dunnock, Linnet and Oriole. All other participants made comments on the ease of reading and aesthetics

of the scores (see appendix I) and since these remarks do not relate to the research questions I have not included them in the IPA analysis. It is important to note that in this study, the drawings and scores themselves were not subject to analysis or treated as data. However, this may be a useful investigation for a future research project (see Section 11.12).

6.1.1 Dunnock: IPA of graphic score comments

Dunnock's music is ten minutes and thirteen seconds long, shown in eleven sections on the score. He makes remarks on seven of the minutes. The score reads from left to right, with Dunnock's guitar music illustrated through purple shapes, and my music, on melodica, illustrated in green. The instrumentation remains consistent throughout. The score includes a legend, shown in Figure 33.

Dunnock key/legend

Purple = Guitar/participant

Green = Melodica/researcher



Glissando

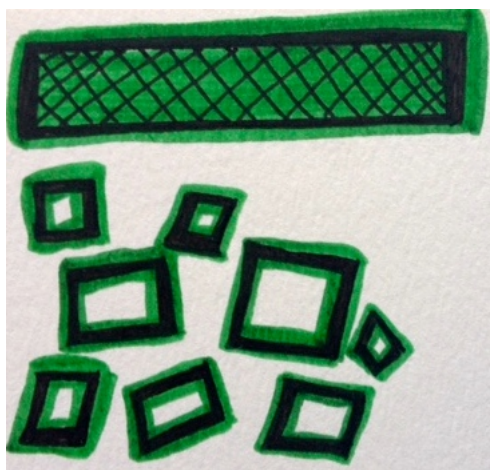


Arpeggio Riff



Short Melodic Notes

Sustained Melodic low Notes and Chords



Short Chords

Sustained High Notes



Tremolo

Melodic Fragments



Staccato

Bass notes



Continuous Guitar Melody



Harmonics

Intervals



Figure 33: Dunnock – graphic score legend. Shown as presented to participant (see Glossary for musical terms).

The comments made by Dunnock were subject to an IPA analysis (Section 3.6). This revealed two Super-Ordinate themes and four sub-themes, shown in Figures 34 and 35. All themes, apart from the musical research relationship (in red), were found in the IPA of the verbal interview.

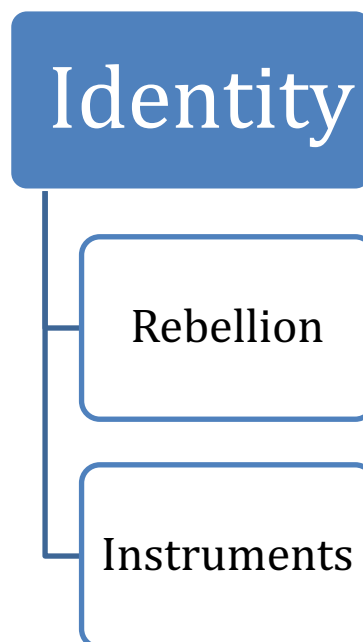


Figure 34: Identity – IPA analysis of Dunnock’s graphic score comments.

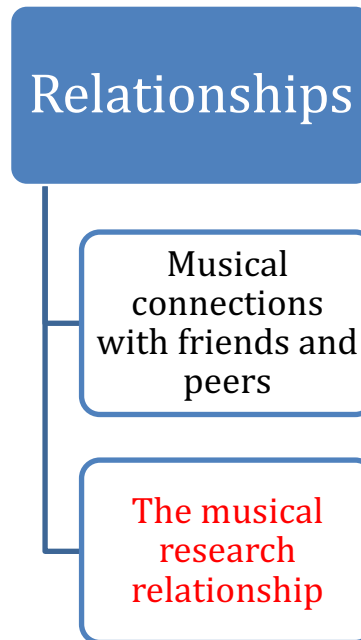
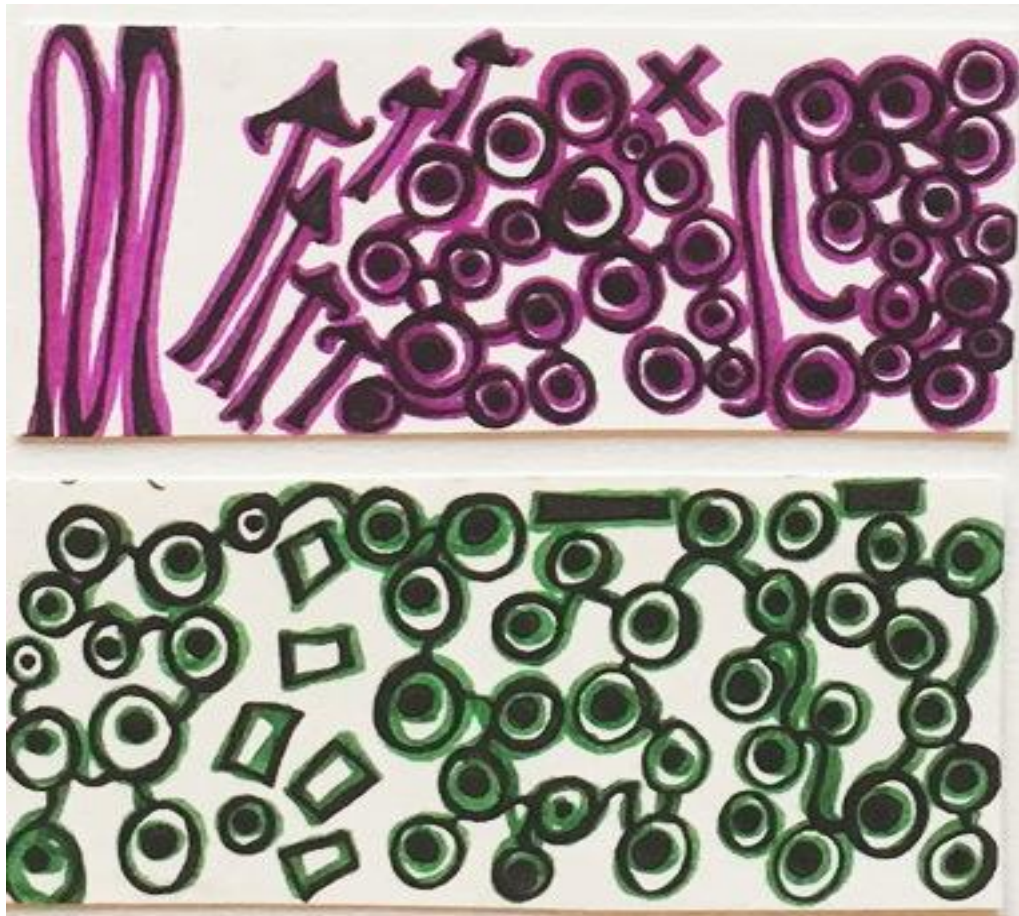


Figure 35: Relationships-IPA analysis of Dunnock's graphic score comments.

6.1.1a Identity: instruments and rebellion

The SO theme of identity is firstly demonstrated through the instrumental use of the guitar (Figure 36).

Minute Eight



Participant comment:

The music between min 8, 9 and 10 just sounds reflective and possibly a bit morose and sad. Interestingly I did not choose another instrument to play. Having spoken so much about how the guitar and improvisation is a bit part of my identity, I remember not wanting to play anything else. I left feeling very close to the guitar and my own music.

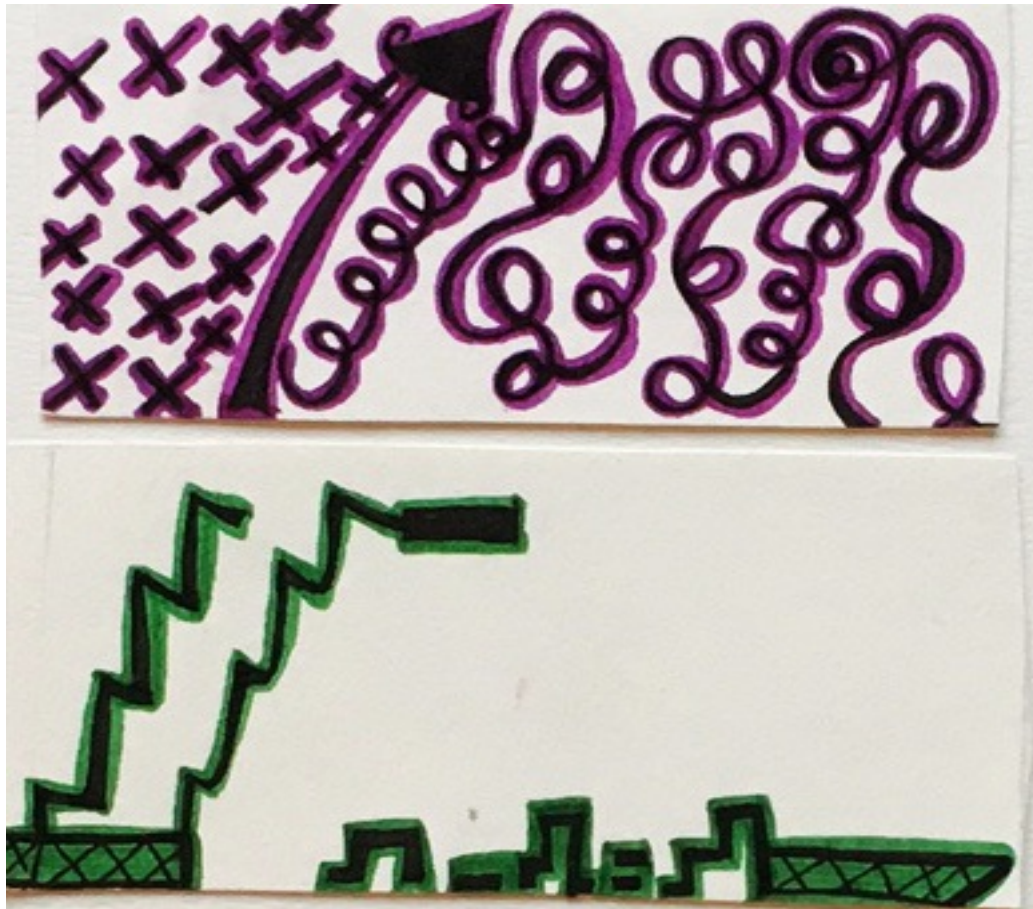
Figure 36: *Dunnock, minute eight – graphic score and comment.*

In the comment related to minute eight, Dunnock states that the improvisation gives him feelings of closeness to the guitar and his *own music*; and his playing the instrument for the length of the improvisation underlines this strong relationship and its connection to his musical identity.

The theme of identity is also explored in Dunnock's comments on *rebellion* (Figures 36, 37). During minutes five and six, he plays a continuous *concordant* melody drawn from the jazz standard *St Thomas*; this is surrounded by what he terms as *rebellious discordant* textural guitar music. In the remarks he hints that the concordant melodic passage is possibly related to a restricted sense of self and *not feeling good enough*, whereas the timbre and discordant music is a *rebellion* and an expression of a different self. This is not elaborated upon any further within these comments, but it could be that he uses the guitar music to explore alternative ways of being, a *restricted self and a free self*. This will be explored further in the music

analysis (Chapter 7). It is important to highlight that Dunnock mentions the supportive relationship with his mentor within the comments (Figure 37). In the IPA analysis of the verbal interview this was connected to identity. However, because this comment links strongly with the musical research relationship, I have included it here under the theme of relationships, which will now be discussed in Section 6.1.1b.

Minute Five



Participant comment:

The discordant passages feel like a rebellion against the harmonically concordant passages. The concordance seems to always be followed by discordance. Possibly linking to when we discussed technicality and my rebellion against my dad and that 'not good enough' feeling.

Figure 37: Dunnock, minute five – graphic score and comment. The melody is drawn with a continuous swirling purple line and the textured guitar ideas of glissando with dots; tremolo: zigzag; sustained high notes: block rectangles; and harmonics: crosses.

Minute Six



Participant comment:

The little figure at 6:10 sounds like the standard 'St Thomas' one of the first standards I learned with my teacher! That's quite spooky!

Figure 38: Dunnock, minute six – graphic score and comment.

6.1.1b Relationships: the musical research relationship and musical connections with peers and friends

Within the SO theme of relationships, the new important sub-theme of the *musical research relationship* is uncovered for the first time, and then consequently appears repeatedly throughout the music analysis, see Sections 7.4.3c, 7.4.4b, 7.4.5b, 7.4.6e and 7.6.1). The musical research relationship can be thought about as unique, formed in the improvisations in the encounter between participant and researcher and consisting of: musical communication (micro communications found in the intersubjectivity); temporal (experienced through perceptions of time) (Begbie, 2000); requiring a heightened awareness of the moment and of the presence of other (Nachmanovitch, 1990); and containing transference and countertransference.

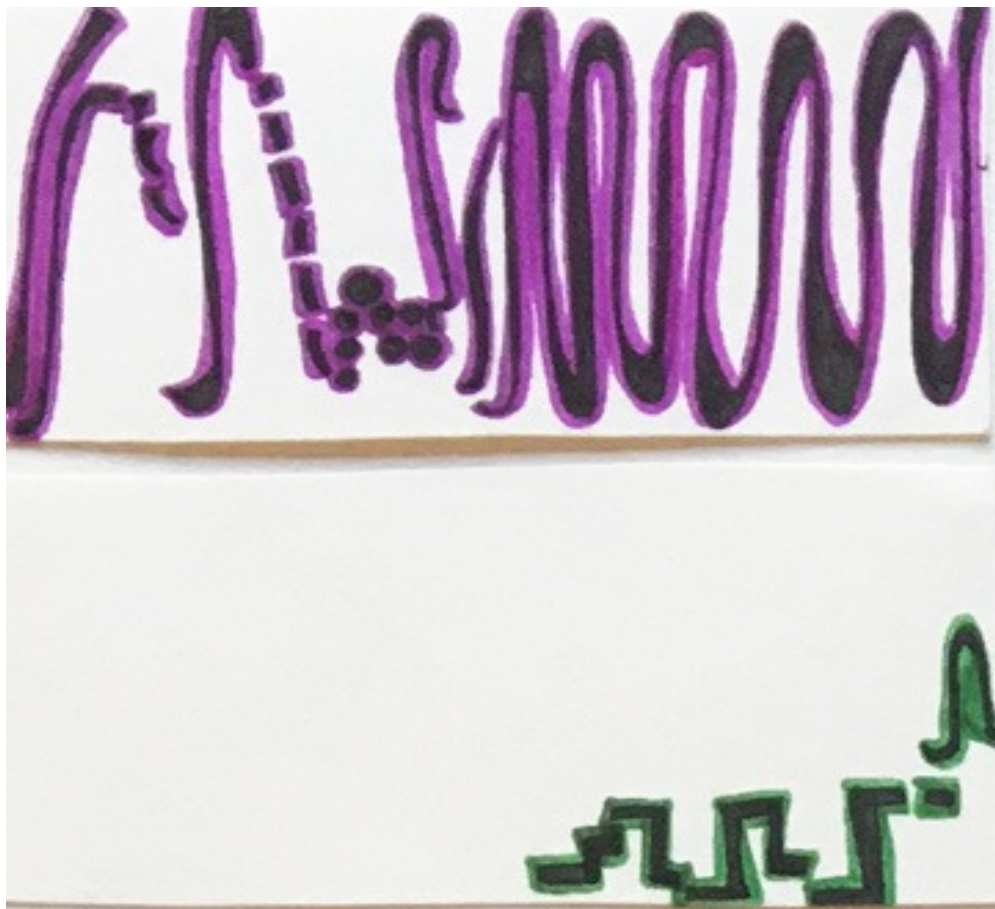
This is a type of research relationship which has seldom been explored in arts-based qualitative research (Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015). However, as there are music therapy studies which explore the musical dynamic/relationship between client and therapist, such as Brown and Pavlicevic's (1996) investigation of therapist identity in improvisation. Furthermore, this relationship has an inherent power dynamic, (Holloway and Jefferson, 2004), power dynamics are highlighted as a sub-theme in the music analysis chapter (see Section 7.6.2).

The musical research relationship creates for Dunnock a transference of important past relationships with his mentor (identity and supportive relationships, sub-theme in IPA of verbal interview) and friends (musical connections with friends and peers). In minute one, he states how it is like playing with his guitar teacher in a *colla voce* style – a solo voice with accompaniment (Figure 39). In minute seven this has developed into

bouncing off each other and playing with a good friend

(Figure 40). He observes how the interaction changes from solo and accompaniment to becoming more equal.

Minute One

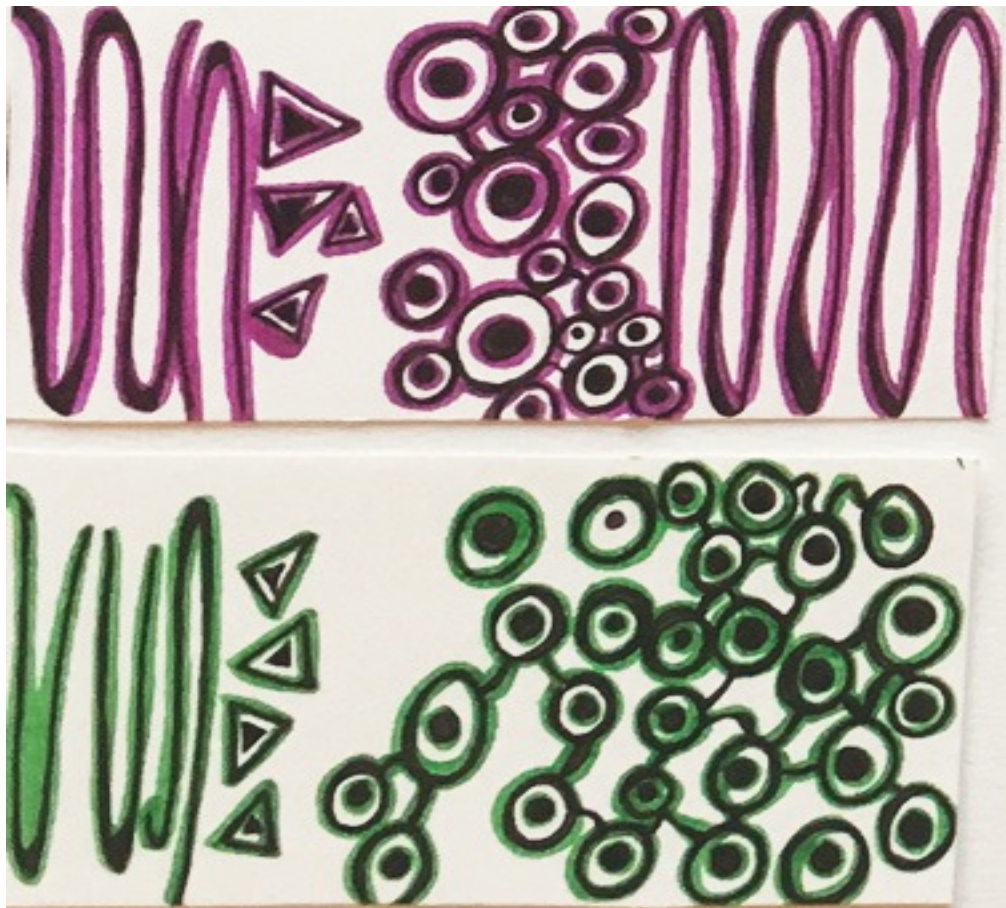


Participant comment:

This first section reminded me of how my guitar teacher and I would begin a piece together. We would have a colla voce style/improvisatory opening and then move into the piece.

Figure 39: *Dunnock, minute one – graphic score and comment.*

Minute Seven



Participant comment:

I really enjoy the staccato passage 6:30– 7:00. The music feels very coherent to me and it sounds as if we are bouncing off each other. The music throughout min 7 really appeals to me. I am not sure why? The best I can describe it is that it feels like I'm playing with a good friend and the music just clicks.

Figure 40: *Dunnock, minute seven – graphic score and comment.*

6.1.1c Dunnock: summary

The graphic score comments made by Dunnock link to the SO themes of identity and relationships, with the sub-themes of instruments, rebellion, musical connections with friends and peers and the new sub-theme of the musical research relationship.

The guitar is central to Dunnock's musical identity; he describes the *discordant* music as an expression of his new *rebellious* self. This is in contrast to the *concordant* music, connected to an obedient sense of self. He comments that the interaction in the music reminds him of past relationships with a mentor and friend, and the musical research relationship seems to support and enable his exploration of a new self. This illustrates the interesting crossover between the SO themes of identity and relationships, where relationships can potentially enable individual development.

6.1.2 Linnet: IPA of graphic score comments

Linnet's score is divided into twelve instrumental sections. The top line illustrates Linnet's music and the lower line my music. No timeline is provided, and each section reads from left to right to indicate musical events. The improvisation lasts nineteen minutes and eighteen seconds. Linnet's comments reflect the content of the interview. She makes statements on eleven sections.

The IPA of Linnet's graphic score comments uncovered two SO themes, one sub-theme, and the two new sub-themes (1) Improvising helps contain emotions and (2) Role of humour (shown in red). See Figures 41 and 42.

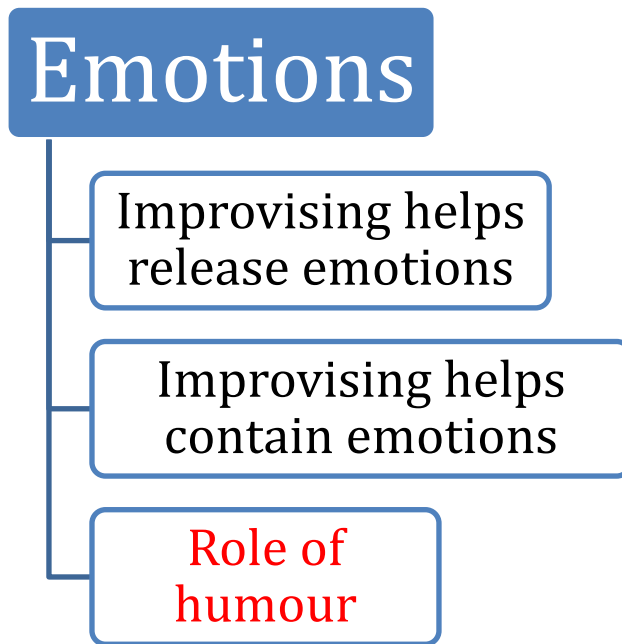


Figure 41: Emotions – IPA analysis of Linnet graphic score comments.

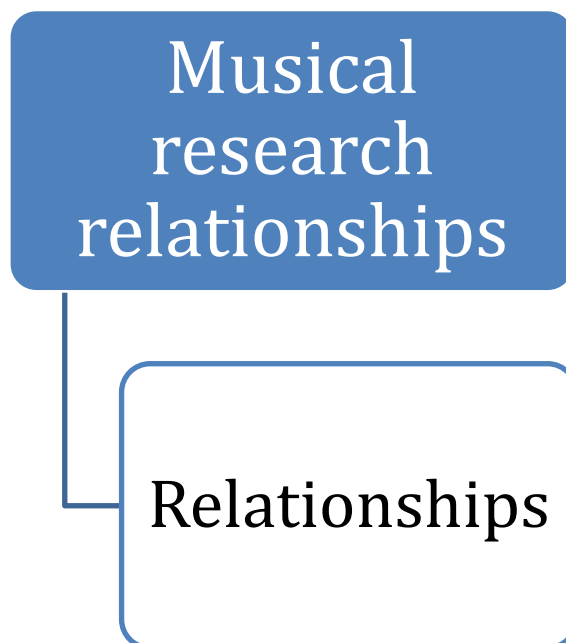
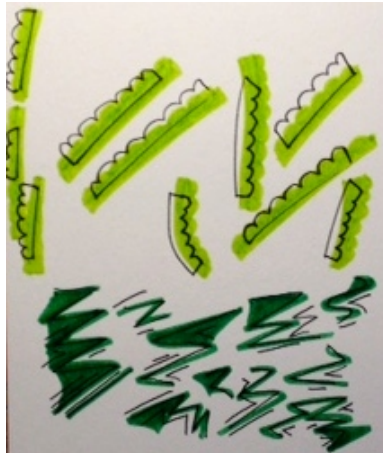


Figure 42: Relationship – IPA analysis of Linnet graphic score comments.

6.1.2a Emotions: improvising helps release emotions

In this music Linnet seeks to explore some of the emotional experiences discussed in the interview; she states that the improvisation *encapsulates* her emotional experience in improvisation. Emotions are intimately intertwined with her experience of learning to improvise. This is clearly demonstrated in section nine when Linnet plays the tin whistle. She states that the instrument affords a means of releasing *pent-up energy and acceptable screaming*. See Figure 43.

Section Nine



Participant = green lines, tin whistle

Researcher = dark green shapes, melodica

Participant comment:

I think I was feeling experimental in this section of the improvisation. I haven't played much on a tin whistle before, so it felt like I was seeing what sounds I could make. Whilst playing this instrument it felt like I was expressing pent-up energy. It almost sounded like a form of 'acceptable' screaming. It sounded as though the melodica was coming underneath the tin whistle and supporting it. The melodica was very grounding. There was a playful interaction between us where Becky was matching me, which felt and sounded very nice. It felt like I was really influencing the direction the music was going to take. It felt very empowering.

Figure 43: Linnet, section nine – graphic score and comment.

Linnet experiments with the tin whistle; it becomes a means of expression of strong emotion, *screaming* in a safe manner. She comments that other instruments such as the ocean drum and percussion are experienced as a means of feeling steady and secure, whereas the tin whistle becomes an expression of extreme, perhaps slightly risky, emotion. It may be that the physicality of the whistle elicits this, with involvement of the breath and shrill high-pitched register, which could be interpreted literally as a kind of sonic screaming. In this, Linnet reveals her connection between emotion and learning improvisation.

6.1.2b Emotions: Improvising helps contain emotions

The ocean drum plays a crucial role in this improvisation. Linnet uses it at the beginning and end of the music, commenting that the playing is similar to her experience in experiential music therapy groups.

The instrument functions as a place of safety, emotional expression and *cathartic release*. It elicits reflection on *her journey of learning to improvise*, and the difficult emotions of *vulnerability, fear, sadness*, change and loss. See Figures 44 and 45.

Section One



Participant = blue shapes, ocean drum

Researcher = green shapes, melodica

Participant comment:

It seemed I was exploring the ocean drum as I would in group improvisations on the training. It started off sounding quite reflective. It felt as though I was reflecting on the difficult emotional experiences I had experienced during improvisation: vulnerability, fear, sadness, change, loss. When I used the ocean drum more percussively, this felt like a cathartic release of these emotions. The melodica felt really supportive and as though someone was joining me and/or holding me on that journey of reflection and release.

Figure 44: Linnet, section one – graphic score and comment. No timeline shown.

Section Twelve



Participant = blue shapes, ocean drum

Researcher = green shapes, melodica

Participant comment:

I remember picking the ocean drum back up as I knew I wanted to stop soon and I wanted it to be the last instrument I played before ending. The ocean drum represents a safe instrument that I can always return to. The ocean drum seems to have marked the beginning and end of the improvisation; it is my safe base that I set off from and returned to after embarking on an improvisation which felt like a journey. It felt like a journey that was reflecting part of my journey of learning to improvise. The improvisation seems to have encapsulated the varied emotional experiences I have had during improvisations.

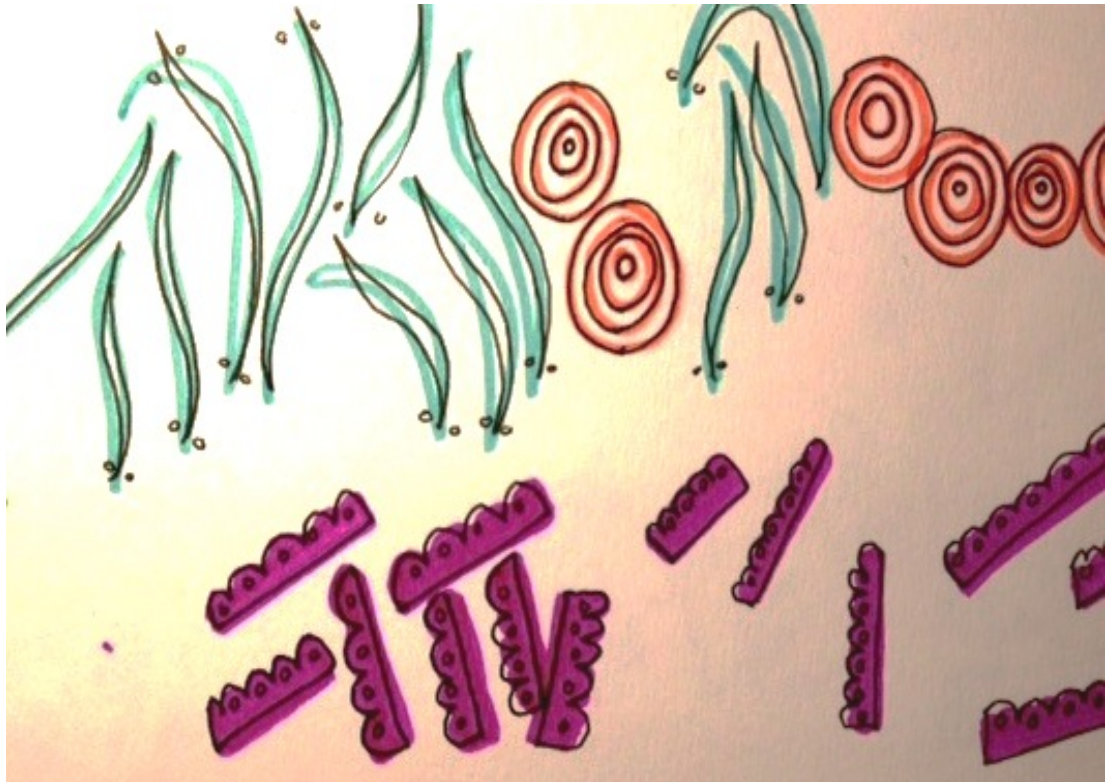
Figure 45: Linnet, section twelve – graphic score and comment.

Her comments underline the central importance of the ocean drum in her experience of learning to improvise, which is also demonstrated in the IPA of the interview and music analysis.

6.1.2c Emotions: role of humour

The final important aspect revealed in Linnet's comments is the role of humour. These are shown in Figures 46 and 47.

Section Six



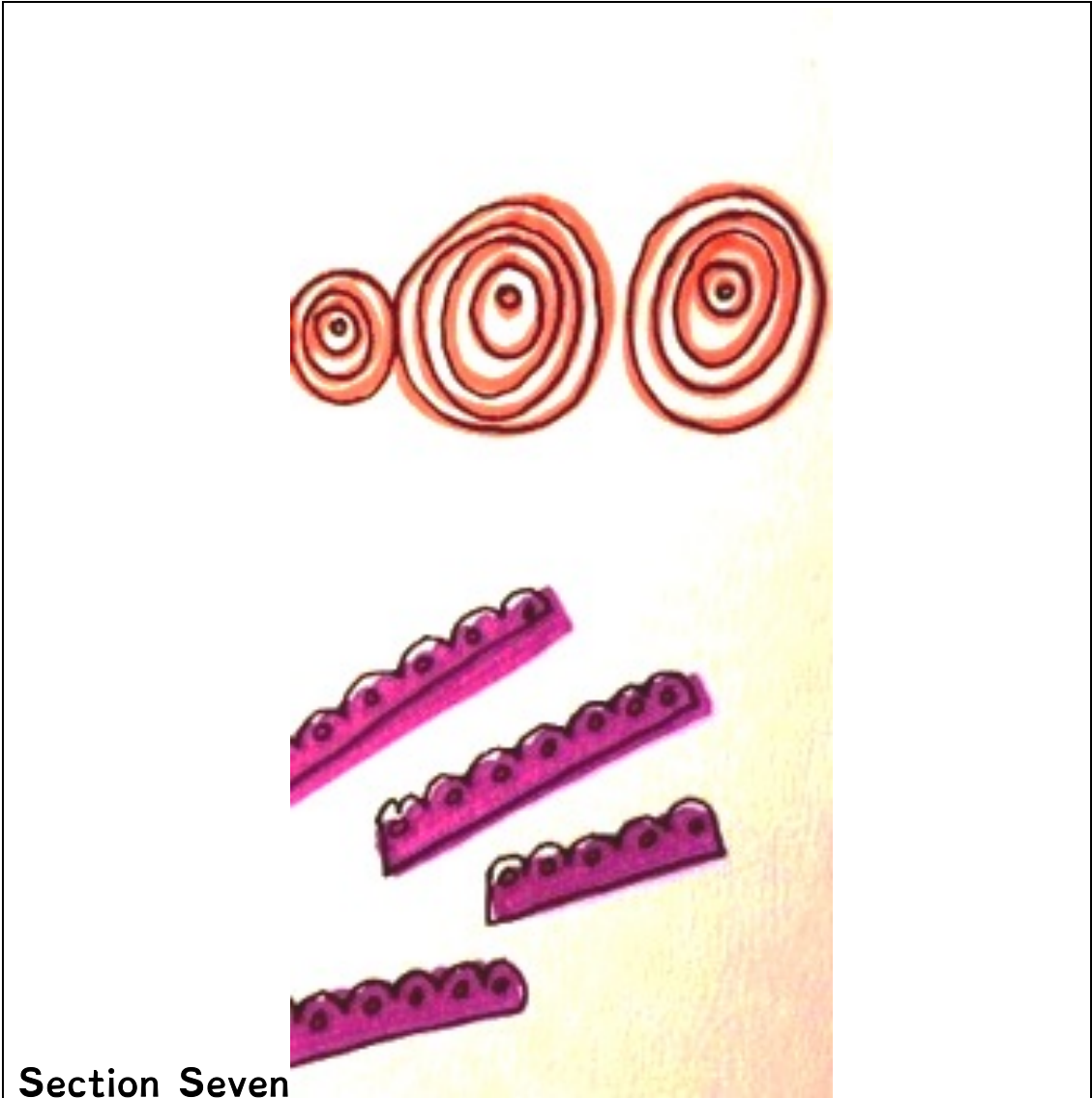
Participant = green and orange shapes: snake shakers and party hooters

Researcher = pink shapes: recorder

Participant comment:

I began to feel a bit more playful in this section.

Figure 46: Linnet, section six – graphic score and comment.



Section Seven

Participant = orange circles: party hooters

Researcher = pink shapes: recorder

Participant comment:

I wonder whether I felt the need to be a bit playful and silly after talking about quite heavy stuff. I felt like I wanted to feel lighter. This section felt very free.

Figure 47: Linnet, section seven – graphic score and comment.

The intensity of section four, where Linnet feels exposed and vulnerable, is followed by passages of playfulness and humour. She discovers the party hooter, which when blown makes a squeaky duck-like sound. Linnet equates this with being a *bit playful and silly*, and uses it as a way of releasing some of the tension felt in previous sections. She states that *she wanted to feel lighter*, the nature of the party hooter affords a humorous feeling of *freedom*.

6.1.2d Relationships: the musical research relationship

During sections one, two, four and nine Linnet makes comments on the musical research relationship. This is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Linnet's comments on the musical relationship

Section	Linnet's comments
One	<i>The melodica felt really supportive and as though someone was joining me and/or holding me on that journey of reflection and release.</i>
Two	<i>At times I wasn't sure whether I was leading or Becky was. It often sounded like she elaborated on what I was playing. The melodica was very enticing and I could feel myself getting drawn into Becky's music.</i>
Four	<i>I felt very comfortable at this point. As if I had exposed vulnerable parts of myself and they had been accepted by Becky, which in turn allowed me to become more present in our music making. It felt like I started to show more of myself in this section of the improvisation, to give more of myself. I began to feel a bit more daring and confident. I can see a parallel here in how I began to eventually feel in group improvisations.</i>

Nine	<i>It sounded as though the melodica was coming underneath the tin whistle and supporting it. The melodica was very grounding. There was a playful interaction between us where Becky was matching me, which felt and sounded very nice. It felt like I was really influencing the direction the music was going to take. It felt very empowering.</i>
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Linnet's comments reveal her awareness of and the importance of the musical research relationship. In section one she initially feels supported by the melodica sounds and during section two follows my lead. In section four risk-taking is enabled by the experience of feeling heard and *accepted*. This continues into section nine where her risk-taking increases to experiment with *screaming* on the tin whistle. At this point she states that the melodica sounds give a sense of grounding, whilst simultaneously creating a *playful* dialogue. The supportive musical

research relationship enables Linnet to explore difficult extremes and containment of emotions and make reflections on learning in improvisation.

6.1.2e Linnet: summary of graphic score comments

As can be seen in the comments made by Linnet, there is an underlying theme of the importance of emotions in her learning to improvise, with instruments used as a means of safety, containment or cathartic release. She also highlights the significance of the musical research relationship and how this enables risk-taking and security even though she feels vulnerable and exposed in the interview. Finally, Linnet employs humour (the sounds on the party hooter) to relieve emotional tension and find a lighter way of being in the music.

6.1.3 Oriole: IPA of graphic score comments

Oriole's graphic score consists of two images per minute, one connected to Oriole's music and the other to the researcher's. The music lasts four minutes and thirty seconds; the instrumentation is piano (Oriole) and electric bass (Becky) throughout. The score is read anticlockwise from the bottom left-hand corner; sounds are depicted using a mixture of shapes, written indications, intervals and chords, and traditional notation. No timeline is shown. Oriole makes short comments on seven of the ten images.

The IPA of Oriole's graphic score comments revealed two SO themes and one sub-theme. This was as shown in Figures 48 and 49.

Identity

Figure 48: Identity – IPA of Oriole’s graphic score comments.

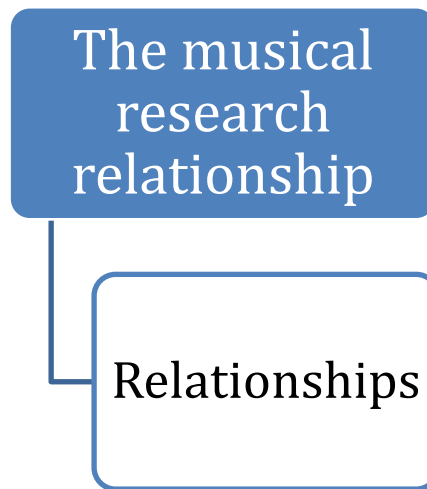
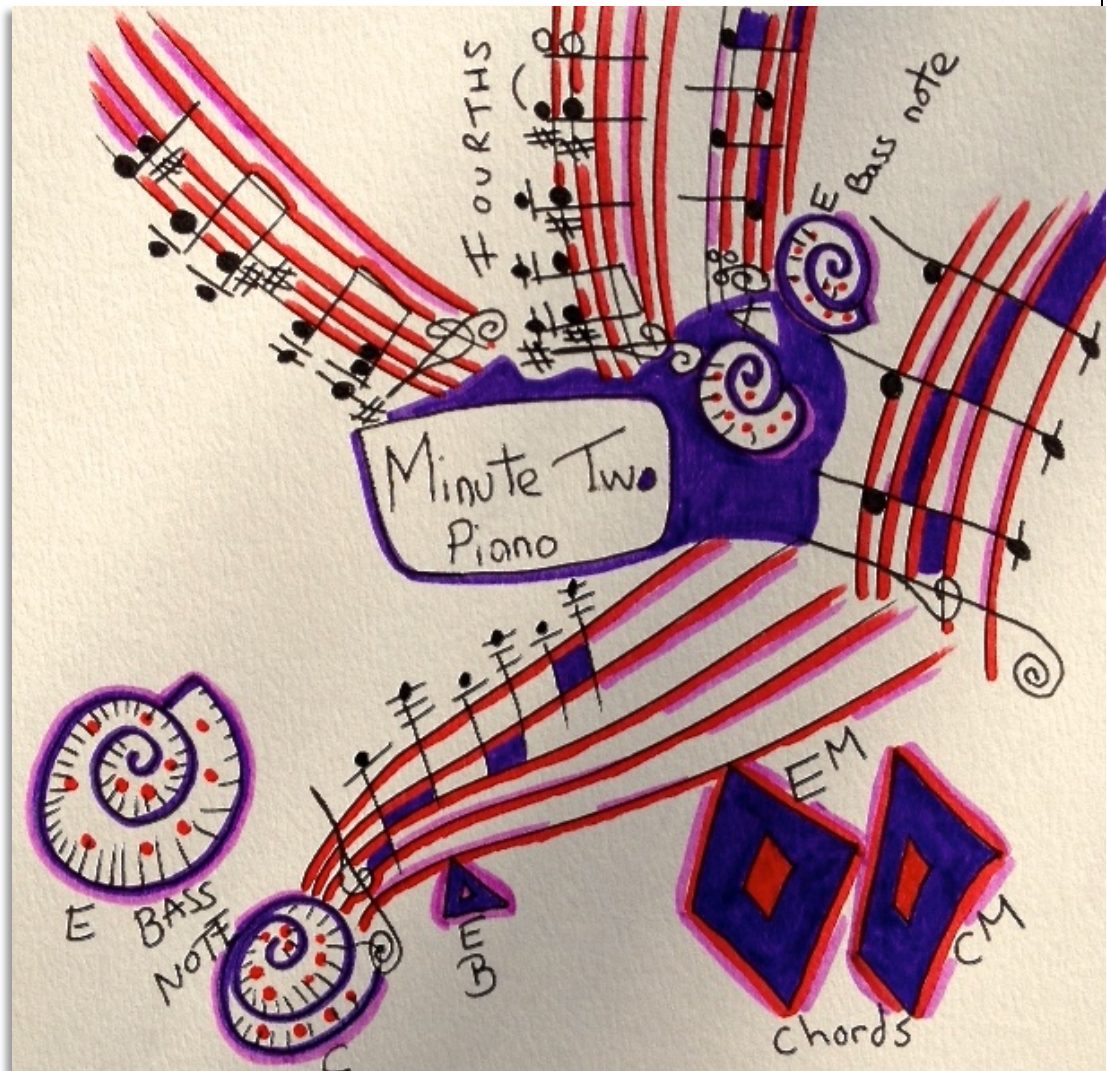


Figure 49: Relationships – IPA of Oriole’s graphic score comments.

6.1.3a Identity

Oriole makes two comments related to identity. These are shown in Figure 50.

Minute Two Piano (Participant)



Participant comments:

- *Who is this person?*
- *What's expected of me?*
- *More fourths!*
- *Major chord – secure base, home!*

Figure 50: Oriole – graphic score and comment.

In Figure 50 Oriole asks *who is this person?*, and *what's expected of me?* Listening to the music and looking at the score somehow elicits a brief encounter with an unacquainted self. This could have been compounded with his unfamiliarity with graphic scores and his struggles with learning to improvise on the music therapy course. The music in this research is like a continuum of the challenge, he hears himself back, it is unfamiliar, and he wonders who he is. There is an uncertain musical identity, yet to be explored.

6.1.3b Relationships: the musical research relationship

Oriole comments on the musical research relationship. In minute one he states *we are both exploring*, and in minute five, *we have found each other*. Oriole comments on the presence of both a musical and a secure base. These are two related concepts; a secure

base is taken from Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory, where a child can form a consistent and reliable attachment to an adult, providing psychological, emotional and physical safety. In music therapy, bass lines or lower registers are often employed to recreate the psychological and emotional experience of a secure base (Wigram, 2004). Perhaps in this improvisation I act as Oriole's secure base? Or alternatively the roles can be interpreted as constantly shifting around? Through his comments Oriole reveals that it is vital for him to feel grounded within improvisation, giving a sense of security and safety. See comment in Figure 51.

Minute Three Piano (Participant)



Participant comment:

Descending major chords

Reminds me of Mahler, 1ST symphony?

I'm holding a secure bass/bass for the bass guitar to riff and improvise

I want to join in!

My notes sound technically challenging/impressive – I had been listening to Liszt's B minor sonata before listening to this – but I was only playing random notes quite fast.

Figure 51: Oriole, minute three – graphic score and comment.

6.1.3c Oriole: summary of graphic score

comments

Oriole offers statements on the musical research relationship, his identity, the presence of a secure musical base (Wigram, 2004) or psychological base (Bowlby, 1988). It can be seen in the comments made that he is concerned with the presence of a secure base, having an aspect of the music which is grounded and solid. Oriole also reveals something of his struggle with identity within this music, as he strives to recognise himself both musically and personally.

6.2 Summary of IPA findings of graphic score

comments

The existing SO themes of identity, relationships and emotions were all found in the comments made by Dunnock, Linnet and Oriole and three new sub-themes were generated: the musical research relationship,

improvising helps contain emotions, and role of humour.

A summary of the themes is depicted in Figures 52 to 54.

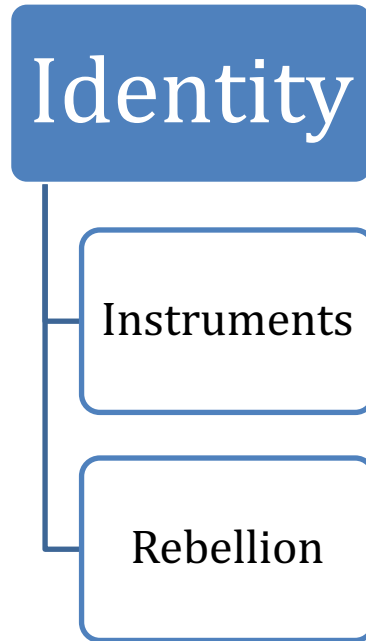


Figure 52: SO theme of identity generated in IPA of graphic score comments.

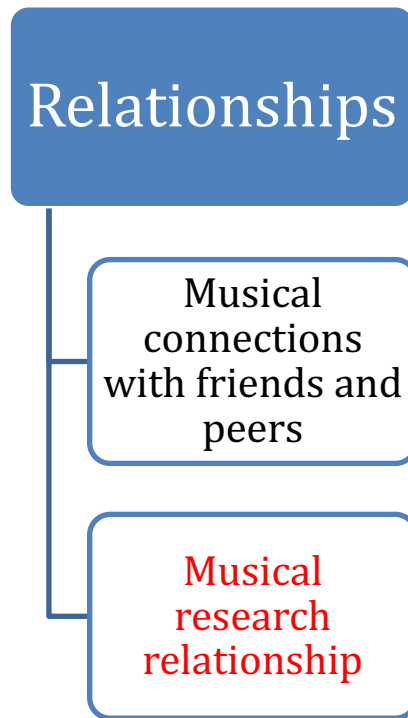


Figure 53: SO theme of relationships generated in the IPA of graphic score comments, showing the new sub-theme of the musical research relationship.

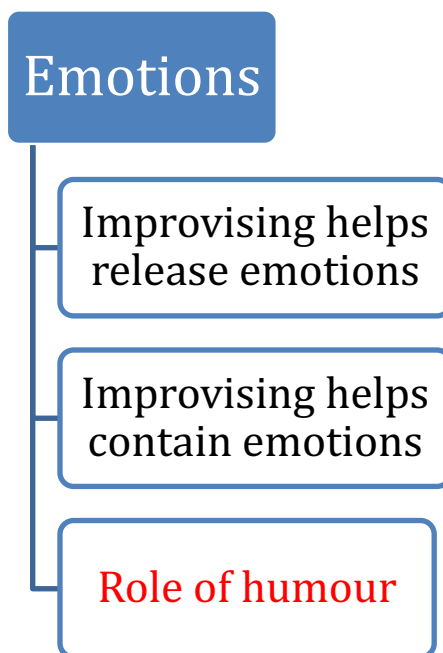


Figure 54: SO theme of emotions generated in the IPA of the graphic score comments, showing the new sub-themes of improvising helps contain emotions and role of humour.

Dunnock, Linnet and Oriole all provide comments on their experiences of learning to improvise in relation to the graphic scores. Under the SO theme of *Identity* Dunnock describes his strong instrumental relationship to the guitar, and the exploration of the textured *discordant* music in the encounter as a new expression of identity and source of *rebellion*. Oriole strikingly observes that he doesn't recognise himself in the improvisation, perhaps indicating his struggle with

learning freer forms of music and a reflection on his potentially shifting sense of musical identity due to training as a music therapist.

In the SO theme of *Relationships*, Dunnock comments that the musical research relationship reminds him of other supportive relationships, such as with his mentor and friends, and observes how this enables his exploration of a liberated musical self in the encounter (crossover with identity theme). Similarly, Linnet remarks how the sympathetic nature of the musical research relationship enables her to explore risk-taking, whilst still feeling vulnerable. Oriole comments on the musical research relationship and reveals his need for a secure psychological and musical bass/base (which can be provided either by the researcher or participant), revealing his desire to experience anchoring, both psychological and musical, in this very freely structured music.

Finally, within the SO theme of *Emotions*, Linnet comments on the role of instruments for cathartic release and emotional containment; she remarks on the use of humour (with party hooters) to release tension in the improvisation and underlines the importance of emotions in her learning.

These IPA findings, made through the comments in the scores, will be considered in combination with literature, the IPA of the verbal interview and music analysis in the final discussion found in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7: Music Analysis

After the IPA analysis of the first case had been completed, it was considered that a detailed examination of the music would elicit deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

Phenomenological music analysis was introduced as a new step in the method. In this chapter I make a case for improvised music as hypertextual (7.1), introduce music analysis as a metadiscourse (7.2), and explore Ferrara's phenomenological music analysis (7.3). I then present the ten music analysis cases in numerical order (7.4.1–7.4.10). This is to give a sense of the music of each participant and how it may be understood in terms of the overall study. An mp3 recording of each improvisation is provided with the thesis. The chapter is written in the first person due to the reflexive nature of the material.

7.1 Improvised music as textual and hypertextual

In order to explore the importance of the music as data, I have strived to develop a concept of hypertextuality and improvised music. Hypertextuality (Stige, 2002) was discussed in Sections 3.8–3.8.3. I have drawn on this for both the design of the study and the music data. Hypertextuality is useful because it highlights the complexity of meanings found in improvised music. Therefore, I would like to briefly suggest a case for an understanding of improvised music as hypertextual; this could be further explored and developed in future studies. In this section I consider the term *text* and *artworks* to be interchangeable, understanding improvised music as artworks.

To begin to build a concept of music as hypertextual, it is useful to first draw on a post-structuralist textual understanding of other types of works such as

photography, books and poetry (O'Neil, 2018). Barthes (1977; 1981a), for example, describes a text or artwork as having a life of its own, created through a relationship with the reader. This then becomes 'intertextual' when set in relation to other texts; there is a relationship from text to text. Similarly, Ricoeur (1991) considers texts as 'inter-action' and primarily relational. He states that texts consist of layers of meaning, which he suggests are 'temporal, socially and culturally situated, identity, systems of patterns and symbols and the potential to open up the reader to new possibilities' (p.155). This is useful because it gives an indication of some of the complexity of layers of meaning in music, in that could be thought about as textual and intertextual. Ricoeur's concept of text and action is illustrated below in Figure 55.

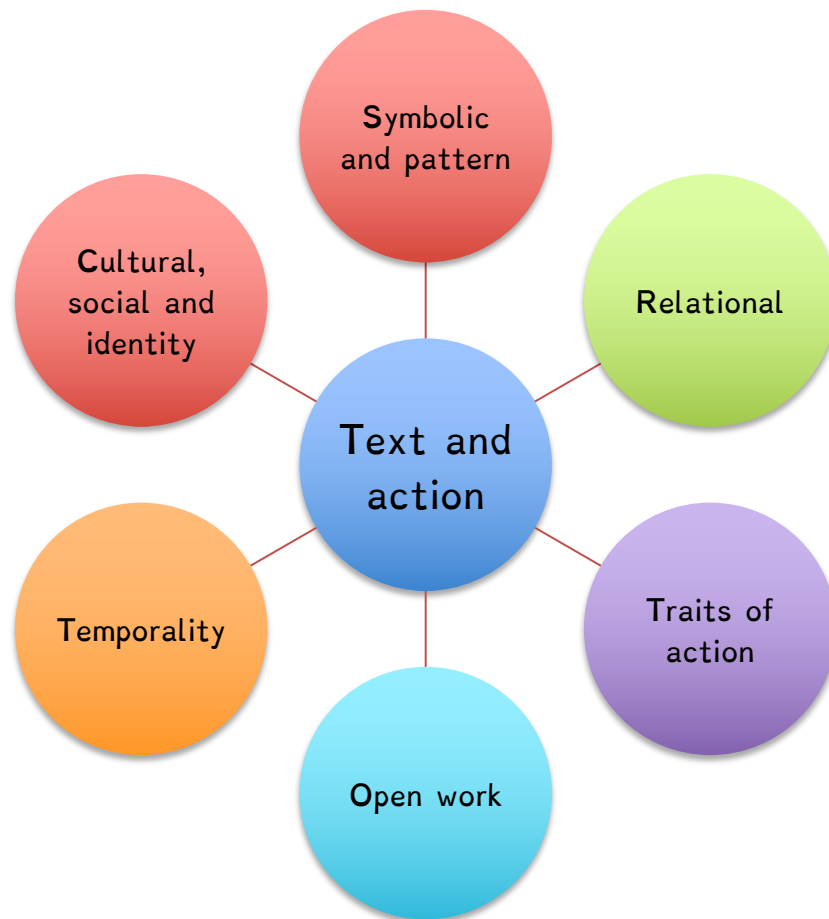


Figure 55: Ricoeur's (1991, p.155) components of text and action.

Ricoeur's text and textuality consists of: the 'relational' – in which the text forms a life of its own with the reader (or listener); as having 'further consequences' – in other words there is always a cultural, identity or social context; as 'traits of action' – texts contain mental states of 'being, performance and beliefs'; as 'open work' – with an

indefinite range of possible interpretations; ‘patterns and symbols’ – linguistic forms, and finally, ‘temporality’ – past, present and future (Ricoeur, 1991, p.155).

Drawing on Ricoeur, I would like to submit that improvised music can similarly be imagined as textual and intertextual using the same components. This is illustrated in Figure 56:

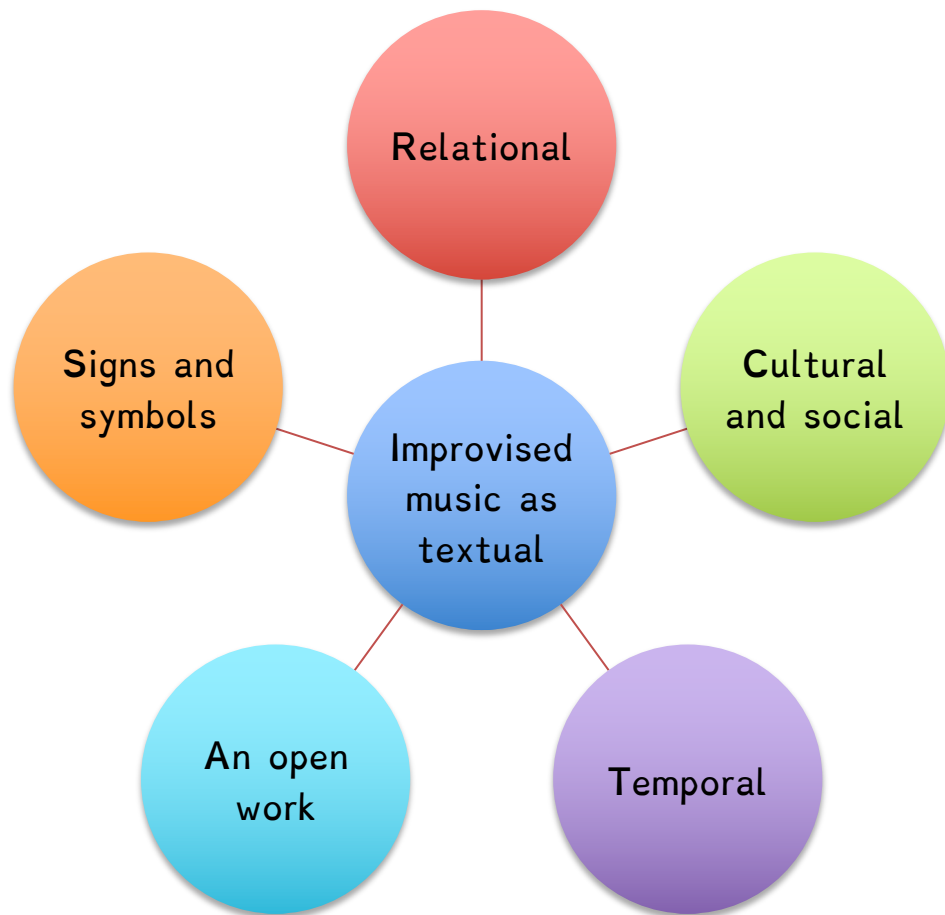


Figure 56: The textuality of improvised music drawing on Ricoeur's text as action.

In improvised music textual components could possibly consist of relationships, cultural or social identities or the experience of time (Begbie, 2000, Trondalen, 2016). Improvised music can also, like Ricoeur's text, be considered an 'open work' with 'traits of action' (p.155); as musicians anticipate new encounters, there can be a strong likelihood for transformations or new

states of being (as explored by Pavlicevic, 1997). Similarly, as previously discussed in Section 2.5.2 with ‘signs and symbols’, music can be experienced as containing two ‘symbolic forms of human communication ... referential and presentational (Langer, 1942, pp. 204–245; Garner, 1982). Thus, we can begin to see (in Figures 7.1 and 7.2), through drawing on Ricoeur’s concept of textuality, that improvised music may contain some of the same layers and complexities of meaning. This can be developed even further to consider other factors such as the environment, acoustics, ambient noise, history of performances, recording or presence of audience. If improvised music is potentially textual then it logically follows that it could also be hypertextual. As previously discussed, (Sections 3.8–3.8.3) hypertextuality is characterised by intertextuality (relationships of one text to another) and non-sequential pathways, with freedom for the listener to make their own construction and interpretation of the work (Genette, 1997; Stige, 2002;

Ensslin, 2007). To continue to imagine improvised music as hypertextual, I would like to suggest that the ‘elements of music’ could be understood as the ‘signifiers’. The art philosopher Dewey (1934) considers this to be the case, that tones, or melody can *signify* emotion.

However, it is important at this point, to acknowledge that the elements of music are a Western art music centric view. Ewell (2020) refers to this as a ‘white Western frame’, formed out of the dominant colonial practices of the 18th Century, for example the music of the Baroque and Classical periods (see Glossary). This theory of music decentralises the music of ‘Asia, South America or Africa’ viewing it as ‘other’, ‘world music’ (no page), or found in only combination with the dominant white culture (for example Debussy’s use of the whole tone scale in ‘La mer’, see Glossary). The Western white frame of the elements of music has reductionist issues. This ontology of music, has its origins in the Descarte viewed of the mind (and music)

as 'immaterial', setting up the body to be considered a 'machine' through which music passes (Hess, 2008, p.74). It falsely separates out the mechanisms of music, whereas in reality it is experienced as a live, living phenomenon. For example, in the music of Uganda, dance plays a prominent role as inseparable from music, which is used to form pedagogy (Magingo, 2020). This creates an integrated and embodied view of music, which perhaps the Western concept of the 'elements of music' lacks. However, for the develop of ideas in this thesis, I have chosen to use the elements of music as means of conceptualising signifiers.

The term 'signifiers' is used by Langer (1942) to denote sounds in music. 'Signifiers' can be either directly 'referential' or 'presentational' but always linked point to the 'life of feeling' (Langer, 1942, p.223). In using the word 'signifiers', I also draw on Barthes's (1977) notion of textuality as containing a 'weave of signifiers'. He states:

The plural of the text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (Barthes, 1977, p.159).

In this way, improvised music could be understood as consisting of a 'weave of signifiers', or a 'weave of the elements'. These can be visualised as surrounded by the textual components, expanding ever outwards towards other related intertexts (such as other music, written works, poetry, photography, dance or visual arts). Pathways between signifiers and other texts are hypertextual, continually shifting and changing according to the interpretation of the researcher, musician or listener (Way and McKerrell, 2017).

This envisaged view of improvised music strongly suggests hypertextuality. It provides a strong argument for the hypertextuality and use of music as data in this project, and for its equal status together with the verbal data. A possible structure showing the

hypertextuality of the music data in this study is shown in Figure 57.

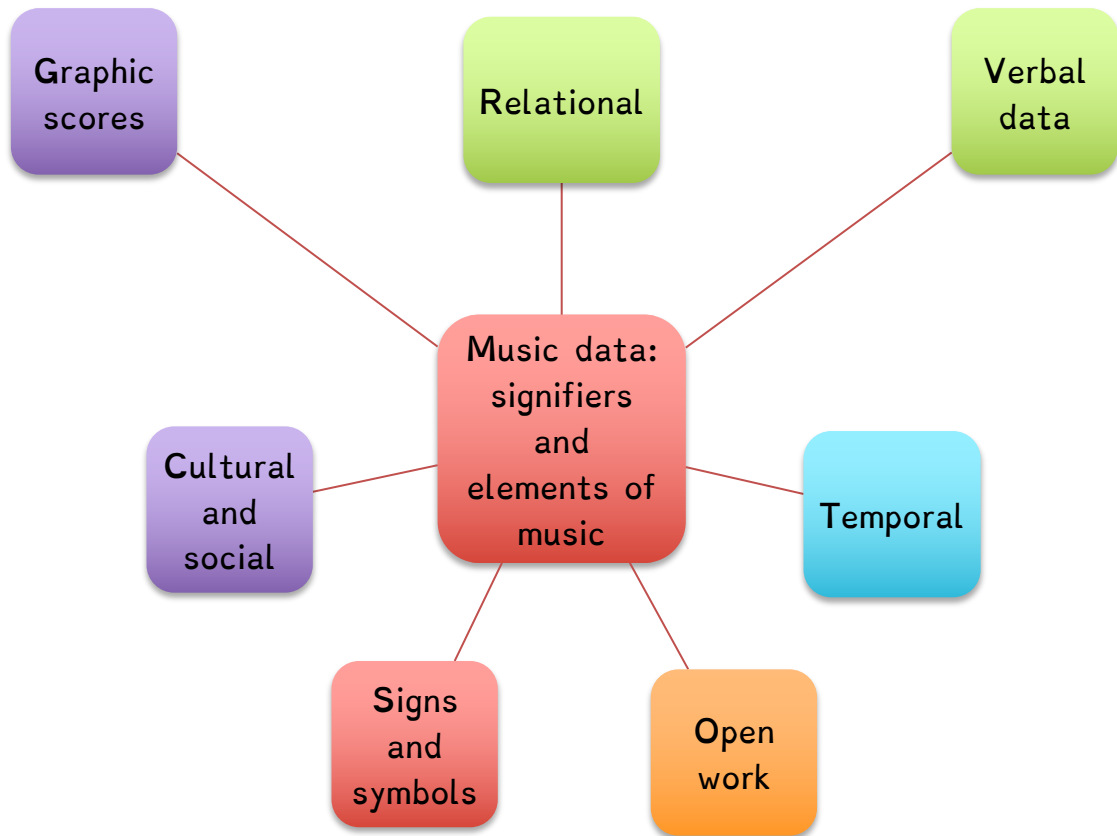


Figure 57: Hypertextuality of improvised music in this study.

In Figure 65 it can be seen that the signifiers are at the centre; these are in a textual relationship with the components of: relational, verbal data, temporal, open work, signs and symbols, cultural and social and

graphic scores; the hypertextuality is found between the music data and the other texts in the study, namely the verbal data and the graphic scores. This is one example of a hypertextuality in improvised music, and it would be interesting to explore other possibilities and contexts, such as in music therapy sessions or free improvisation performances. However, this argument gives a good grounding for the equal status of the music alongside the verbal data, crucially highlighting the complexities in meaning of improvised music. I will now consider the music analysis as a ‘metadiscourse’.

7.2 Analysis of music data as ‘metadiscourse’

The music analysis in this study can be considered a type of ‘metadiscourse’ and act of interpretation, influenced by my perception and theoretical leanings as the analyst. It is made up of three facets, the ‘object’ or the audio recordings, ‘metalanguage’ and

‘methodology’ (Nattiez, 1990, p.133, p.153). This ‘metadiscourse’ includes psychodynamic music therapy (De Backer and Sutton, 2014), microanalysis (Wosch and Wigram, 2007), reflexive thinking (Etherington, 2004) and Western art music analysis (Cook, 1987). Psychodynamic music therapy has previously been discussed in Section 2.5.4, and reflexivity in Section 3.7. I was also very broadly influenced by microanalysis in music therapy, which employs the analysis of small details in improvisational encounters. In sessions, therapists investigate minutiae such as instrumental use, movement, eye gaze or vocalisations to reveal in-depth material such as interactional dynamics and cognitive and emotional responses. De Backer and Wigram (2007) demonstrate a breadth of approaches; for example, Sutton (2007) used coding of musical cells and Grocke and Trondalen (2007) composed textural descriptions related to musical and therapeutic events. I was also influenced by Western art music analysis which traditionally focuses on

drawing out musical features of ‘regular form and theme’, melody and harmony (Cook, 1987, p.9; Lee, 2003a, 2003b). However, Western music analysis was not entirely suited to the improvisations with the participants since the music contained irregular form, melody, rhythm or timbre and ambient noise, as well as an absence of five-line stave music notation. I therefore used facets only, listening to the improvisations and making written notes on a timeline of any pertinent features in the elements of music. This highlights that the music analysis was a subjective interpretation, rather than objective, which can be the case even in a music analysis of highly notated music where lived experience of the analyst and musical, social and cultural context can have repercussions for how a musical text is understood. For example, the Tristan chord in Wagner’s prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* (1859), has famously been interpreted in many different ways, depending on how it is experienced: as a diminished seventh chord, a motif

or tonal movement with and without key (Cook, 1987, p.218).

To create this ‘metadiscourse’ in music analysis I used an adapted version of Ferrara’s phenomenological music analysis; this is discussed in Section 7.3.

7.3 Ferrara’s Phenomenological Music Analysis

In this study I employed an adapted version of Ferrara’s (1984) phenomenological music analysis, which has been influential in music therapy research (see Section 3.3). Ferrara suggests a five-stage method from opening listening to ontological, which provides ‘multidimensional ... meanings’ (p.373), a summary of the stages is shown in table 9:

Table 9: Ferrara's stages of phenomenological music analysis

Five Stages of Analysis
<p>Stage 1: Listening openly – Ferrara proposes several open listenings with reflective descriptions to ‘orientate the analyst towards the work’ (Ferrara, p.359).</p>
<p>Stage 2: Syntactical listening – several listenings which focus on the sounds themselves (traditional music analysis could be used).</p>
<p>Stage 3: Semantic listening – listening for musical form and technical events (e.g., tonality, rhythm, timbre).</p>
<p>Stage 4: Ontological listenings – focusing on the lived experience meaning of the work, the cultural, social economic situation, the relevance of the performance and lived experience of the musicians.</p>

Stage 5: A return to open listenings, considering the dynamic between the syntactical and ontological meanings. Repeat the process as necessary.

A number of music therapists have adapted Ferrara's analysis, either utilising all five stages or drawing on some aspects; for example, Amir (1990) used a seven-stage adapted method looking at improvised music with song lyrics in music therapy; Arnason (2002) used six levels in group work. Other music therapists who have used an adapted version include Forinash and Gonzalez (1989), Kasayka (1991) and Grocke (1999a).

In this study I used a two-stage version to focus on syntactical/semantic and ontological elements; this was as follows:

1. A combination of the syntactical and semantic stages, encompassing a short, simple written

description of purely musical events such as tonality, rhythm or instrumentation.

2. An ontological stage which attempts to examine the lived world of the musicians.

In addition I employed some summary analysis, to combine the two stages, this is when there was a need to consider the overall form of the music.

Cook (1987) states, music analysis is always an act of interpretation, no matter what the form of analysis undertaken. Therefore, I acknowledge that in this study the nature of the two stages of music analysis were subject to my personal interpretation and influenced by my training as a psychodynamic music therapist. I would also like to acknowledge that the participants were not involved in this stage of the analysis, creating a researcher – participant power dynamic. It maybe useful for future researchers to consider how this power dynamic maybe levelled. It is also important

for the researcher to explicitly declare their cultural, social and musical situatedness when undertaking a music analysis, since this will influence interpretation.

The ten music analyses are now presented, music analysis is also included in the discussion chapters 9. Further extracts from the music analysis can be found in Appendix E.

7.4 Presentation of music analysis

I will now present the analysis of the ten pieces of improvised music in numerical order of participants. I have chosen to show the music in this way to preserve a sense of the narrative and temporal flow of the music in the study. Participants' music will be shown in the following order:

1. Length of music
2. Instrumentation
3. Important aspects identified within the music
4. Metadiscourse on aspects including relevant examples of extracts from the Ferrara analysis, reflexive thinking and illustrations from the graphic scores.

The chapter will conclude with a short summary of the main aspects which have been identified across cases, leading into Chapter 9 and the discussion of how these

relate to the five **SO** themes of identity, relationships, emotions, learning and flow which arose through the **IPA**.

7.4.1 Dunnock

The improvisation with Dunnock is ten minutes and thirteen seconds, with acoustic guitar (D) and melodica (Becky). The music analysis revealed three important aspects, shown in Figure 58.

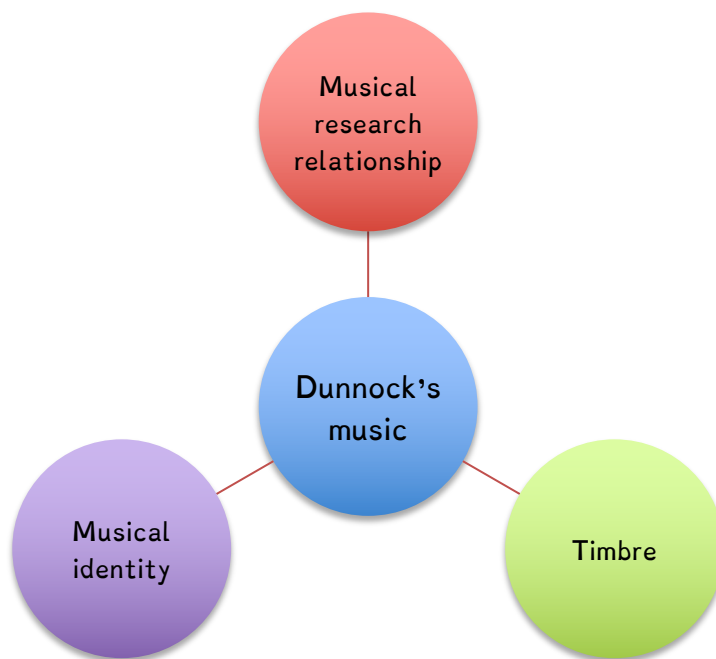


Figure 58: Analysis of Dunnock's music: timbre, musical identity and the musical research relationship.

7.4.1a Timbre

Dunnock employs differing guitar techniques, creating a wide range of timbres such as glissandos, arpeggios, harmonics and staccato; the variety of which is suggested visually in the graphic score (see Figure 59).

Dunnock – Minute Four



Figure 59: Dunnock – minute four, graphic score, illustrating the wide variety of guitar timbres. The top purple line, reading from left to right: short, strummed chords – short, curved lines; staccato – dots; melodic – longer waving lines, fragments; and harmonics – crosses. The lower green section represents the researcher’s accompanying melodica music.

The guitar in jazz is often traditionally used rhythmically or melodically (e.g., the smooth jazz lines of Pat Metheny, 2020) and is seldom explored through timbre, with a few exceptions such as Derek Bailey (Watson, 2004) or George Burt (MacDonald, 2020). Dunnock's music clearly pushes at the boundaries of traditional jazz guitar, playing only one single continuous melodic line (Table 10).

Table 10: Dunnock – minute five, music analysis, continuous melodic line, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Dunnock – minute five, syntactical/semantic analysis	
4:00	The guitar begins with a major third G to B and then creates harmonics. The slow, quiet music continues with sustained low G tremolos on melodica against a high A quaver.
4:15	With more harmonics on the guitar, I move to play a B tremolo, fitting together in a major third with Dunnock's G.

4:30	Here Dunnock plays a substantial melody for the first time, accompanied by sustained notes on the melodica. At the end of the melody once again F major returns with the introduction of a Bb.
	Ontological analysis
	The space in the music continues and Dunnock seems to be reaching to find his voice. As I play supportive low notes he eventually reaches out for a rather beautiful melody, which is perhaps the place he was trying to find. It is as if all the tension before this is a necessary part of the journey to discover this melody. The introduction of Bb at the end, feels cheeky and like a surprise, testing to see what will happen next.

Initially in the ontological analysis, I mistakenly interpret the melodic line as a climax, labelling it as ‘the place he was trying to find’. However, with an overall view there is an inherent tension between timbre and melody; it is as if Dunnock constantly

shifts between the two (melodic fragments appear in all but minutes five and ten). As explored in the analysis of Dunnock's comments on the graphic score (Section 6.1.1), the melody is important because it seems to represent a compliance with traditional elements of jazz guitar, whereas the timbres give a sense of rebellion. He is potentially exploring new ways of presenting himself, perhaps sounding the free self, one which doesn't rely on traditional modes of playing.

7.4.1b Identity

Dunnock only uses the guitar in this music, and it seems to hold an embodied, sensory, emotional and cognitive sense of self. This can be a common experience for musicians who are heavily invested in the expression of self through an instrument. As in Winnicott's (1971) concept of the transitional object, the instrument can become a mediator of the self and

the outside world, creating a way of relating and forming boundaries.

7.4.1c The musical research relationship

As highlighted in Section 6.1.3b, the musical research relationship becomes prevalent through the music analysis. This relationship consists of musical communication and intersubjectivity, temporal connection, presence or heightened awareness of other and transference and countertransference. The musical research relationship is very prominent in the analysis of Dunnock's music. His exploration of timbre affords a means of different ways of relating to self and other. This is clearly mapped below in Table 11.

Table 11: Dunnock – summary music analysis, overview of musical relationship, syntactical, semantic and ontological combined.

Minute	Analysis of musical relationship
1	Period of negotiation and opening dialogue.
2	Searching for direction and forward motion, much of the tonality in E minor.
3	Negotiation of forward movement, tense conversations as to who will take the lead. I push the tonality, C natural against chord of G major creating a tritone (2:50).
4	Dunnock leads on the guitar, finding his place and voice.
5	Continuous melody on guitar supported by melodic low notes. Dunnock plays what feels like a ‘cheeky’ Bb to end, suggesting what might happen next.
6	Dunnock takes ownership of the music, pushing for a conversational dialogue.
7	The dialogue continues; he is still pushing for a response (which I give). At 6:48 there is a

	moment of what seems to be equal status and counterpoint texture.
8	There is agreement in the music, a joint groove and energy.
9	Ending together.

In minute six Dunnock initiates a dialogue, perhaps looking for reassurance he is being heard? Dunnock previously discusses his acute need to be acknowledged by others, and here the music seems to become a microcosm of this. As I respond there is a feeling of increased trust, demonstrated in Table 12:

Table 12: Dunnock – minute seven, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate.

	Dunnock – minute seven, syntactical/semantic analysis
6:00	Continuing the dialogue, Dunnock plays considered phrases as I answer.

6:08	There is a striking phrase on a syncopated G, answered by fourths in the melodica (G to C). This pattern is then repeated.
6:15	Melodica answering phrase upward to D. Music becomes increasingly faster, dense and arpeggiated.
6:48	Both play short staccato phrases.
Ontological analysis	
	The dialogue continues, with the guitar still very much directing my music and looking for a response. Perhaps this is similar to how he was looking for a reaction from ‘other people’ or the ‘audience’? At 6:48 we achieve more of an equal status, rather like a counterpoint texture. It is as if we fit together and reach an agreement about the forward motion.

The sense that he is being fully heard facilitates a deepening of relationship, and at 6:48 Dunnock and I seem to be equal within the music, playing together

using short staccato phrases. This later develops into a joint groove in minute seven, see Table 13.

Table 13: Dunnock – minute eight, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Dunnock – minute eight, syntactical/semantic analysis	
7:00	The music becomes increasingly complex and chromatic and the pulse more marked. As I keep the pulse, Dunnock explores glissandos on B. I also move in semitones downward to B \flat , A and A \flat .
7:21	There is an exchange of register, as Dunnock moves to the lower (chord of G major with a B natural), and I play higher around G; we interweave with each other.
Ontological analysis	
	The agreement of sound follows through with a joint groove, the dialogue is full of energy and complexity.

The sense of acceptance and trust enables increasing chromatic complexity, as at 7:00 Dunnock plays glissandos on B and I move in semitones to Bb, A and Ab. The musical relationship demonstrates both Dunnock's wish to be independent, and to be heard and acknowledged. It is possible that without this acceptance he feels he can't persist in exploring his musical identity, and it gives him confidence to discover fresh ways of improvising and developing a new sense of self.

7.4.1d Dunnock's music – summary

This music reveals Dunnock's learning in improvisation. It demonstrates the tension between his old (melodic), and new (texture and timbre) ways of playing music. His sole use of the guitar suggests its importance in relation to his musical identity. Finally, the music strongly underlines the significance of the musical research relationship, highlighting Dunnock's needs for

reassurance from and being heard by others,
facilitating his continued development as an improviser.

7.4.2 Linnet

The improvisation with Linnet is nineteen minutes and eighteen seconds long. The music analysis reveals five aspects, as shown in Figure 60.

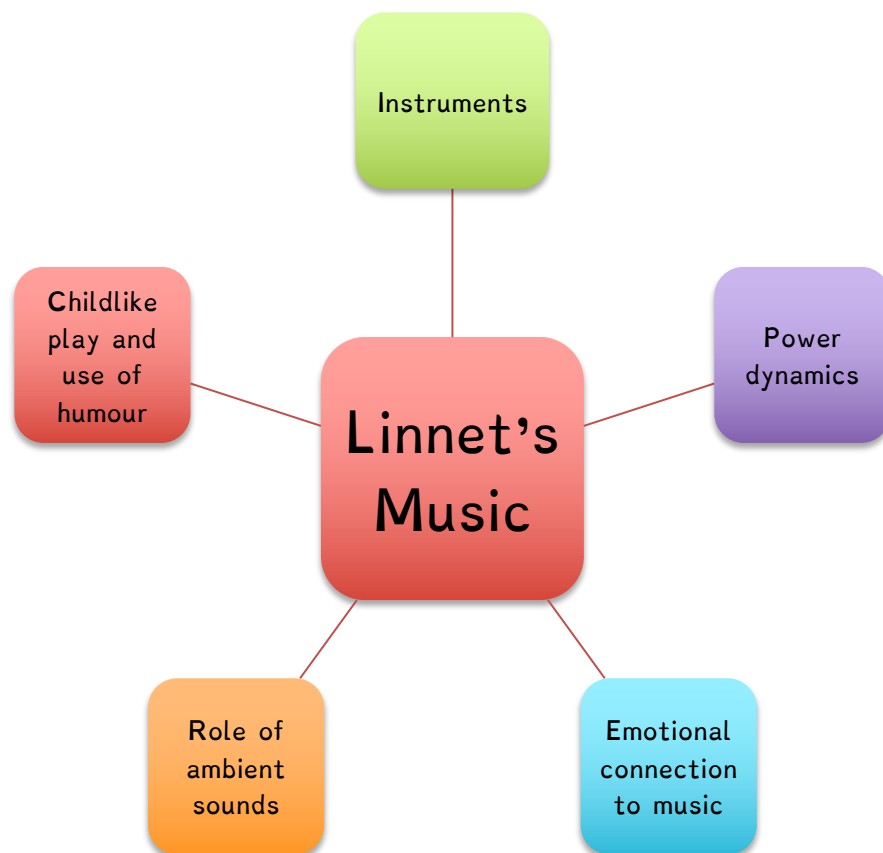


Figure 60: Analysis of Linnet's music: instruments, power dynamics, emotional connection to music, role of ambient sounds, and childlike play and role of humour.

7.4.2a Instruments

Linnet plays the ocean drum in both the opening and closing sections of the music. It provides an emotional holding, helping to contain extremes of emotions; this is shown in Tables 14 and 15.

Table 14: Linnet – section one, music analysis, 00:00–1:24; ocean drum (Linnet), melodica (Becky), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet – section one, 00:00– 1:35, syntactical/ semantic analysis	
0:00	The music opens with ocean drum and an outside car horn. I enter quietly on melodica playing an interval of a fifth, pitches G to D .
0:34	Flourishes on the melodica, with rising notes D major to B minor, progressively louder.
0:56	Sudden crash of ocean drum.
1:24	Pause, followed by Linnet tapping on the drum.
Ontological analysis	

	<p>A slow ambient opening led by the ocean drum. I follow on the melodica, attempting to match Linnet's sounds, through groups of rising and falling pitches. A more certain, definite ocean drum crashing at 00:56, seeming to suggest it is time to move on.</p>
--	--

Table 15 Linnet – section ten, music analysis, 16:00–19:18, ocean drum (L), melodica (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet – section ten, 16:00–19:18, syntactical/semantic analysis

In this last section we return to the original instruments, ocean drum and melodica. I underpin Linnet's ocean drum sounds with an augmented fourth on F, adding a drone-like D. The ambient sounds of the city street once again enter the room, and resonate with the ocean drum, seeming to amplify its sounds. I finish the music with very quiet notes (around the pitch G) to play out.

Ontological analysis

A natural coda occurs with a return of the original instrumentation of ocean drum and melodica. The sounds are intense and brooding, filling the whole room. Here Linnet seems to be reflecting on the journey of the interview and music, and the different emotions she has expressed. I support the ending mood on the melodica with a slightly dissonant interval and added drone, and we both are surrounded by the ambient sounds of rumbles and crashes of building works directly outside the window of the small room. The music comes to a slow and quiet end.

Noticeable in section one (0:56) is the sudden strong crash on the ocean drum. In contrast, in the coda, there is a quiet reflective *brooding* quality to her sounds.

Linnet makes a wide selection of instrumental choices, shown in Table 16.

Table 16: Linnet's (L) and Becky's (B) summary, instrumental choices divided into ten sections

Section	Instruments
1	Ocean drum (L) / Melodica (B)
2	Glockenspiel (L) / Melodica (B)
3	Shaker (L) / Tambourine (B)
4	Tambourine (L) / Melodica (B)
5	Silence (L) / Rattling melodica keys (B)
6	Snake shakers, tambourine, bells, party hooter (L) / Recorder (B)

7	Party hooter, snake shakers, drum (L) / Recorder, drum (B)
8	Bells (L) / Tambourine, sweetcorn shaker (B)
9	Tin whistle, claves (L) / Melodica (B)
10	Ocean drum (L) / Melodica, Tambourine (B)

She explores nine instruments in total; her playing has an almost uninhibited, humorous and childlike quality.

During section six (8:03) she plays the party hooter, the sound (duck-like) of which creates much laughter.

The interaction is humorous and teasing and we playfully provoke each other: sections six and seven, Tables 17 and 18.

Table 17: Linnet – section six, music analysis, 8:03–9:12, snake shakers, tambourine, bells, party hooter (L), recorder (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet – section six, 8:03–9:12, syntactical/semantic analysis	
8:03	Linnet makes rattling sounds on the tambourine and snake shakers. I play answering fast trills and fragments of improvised melody in D major on the recorder. Linnet blows the party hooter, we play alongside each other and laugh.
Ontological analysis	
	There is a lightness and humour in this section. Instruments are rattled, I play the recorder in a slightly mischievous manner and Linnet is playful with the party hooter. It is like she is searching for something, experimenting with the different sounds and I follow her lead.

Table 18: Linnet – section seven, 9:12–11:08, party hooter, claves, snake shakers, fingers tapping on drum, tambourine (L), recorder, drum (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

9:13	Linnet – section seven, 9:12–11:08, syntactical/semantic analysis
9:13	Party hooter and recorder continues, Linnet taps her fingers on the drum.
9:32	Pause and silence.
9:35	Linnet uses the claves. I play the drum suggesting quadruple time; however, the pulse becomes uncertain and scattered.
10:00	Linnet finds a steady pulse on the claves; I play syncopated rhythms around it.
10:48	I switch to the tambourine.
	Ontological analysis
	Playfulness continues with the recorder, hooter and laughter. There is an echo of the power dynamics of section three: I play too strongly on the drum, resulting in the pulse and rhythms unravelling. Linnet once again responds by

	creating her own pulse (claves) and I add syncopated rhythms. The power dynamic shifts as she takes the lead.
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Linnet plays almost all of the instruments provided, possibly because they are novel. She seems to have an evolving relationship with the percussion, and I wonder if it is not only the ocean drum which provides emotional holding and containing.

7.4.2b Childlike play and role of humour/power dynamics

In the ontological analysis (Table 19), I question the role of the humorous interactions. They could be about a release of tension, as stated in the graphic score comments (Section 6.1.2e), but perhaps Linnet was also using humour to descale the inherent power dynamic?

Humour often levels tense relations or situations

(Haire and MacDonald, 2019). At 3:26 I am overly musically assertive and creating a power dynamic. I assume Linnet struggles with the pulse and provide one on the tambourine, making an unsteady negotiation of pulse and mistakenly directing Linnet to follow my music (3:46). However, I quickly remedy the situation by returning to the melodica. This is shown in Table 19.

Table 19: Linnet – section three, music analysis 3:19–3:46, shaker (L), tambourine, melodica (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet – section three, 3:19–4:17, syntactical/semantic analysis	
3:19	Linnet picks up the shaker and continues the wavering pulse, I search for a new instrument.
3:26	I pick up the tambourine, pulse and rhythms become syncopated and unsteady as we negotiate them between us.
3:41	I make a continuous sound on the tambourine, underpinning the shaker sounds.

3:46	Linnet imitates the sound of the tambourine. I begin to hit the tambourine, instead of shaking it, and quickly move back to the melodica.
Ontological analysis	
	<p>This section is a negotiation of who will lead the music. It begins with Linnet playing the shaker, but as I initiate too strongly on the tambourine she loses confidence in her sounds, the pulse is lost and she imitates my music. I remember thinking I had played too much and tried to remedy this by making a more continuous grounding sound, leaving Linnet to explore her own pulse and rhythm. However, she continued to follow and imitate my sounds. I then tried to break this dynamic up once again by hitting the tambourine and quickly moving back to the melodica. This seemed to help readdress the power dynamic issue, as she took over on the tambourine (the power instrument). This seems to perfectly</p>

	illustrate the power dynamic inherent in the interview/improvisation process.
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In section four, the power dynamic is readdressed, Linnet picks up the tambourine and asserts a musical lead, shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Linnet – section four, music analysis, 4:18–7:40, tambourine, (L), melodica (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet, section four, 4:18–7:40, syntactical/semantic analysis	
4:18	The music becomes more lively and pronounced. At this point Linnet picks up the tambourine and leads the music rhythmically, making a strong statement and finding a pulse in triple and quadruple time. I follow on the melodica, initiating the key of Bb major playing repeated quavers. I play in a sustained manner around the chords of Eb major, G minor and Bb major.

6:20	In response to the dynamic variation from the tambourine, I play short ornamental turns together with repeated chords, moving to the chord of F. Linnet gets progressively louder.
7:21	The music sounds more frenzied, Linnet plays slightly uneven loud quaver patterns.
7:39	We both come to an end together, the musical energy is not sustained.
Ontological Analysis	
	In this section Linnet takes the lead, picking up the instrument I had previously played. It might be that the tambourine had become the <i>power</i> instrument, and she asserts overcoming the inherent dynamic of researcher and participant. I initiate a tonality, and follow her rhythmic gestures. At 7:21 the music becomes frenzied and seems to feel intensely emotional, however it quickly comes to an end, as if this is difficult to sustain.

As the power dynamic shifts an intensity in the emotional content emerges. However, the emotional force is difficult to sustain, perhaps too risky, and quickly dissipates (7:21). At 8:03 humorous interactions begin, suggesting they might also be a form of emotional regulation.

7.4.2c Emotional connection to music

Linnet's learning in improvisation is intertwined with moments of emotional intensity. This is shown at two specific points: section four on the tambourine, and section nine with overblowing on the tin whistle. Here the music reveals how Linnet's emotions are manifest in sound. The embodied phenomenological experience of overblowing (see **Glossary**) on the tin whistle requires an energy and force of breath, and specific intention to continuously play at a high level of pitch (Hz) and loudness (dB). This combination can be physically and

aurally uncomfortable, suggesting an emotional discomfort; see Table 21.

Table 21: Linnet – section nine, music analysis, 12:34–14:37, tin whistle (L), melodica (B), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Linnet – section nine, 12:34–14:37, syntactical/semantic analysis	
12:34	Linnet experiments with the tin whistle in G major and I play the melodica. There is a difference of intonation between the whistle and melodica. Linnet plays trills and I return to the earlier motif which utilised the notes G , A and B .
14:37	The music breaks up into shorter notes and a dialogue led by Linnet. She overblows trills to finish this section.
Ontological analysis	
	Although this section begins as playful, the humour dissipates and an emotional intensity returns, expressed in the overblowing of the tin whistle, which is uncomfortable and shrill to

hear. This is broken up for a short moment, with a turn-taking dialogue between whistle and melodica, but Linnet returns to trills. Perhaps at this point she was thinking about the intensity of the emotion talked about in the interview?
--

7.4.2d Role of ambient sounds

The final point to consider is the role of ambient sounds. These are part of the sonic landscape and influence our music making, particularly in sections nine and ten, with a low rumble of demolition works outside the window, the vibrations of which could be felt as well as heard. This dramatic, almost sinister sound affects Linnet and I as we improvise together. The shuddering and deep rumbling almost seem to amplify the emotional intensity she expresses, and sonically merge with the ocean drum.

7.4.2e Linnet's music – summary

Linnet clearly has an emotional connection to sounds, which is developing through learning to improvise, whilst using the ocean drum to create emotional holding and containing. The music analysis demonstrates her use of playful humorous interactions to manage intensity of emotions and to level power dynamics within the encounter. Finally, the analysis suggests how unexpected external ambient sounds can have an influence on the expression and development of the music.

7.4.3 Oriole

The improvisation with Oriole is five minutes and thirty-four seconds long, with piano (O) and electric bass guitar (B). The analysis reveals three important aspects, as shown in Figure 61.

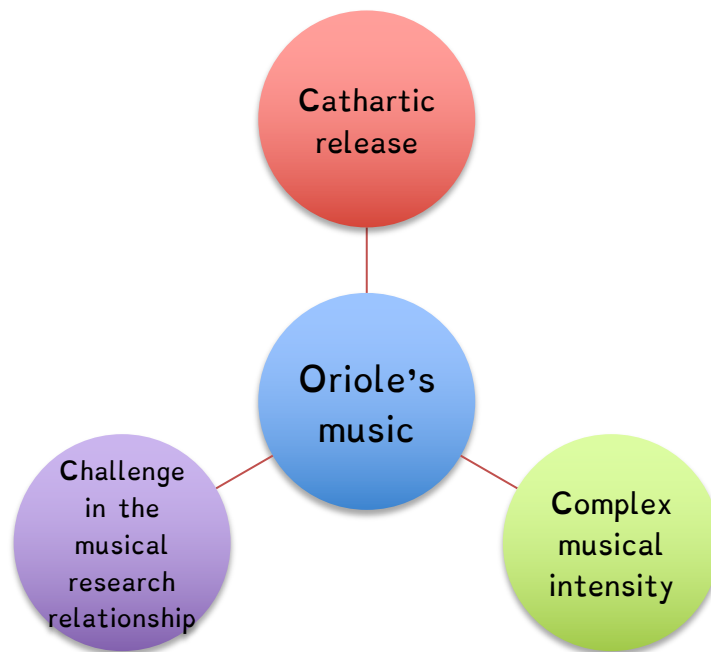


Figure 61: Analysis of Oriole's music, with three important aspects: cathartic release, complex musical intensity, and challenge in the musical research relationship.

7.4.3a Cathartic release

There is a sense of cathartic release throughout the whole of the music, beginning with a three-note statement on the piano music (E, F, G) and rich harmonic textures; see Table 22.

Table 22: Oriole – 0:-0:55, music analysis, piano (O), electric bass guitar (B)m syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Oriole – minute one, syntactical/semantic analysis
0:00	Piano – three-note opening statement, pitches E, F and G, with chord of G major. Quaver fourths in piano bass, G to D.
0:15	I answer with a bass guitar repeated high G quavers.
0:21	Three-note phrase statement on the piano.
0:23	Bass guitar, high G down the octave.

0:26	Repeated pitch D on the bass, with three-note phrase on the piano, E , D and C# , suggesting the chord of A major with an added 11th.
0:32	Piano bass notes D , repeated G on the bass guitar.
0:36	Oriole plays melodic phrases running up to C quavers, I answer on the bass with a low run on G .
0:38	Bass guitar plays D .
0:40	Piano uses low G and quavers continue.
0:43	Bass movement to pitches G , F and G .
0:46	Repeated G on bass.
0:47	Piano uses G in the bass register.
0:48	Piano octaves, A , A , E and D .
0:54	Octave D in bass guitar, accompanied by piano high D .
0:55	Bass guitar slides up to D , E and F# , with repeated D .
	Ontological analysis

<p>Oriole plays immediately with a three-note motif on the piano. At 0:15 I enter on the electric bass guitar, supporting, imitating and matching his quaver movement. There is a dense texture, urgent, with a feeling of <i>letting something go</i>. He demonstrates fast motor skills, and his playing is intense and loud. There is a density to his chords, such as at 0:26 with the added 11th. At 0:40 bass notes on the piano seem to signify an introduction, that something is about to happen in the music.</p>

7.4.3b Complex musical intensity

Oriole's music has a tightly packed, chaotic texture, with motifs, added chords, chromaticism, heavy piano pedalling and fast semiquaver runs. This frenzied quality has a strong feeling of urgent catharsis, perhaps a release after the intensity of the verbal interview.

7.4.3c Challenge in the musical relationship

There is a forcefulness to his playing, demonstrated in the opening three-note motif (minute one) and intervals in minute three. This becomes highlighted in the musical research relationship. At minute four (3:33) I consciously play a dissonant A minor against Oriole's B minor; for a moment we both pivot on A (3:34) but return to F# (which is out of tune) and the suggestion of B minor. I comment that this was like a *musical disagreement*; I felt I was responding to Oriole's need to be challenged musically (Table 23).

Table 23: Oriole – 3:00 – 3:58, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Oriole – minute four, syntactical/semantic analysis
3:02	Bass guitar E harmonics.
3:03	Piano bass suddenly quiet with space, B, D, E higher register of piano with bass guitar harmonics.

3:16	Bass guitar G harmonics.
3:20	Bass guitar uses D, E, B higher notes and a G glissando, piano still in higher register around B .
3:24	Higher notes on the piano A, B .
3:29	Oriole makes a strong statement with F#, E and C#, B to F# , suggestive of B minor .
3:33	I play dissonance against Oriole's piano, using the notes A, B, D, A, A .
3:34	Continue with As both instruments.
3:41	Both move to an F# .
3:42	Bass guitar glissando, B, C and C# , and F# in piano bass, still feels like B minor .
3:46	I use a rocking note on F# low bass guitar.
3:58	Bass guitar E, F# as if to finish, and repeated low F# .
Ontological analysis	
	In this minute there is increased space and a sense of waiting. At some point (4:33) I look for ways to change the music using dissonance, and there is a disagreement over a move to a tonal

	centre on A or B minor. The final note F# is out of tune, and we are finding a means to finish. Oriole checks the piano stool, and the negotiation continues.
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This interaction reflects his difficulties with the freer structures in improvisation, encountered on the music therapy training course. As an experienced musician in jazz standards, he feels confronted by less structured methods of improvising. Oriole admits that he has found this particularly problematic, and at the time of the research interview these difficulties were obviously prevalent. Throughout the interview and improvisation, he questions the use of free structures as opposed to jazz standards, and gives a challenge to the music therapy profession, and to me as its representative. My personal response, considered a form of transference, is to initially feel defensive and then to return his challenge, quickly followed by wanting to take on the role of tutor (which perhaps originates in Oriole's

perception or projection of me as a tutor). This is found in the music, as at 3:33 when I play an A against his B minor, seeking to *help him* into atonality and freer tonal structures of music.

Despite these professional and relational challenges, there is a dichotomy. The piano music is very free with loose chord structures, as if Oriole relishes the challenge, or is actively seeking ways of breaking into looser methods of improvising. His challenge is not only to the music therapy profession, to me, but to himself. He seems to be looking for permission to expand, to move away from known structures. During the interview Oriole acknowledges that his journey into open ways of improvising (see Glossary key terminology) is reflected in his personal development, seeking out new states of being. However, the desire for this freedom also creates tension within the music.

7.4.3d Oriole's music – summary

The analysis suggests Oriole's use of the improvisation for intense cathartic release. It also exposes the prevalent feature of challenge and seeking musical freedom. This confrontation is augmented within the music, and highlighted within the musical research relationship, as the music acts as a conduit for Oriole's tension in learning to improvise on the music therapy course, paralleled by his personal experiences of pursuing change and growth.

7.4.4 Bullfinch

The improvisation with Bullfinch is seven minutes and twenty-two seconds long, with piano (Bullfinch) and electric bass guitar (Becky). The analysis demonstrates two important features, as shown in Figure 62.

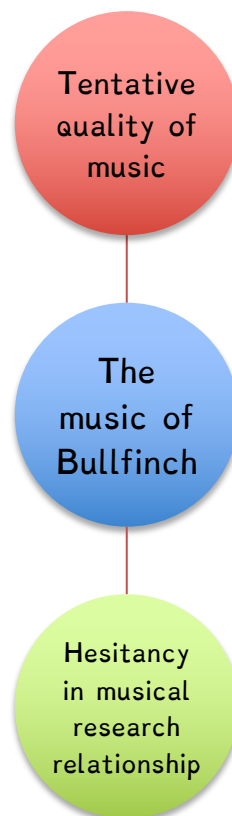


Figure 62: Analysis of the music of Bullfinch, with two important aspects: tentative quality of the music, and hesitancy in the musical research relationship.

7.4.4a Tentative quality of music

The music is split into two halves and is characterised by a faltering quality, little forward motion, and unsure relational connection, shown in Table 24, and depicted visually in Figures 63 and 64,

Table 24: Summary overview of music, 0 – 7:22 with Bullfinch, showing the split into two halves, syntactical, semantic and ontological combined

Minutes	Overview of music
0:00– 3:32	Focus on C and G major chords, wandering around C major with a brief shift to A minor, introduction of the chord of F major (2:24) – static and slow.
3:33– 4:04	Pause.
4:05– 7:22	Increased forward motion, use of major thirds in C major, some interactional dialogue, the use of the pitch A (5:14).

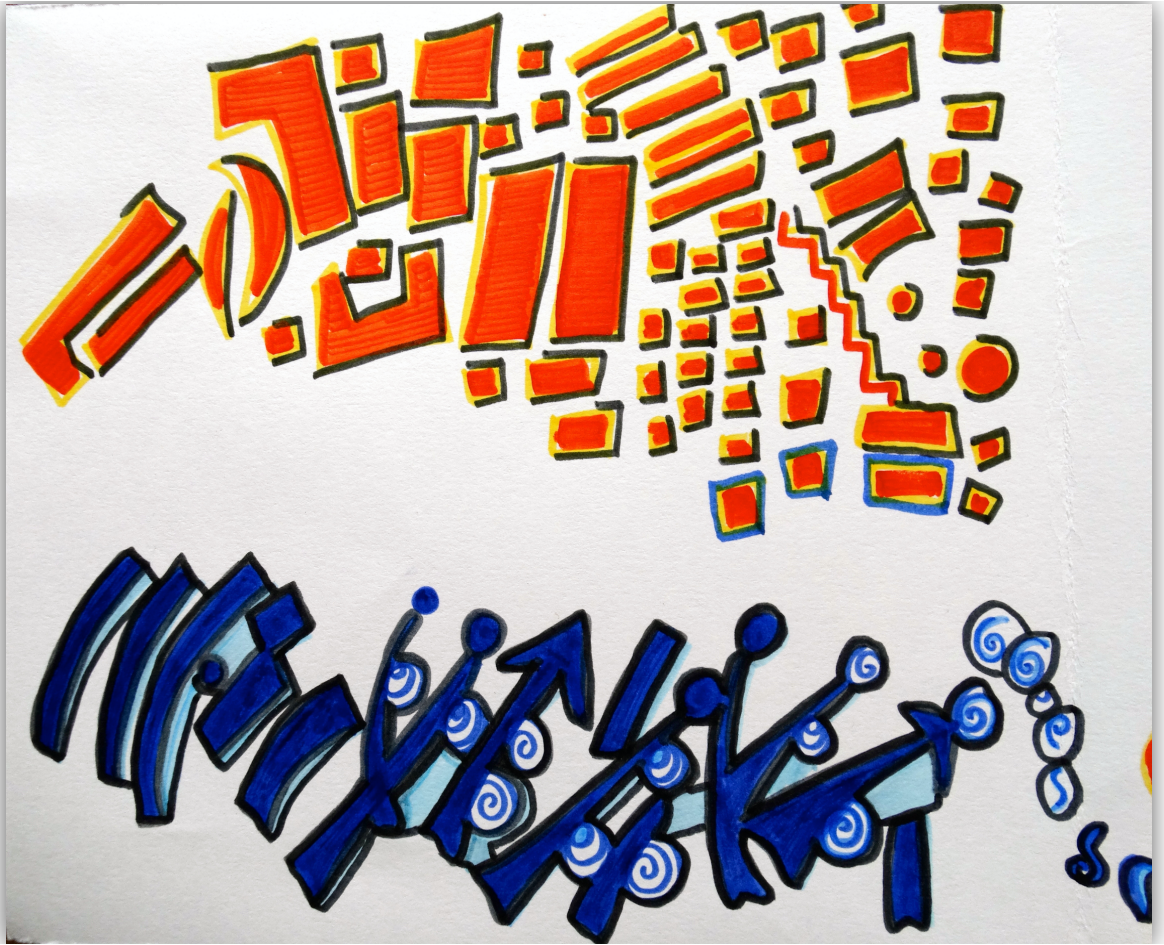


Figure 63: Bullfinch – first section of graphic score, 0:00–3:45. The score is divided into three sections, 0:00–3:45, a pause, and 3:46–7:22. The orange and yellow shapes represent the participant’s piano music, whilst blue shapes represent my music on the electric bass guitar. The score is freely drawn, reads from left to right, without a key, and is intended to give a visual sensation of the direction, form, timbre, movement and musical relationship.

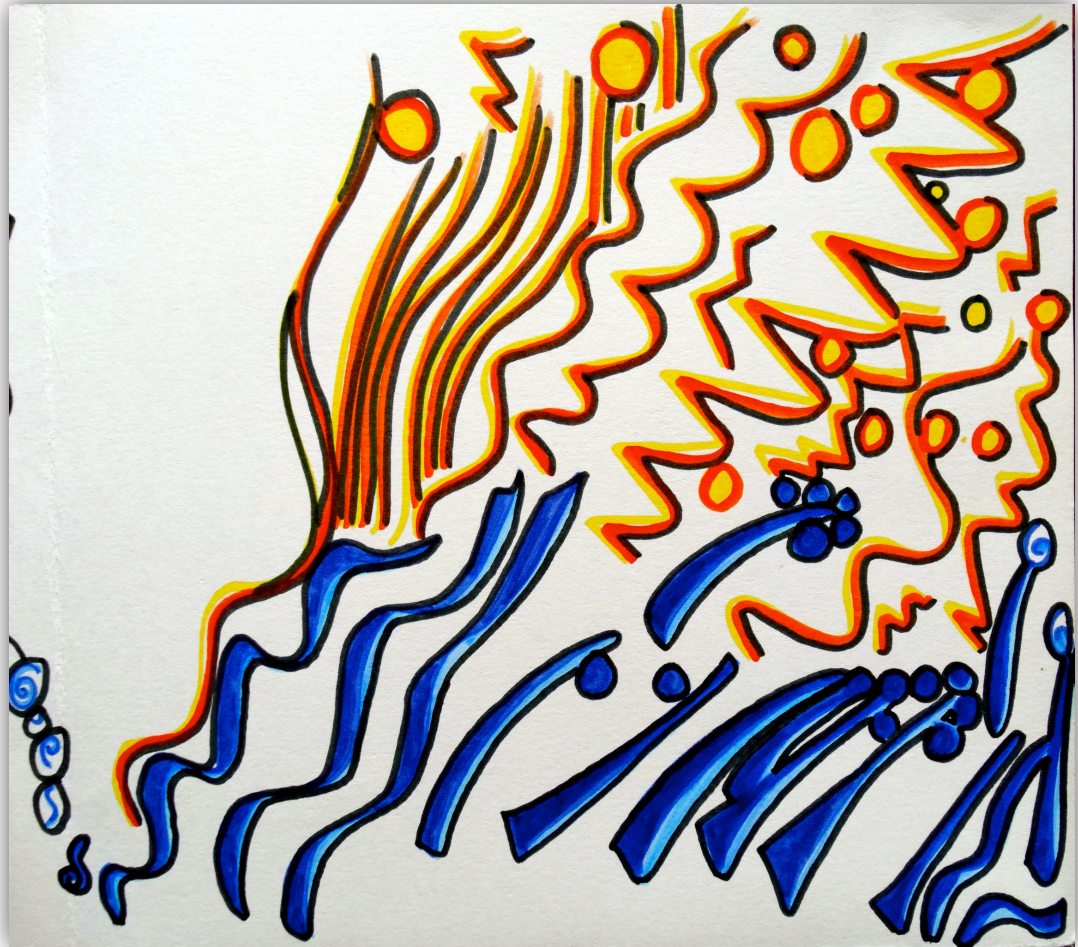


Figure 64: Bullfinch – second section of graphic score (3:46–7:22).

The music begins in C major with a static quality, apart from a brief foray into A minor and use of the F major chord (2:24). There is a short and fragile interaction; in minute one I respond to a rising three-note phrase, beginning a dialogue (0:11–0:26). However, the sense of connection and forward motion is suddenly broken (0:29) as Bullfinch switches back to C

octaves. This encapsulates the unchanging form, with little harmonic or melodic movement, shown in Table 25.

Table 25: Bullfinch – minute one, music analysis, piano (Bu), electric bass guitar (Be), syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Bullfinch – minute one, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (Bullfinch), electric bass guitar (Becky)
0:00	Bullfinch begins on the piano with a definite statement in C , moving to intervals C/E and C/G .
0:06	On the bass I reply with a tonal movement and glissandos – intervals D/E and G/A . The first forty seconds of the music is made up of call and response, wandering around C major.
0:11	Bullfinch plays a three-note phrase in C , E , F and G .

0:13	I respond with A, E, G and E, two quavers and a crotchet.
0:15	Bullfinch shifts between the notes A and C and G and B, responding to my previous pitches; she plays two crotchets, a semiquaver and dotted quaver.
0:23	Bullfinch moves up to F and G and two As in a similar rhythm to my sounds.
0:26	I take up the G and move to E.
0:29	Suddenly she plays octave Cs, switching back to the starting tonic. I play around a G, the dominant, and then a three-note chord in the relative minor (A). This seems to prompt a shift in her music, and she plays a high note quaver motif still in C.
0:48	I keep to the A minor pedals and add in a sixth (G), but then suddenly shift back to C at 1:00.
	Ontological analysis
	The minute begins in C major with a call and response. It feels tentative and unsure; there is

	<p>an unsteady negotiation of the tonic. We do not yet feel connected or established in how we will play together. At 0:40 I move to A minor, which might have been an attempt to create something more solid and concrete in the music. Bullfinch rests in A minor for a moment, but then we return to C.</p>
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The music changes in minute four, as a pause occurs, and we seem to consider how to proceed. The pause can be seen depicted visually in the graphic score on the right-hand side of Figure 63 and left-hand side of Figure 64, and is also demonstrated in Table 26.

Table 26: Bullfinch – 3:00 – 3:59, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Bullfinch – minute four, syntactical/semantic analysis
	There is a pause in the music at 3:33, three-note movement in the piano bass from C, D, E. I play C pedal notes.
3:45	Fast repeated quavers on C in bass guitar, major third, C to E.
	Ontological analysis
	The pause and slowing down in the music feels like a waiting, thinking or a readjusting. The introduction of the E in the bass of the piano possibly signifies a new section and I play fast quavers in response.

Following this, Bullfinch initiates more with an E in the bass of the piano and rising major third (4:05). This results in increased forward motion, especially as the

piano rocks between C major and F major at 4:35, see Table 27.

Table 27: Bullfinch – 4:00 – 4:59, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Bullfinch – minute five, syntactical/semantic analysis	
4:05	More movement, still staying in C major, piano, C, D, E, and falling phrase, I play answering phrases.
4:10	More dialogue develops, Bullfinch answers with notes C and E, four quavers and a crochet. High register on bass on E.
4:12	Bullfinch again initiates with pitches E and F.
4:15	I answer, adding a repeated G.
4:26	Higher register piano, G, F, E, two quavers and a crotchet. I reply in a similar fashion. Repeated quavers in piano, E, D and C.
4:27	Major thirds in bass guitar.
4:28	Bass guitar plays G, A and G quavers.

4:30	Piano plays slower crotchets G , F , A and G .
4:32	I underpin on bass guitar with repeated major thirds.
4:35	Piano rocking chords C major and F major, giving the music some forward movement.
4:40	I underpin the F in bass guitar.
4:45	Bass piano notes remain on major third, rising E to C .
4:49	Bullfinch moves back to C major tonic, and major thirds. Chords of G major and F major.
Ontological Analysis	
	Minute five denotes the second half of the music. It feels more connected, similar to an awakening with suddenly energy. In addition to the use of the major third, the F major chord creates a forward momentum and a new aspect to the improvisation. It sounds more optimistic and alive.

In the second half of the improvisation there is increased connection (portrayed in the score's closer-together shapes, Figure 73) and a little more melodic exploration. However, the music still has a faltering quality to it, slowing and returning to C major. This is demonstrated in Table 28.

Table 28: Bullfinch – minute seven, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Bullfinch – minute seven, syntactical/semantic analysis	
6:00	The music is coming to an end; I play a rocking bass note G to C and intervals of a fifth, D/A and C/G . This creates dissonance, as simultaneously Bullfinch plays a major third C/E .
6:08	The pace is slowing and we return to C .
6:14	Bullfinch plays a major third (E and C again), I respond with a perfect fourth F/C and major

	third E/C. This music is finishing on the third motif.
6:22	I play a soft but definite tonic C to finish.
	Ontological analysis
	This ending firmly remains in C major. At 6:05 with the perfect fifth (D/A) I was asking musically if we might continue? However, this creates dissonance and a moment of disconnect since simultaneously Bullfinch plays the C. We then negotiate a slower pace and quietening down of the music. The major third is used as a way of finishing and the sounds fade out.

7.4.4b Hesitancy in musical relationship

In the interview Bullfinch states that she has less technical facility on the piano; this may explain why her playing is fragile and hesitant. In discussion she focuses on striving to build self-confidence, finding a voice (musical and verbal) and initiating in group

improvisations. It is conceivable that her choice of instrument is a means to trying out a differing musical voice. Alternatively, her choice may be a response to the inherent power dynamic present between student and researcher: I also play the guitar (the bass) and she may have experienced self-insecurity connected to her guitar playing at this moment. Whatever the reasons for her choice of instrument, it has a profound effect on the shape and dynamic of the music.

7.4.4c The music of Bullfinch – summary

This music unmask some of the difficulties Bullfinch experiences in learning to improvise, exposing her struggle with the keyboard and a search to establish a strong musical voice and connection in music. However, despite this, there are hints at potential, demonstrated in the fragments of dialogues she initiates in minute five. In this way, the improvisation is an audible witness to her current learning and struggles, and her

striving to be able to initiate musically to find a musical voice and create connections.

7.4.5 Wren

The improvisation with Wren consists of eleven minutes and twenty-nine seconds, with the instrumentation of percussion, piano, melodica and acoustic bass guitar. Throughout Wren talks and plays music simultaneously, providing a running commentary on his biographical musical narrative. The analysis reveals six important aspects shown in Figure 65:

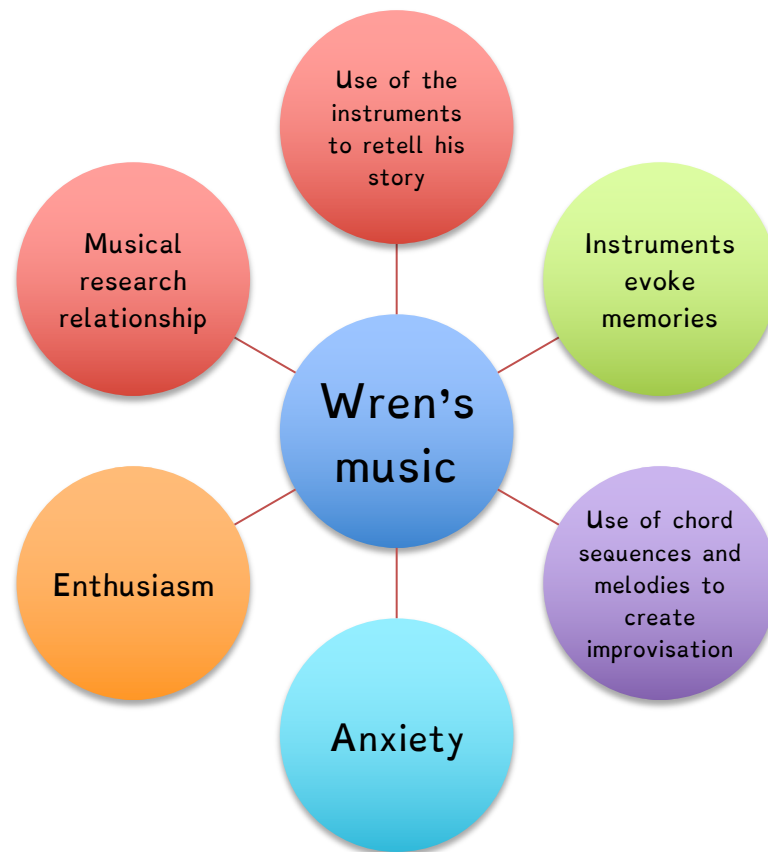


Figure 65: Analysis of Wren's music: use of instruments to retell his story, instruments evoke memories, use of chord sequences and melodies to create improvisation, anxiety, enthusiasm and the musical research relationship.

7.4.5a Use of instruments to retell his story – instruments evoke memories

It is common for instruments to have a powerful effect, such as evoking memories, emotions, associations with relationships or eliciting sensory

responses (Gilboa and Almog, 2017). Wren has an immediate response to the glockenspiel; he picks out the notes of *Für Elise*, Beethoven's Bagatelle no. 25 in A minor. The glockenspiel evokes powerful memories, as he recalls being in a doctor's surgery as a child and discovering a similar instrument. He states, this is the *first melody you might find as a child*, and it reminds him of *nursery rhymes*.

7.4.5b Musical research relationship

In my reflective notes I honestly confess to being both surprised and irritated by his response and playing of the melody, and failing to fully anticipate what impact the instruments might have in this context, as I write in Figure 66:

I wonder if I had a need for him to move on from the melody, bearing in mind when presented with a childhood instrument adults often try to pick out familiar tunes (for example, chopsticks on the keyboard). I think I may have experienced irritation at this point, and had expectations he would play freely; I talked over some of his playing, saying, ‘you don’t have to play percussion’, and, ‘there a few things in the room’.

Figure 66: Personal reflection – Wren’s music, 14 June 2017.

After this initial reaction I quickly move away from my own feelings and countertransference and focus on Wren. He continues to be immersed in the instruments; they remind him of other aspects of his life: the bells and claves, an interest in sound healing; the piano and bass guitar, his mother’s love of 1980s power ballads. This first response to the glockenspiel can be seen in Table 29.

Table 29: Wren-minute one, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Minute one – Wren, syntactical/semantic analysis, glockenspiel (W)
0:16	I rattle the instruments out of the bag.
0:36	<i>Für Elise</i> melody, Wren plays on the glockenspiel throughout this section, starting on Ab.
0:46	He hits a Bb instead of Ab, a mistake?
0:52	Repeating the Ab as if to emphasise this is the tonic.
0:55	Ab/C major third.
0:56	Ab/D and Ab/C.
0:59	He tries out different intervals with Ab.
	Ontological Analysis
	As I take instruments out of the bag, he is immediately attracted to the glockenspiel, and is laughing and energetic. It appeals to him and he plays straight away. I carry on taking the instruments out, and invite him to use whatever

he likes. As he plays *Für Elise*, I offer other instruments, possibly to give him permission – but also perhaps out of my own need to explore something else – for the music to go somewhere else. I remember feeling the responsibility to create a comfortable space, and was also aware that he was unfamiliar with the idea of very free improvisation (being primarily a songwriter), thus there was a slight anxious feeling. This was my first research interview with a non-music therapist and I was also slightly anxious. I attempted to contain our joint anxiety, encouraging him to explore in a comfortable way. There is a certain frenetic excitement, and the playing of the melody *Für Elise* suggests a *bursting out* quality.

He plays intervals, trying out the instrument and testing sounds. The melody gives him a safe platform to improvise.

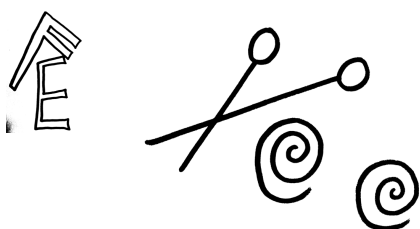
The response to the glockenspiel can also be seen in the graphic score, which includes spoken words layered with images (representing the instruments and music in the same temporal space); see Figure 67.

Minute 1

[music continues, W plays intervals on the glockenspiel/B rustles the instrument bag].



W: So just [1:03] so if this was a screen play or something, ah you can just, what I would have said was I probably might have started with that there [indicates the glockenspiel and he plays the first few bars of Für Elise again].



B: You could do.

W: Because that reflects to me is erm nursery rhymes, it reminds me of one of the first melodies you might ever find as a child [glockenspiel sounds] and that melody is part, of my very first, 'oh wow you've got instruments to re-tell this story'. Ok, nooo, here we are this is what we're at now you see with this thing, more traditional acoustic instruments that are to do with [pause] sound healing [holding the belly dancing bells] like Tibetan bowls and rattles and things like that.

Figure 67: Wren – graphic score, minute one. Spoken text is combined with graphics: a cross to indicate the beaters of the glockenspiel, bag of instruments image, and FE to indicate Für Elise. This extract also demonstrates Wren's quick, rapid energetic speech patterns which occur in the same temporal space as the music. Graphic score shown as presented to participant.

7.4.5c Anxiety and enthusiasm

The dynamic quality of his movements, speech and handling of the instruments presents as enthusiastic and anxious energy. This is sustained throughout the

interview, most clearly demonstrated in the musical research relationship. During minute 4 he attempts to play a blues on the glockenspiel, I join on the bass. He hits some *wrong* notes, and he quickly withdraws from the musical interaction. This moment encapsulates the feeling of anxiety; perhaps he does not feel good enough to play, or is anxious about playing together? As a result, he fills any pauses with rapid spoken language. This anxious interaction can be seen in Table 30.

Table 30: Wren – 3:00–3:59, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Minute four – Wren, syntactical/semantic analysis, glockenspiel, shaker (W), acoustic bass guitar (B)
3:01	Bass guitar intervals of a fifth and fourth, A/E, A/E, A/E, A/D followed by A quavers.

3:09– 3:20	Glockenspiel, trying out a four-bar walking blues pattern, pitches G , B , D repeated, triad on A .
3:13	Continues to try to reproduce a walking bass on the glockenspiel, starting on G .
3:18	I accompanied in fifths, G and D .
3:23	Wren does not move to the following chord in the sequence.
3:26	Abandons the walking bass and Wren plays intervals of a fifth, G/D and D/A .
3:27	Continues with intervals C/G and D/A .
3:35	Bass guitar crotchets on G .
3:38	Bass run down to bottom C .
3:48	Fifths in the bass, Bb/F and A/E , Wren begins to talk, I play (noodle) under his dialogue.
3:50	Wren picks up the shaker.
	Ontological analysis
	Wren reaches for familiar musical material, playing the glockenspiel. Switching from <i>Für Elise</i> to a twelve-bar blues on G , he makes a

mistake and is reluctant to start playing again, filling up the space with verbal dialogue. I accompany (on the bass) with the intervals of a fifth, but the music is faltering and fragmented. It is as if we are on the edge of playing, but don't manage to step over the threshold of music making. Perhaps Wren feels there is something anxiety-provoking? Perhaps thoughts of, *will I be good enough, will it be too revealing*, fill both our minds? At the end of minute three he shifts quickly to the rattle (shaker), and talks about concepts such as sound healing and singing bowls.

7.4.5d Use of chord sequences and melodies to create improvisation

As the interview progresses, our anxieties fade; Wren seems to feel safer as he plays the familiar instrument of the piano, followed by bass; we find a way of

sharing joint music making through structured chord sequences.

The melody and chord sequences are central to Wren's childhood music, and as an adult musician he utilises them as an improvisatory framework for songwriting. He demonstrates this in minutes six, ten and eleven (Tables 31, 32 and 33). The piano chord sequence (Table 31, 5:02) in A minor provides a platform for a moment of musical connection. This shared music making is further developed in minute ten (9:15), as with the bass guitar (W) he begins to play a sequence in B minor. I join him on the melodica (10:17) and the music finally becomes much more connected. However, Wren quickly cuts off the interaction again.

Table 31: Wren – 5:00 – 5:59, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Minute six – Wren, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (W), acoustic bass guitar (B)	
5:02	Wren begins a piano chordal sequence in A minor, with the introduction of the notes A, B, C, F, in the lower register.
5:05	His answering notes, C to B on piano in high register.
5:08	Piano on A minor – I struggle to find the notes because of the tuning discrepancy (on bass).
5:16	F or F# in piano (it is very out of tune), I put the bass down because of this.
5:18	E (V chord) on piano.
5:21	A (I) and F (VI) chords piano.
5:27	I play the ocean drum tapping in 4/4.
5:31	A minor, G (VII), C (III) chords.
5:48	I play the shaker.
5:53	Piano melodic run down from F to A.
Ontological Analysis	

Here he has found a comfortable place, demonstrating a familiar chord sequence. I begin to accompany him on the bass, but the two instruments are badly out of tune; I abandon the instrument and try to support him on the ocean drum and shaker, keeping the pulse.

There is much more confidence in his music, and he takes a risk of playing a melodic run at 5:53, demonstrating a musical idea he would *play around on for hours*. The glockenspiel, the melodies and piano are all well known to him, and provide a method for improvising.

Table 32: Wren – minute ten, semantic music analysis, syntactical and semantic

Minute ten – Wren, syntactical/semantic analysis, acoustic bass (W), melodica (B)	
9:15	Wren on bass.
9:23	Bass – B minor chord sequence, 4/4, open strings.
9:29	F# minor chords continues.
9:31	A major.
9:33	D major.
9:36	A minor, I play the melodica F#, I struggle to find the key.
9:40	F# and A major.
9:42	A major.
9:43	Melodica plays on F#, still trying to find the key.
9:45	D major on bass.
9:48	Melodica D and C#.

Table 33: Wren – minute eleven, semantic music analysis, syntactical and semantic

Minute eleven – Wren, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (W), melodica (B)	
10:07	I suddenly get the key, B minor; Wren continues on B minor.
11:26	The music comes to an end.

Table 34: Wren – minutes ten and eleven, music analysis, ontological

Minutes ten and eleven – Wren, ontological analysis	
	Wren leaves the piano and asks to play the bass, looking immediately comfortable and at ease. He quickly starts to play a chord sequence in B minor, which uses some of the natural qualities of the instrument, the open strings, harmonics and sliding between the notes. Again, this feels like a chord sequence he

has previously written, and there is an enthusiasm and energy. The bass chord sequence is emotive and rich, similar to the piano music. At 10:36 I use the melodica, but struggle to find the correct tonality, (having a preconception of what key he might play in – the usual guitar keys of **G** and **D**). I remember thinking, *just listen*, and then immediately finding the right key of **B** minor. He takes me by surprise a little with this key; it is fairly unusual on the bass (although it is the relative minor of **D**). However, joint tonality is established, and there is a feeling of togetherness with energy. He has a kinetic vigour, and it feels as if the music could expand, even though within the boundaries of a predictable repetitive chord sequence. At 11:26 he chooses to finish the music, we at last find our ending together.

7.4.5e Wren's music – summary thoughts

This analysis discloses the powerful effect of the use of instruments in a research encounter, and how they can evoke emotions, memories and sensory-embodied responses. It also shows Wren's emotional presentation, excitement and anxiety, expressed through quick rapid speech, bursts of intense playing, and through premature cutting off of the musical interaction. Finally, the improvisation allows Wren to practically demonstrate his improvisational songwriting process through the use of repetitive chord sequences and melodies.

7.4.6 Curlew

The improvisation with Curlew is twelve minutes long, and uses a variety of percussion, piano and acoustic bass guitar. The music analysis reveals five important aspects that are shown in Figure 68.

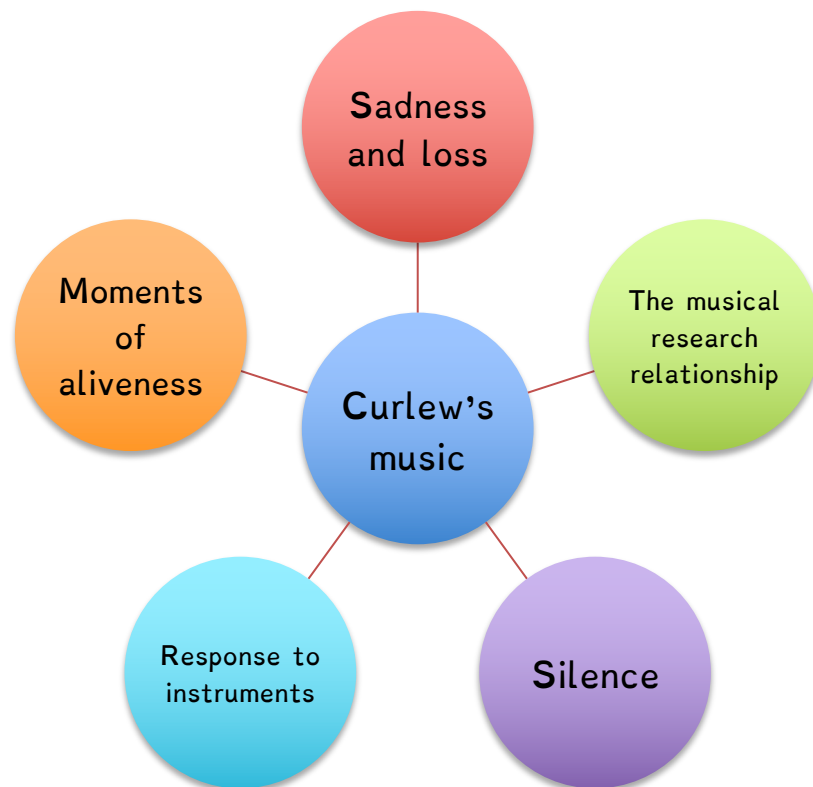


Figure 68: Analysis of Curlew's music: sadness and loss, the musical research relationship, silence, response to instruments and moments of aliveness.

7.4.6a Sadness and loss

Curlew begins with two slow piano chords and octaves in A minor. The character of his playing is sad and intentional. He deliberately builds the tension, using pedalled dissonance, such as sounding the notes B and C together at 1:12. I accompany on the bass with repeated quavers and quiet low notes, sometimes altering the tonic. In minute three his playing increases in pressure with stabbing seventh chords (2:24), beginning on F7 and moving up the keyboard. The music feels solid and purposeful, ending at 3:15. An analysis of the piano music, minutes one to three, can be seen in tables 35, 36 and 37.

Table 35: Curlew minute one, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Curlew – minute one, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (C), acoustic bass guitar (B)
0:00	Piano straight in (Curlew), two slow firm chords and octaves in A minor.

0:04	Top octave piano.
0:05	Bass (Becky) repeated quaver replies on top A.
0:11	New chord G minor 7, the slow chords continue, quiet and moderately soft.
0:13	Moving to G6.
0:16	G7.
0:21	Bass quiet notes, repeated low Ds.
0:24	Piano single low notes – with held notes in A minor, Es to As.
0:27	Moving to E minor.
0:28	Bass E minims.
0:30– 0:32	Piano notes C to A.
0:34	Quicker quaver movement A to C, A to E.
0:35	E, A, E piano notes – general A minor tonality.
0:38	Bass guitar begins a melodic phrase in A minor seventh.
0:43	Piano A octaves.

0:44	Piano A minor 7.
0:45	Bass guitar plays C octaves quietly.
0:48	Piano low notes A, G, E.
0:50	Bass guitar notes C, D, C, D.
0:52	Back up to A (piano).
0:53	Piano low notes C, B, A, bass guitar plays E.
0:55	Bass Es.
0:57	Bass guitar A/piano higher A and E at the top.
	Ontological analysis
	<p>Curlew begins with immediate and slow chordal movement on the piano, with much space and moderately loud. Octaves, open chords, some minor sevenths. The music feels space, considered and intentional. On the bass guitar I weave repeated quavers, fading in and out, and introduce a small melodic fragment (0:38). The music builds in intensity with an A minor seventh at 0:44, there is some forward</p>

motion, it seems to be an introduction to something.

Curlew has no hesitation in immediately playing the piano. The music sounds slow and contemplative, as if leaving room for thoughts to flow. Open chords, octaves, the G7 and A7, the underpinning of tonality of A minor provides a foundation for the music to unfold. The bass follows, weaving quavers fading in and out, and a melodic phrase at 0:38, which the piano leaves room for. As if in response, Curlew shifts to the A minor seventh chord, and the intensity of the music increases, with bass notes on the piano and guitar.

Table 36: Curlew – minute two, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Curlew – minute two, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (C), acoustic bass guitar (B)
1:01	Bass guitar A minor octaves.
1:04	Piano A minor tonality, with piano bass notes G to A.
1:09	E minor piano chord.
1:12	Low F in piano (F under an A minor chord), louder and pedal more intensity.
1:18	B in bass on piano, with A minor moving to C, a dissonant tension, repeated Cs against the B, letting it sound, moving back to the A.
1:22	Back to A minor on piano, using the whole register, bass guitar continues to underpin A minor.
1:31	A and F, upper notes on piano, interval of a sixth, suggests F major?
1:33	E and B (fifth) back to the suggestion of E minor.

1:35	Rocking quavers on bass guitar, D and A.
1:37	D and E, higher piano notes (second), tension and bass guitar keeps A minor underneath.
1:40	Bass guitar, four crotchets, interval of a fifth, A and E, and continue rocking quavers.
1:46– 2:00	Piano single notes, lyrical, and melody starts to emerge, slow crotchets E, D, D, E, C.
1:51	Bass guitar changes chords to F/C (no third); the move to F major is made lyrically.
2:00	Chord changes from C (fifth) to A minor on bass, but the C seems to be a passing chord, quickly back to A minor.
	Ontological analysis
	The tension builds in minute two, rocking bass guitar octaves, as shifting harmonies gather under A minor. Curlew on the piano suggests F major (1:12), but this turns into a rising bass figure (F–C). The notes B and C are made to vibrate together, creating dissonant tension, but he quickly moves to E minor and

a hint of D. On the bass guitar I underpin the harmony, keeping pedal As, rocking quavers or moving with the piano, such as the hint of D major at 1:35. It is as if the music is building towards something, it seems to be full and expressive, and there is a mounting tension, with less space. The question of F major hangs over the sounds, and with another dissonance at 1:37 (D and E), Curlew slowly begins to pick out a high note melody, lyrically falling from E. With more space I am able to change the harmony, and take up F major under his C/B notes. This seems to be an important expressive moment in the music, a moving forward as well as a coming together.

The feeling of sadness and intensity abounds in this section of the music, the need to move forward, but at Curlew's pace. There seems to

	<p>be a natural connection between us, which has fallen into place easily. The melody which emerges at the end of the minute, out of suggested F major and tension and release, is expressive and sad.</p>
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Table 37: Curlew – minute three, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Curlew – minute three, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano (C), acoustic bass guitar (B)	
2:05	Piano notes E, D, E.
2:06	Bass guitar octaves Es.
2:10	Piano notes F and G.
2:13	Bass guitar moves to a D.
2:16	Piano on G major.
2:18– 2:19	As above.
2:22	Piano moves to F7.
2:24	Piano moves to F7 and G7.
2:27	Piano D7 and B7 diminuendo and slower.

2:31	D7 and bass guitar slides to lower notes C _s and D _s .
2:34	Bass guitar notes continue and piano on D7.
2:36	Piano octaves on D.
2:37	Piano shorter chords, stabbing almost G7 and the note C with an E.
2:39	These stabbing chords continue.
2:40	Bass guitar runs three-note figure C, G, A.
2:42	Low piano sustained notes E and G.
2:43	G7 and C/E stabbing chords.
2:46	Bass guitar continues three-note phrase in background.
2:47	Bass guitar slides higher notes F and G, suddenly breaking through the texture.
2:49	Piano high G chord and loud.
2:52	Bass guitar rumbling around G, fast quaver runs with piano G higher and then low notes G, F, E and A.
2:55	Piano G, F and E, three-note phrase, low.
2:56	Piano G ₉ , piano low notes D, G, A, D minims.

	Ontological analysis
	<p>The music is faltering at first, as if waiting for something to happen. At 2:22 Curlew makes a definite move to F7. He rocks between G7 and F7 as if to emphasise the direction of the music. I play a D underneath, suggesting D7, but the guitar is not as strong in texture as the piano, so the harmony remains ambiguous. At 2:26 Curlew takes the 7th chords further; he is moving up the keyboard to D7 (a response to my D?) and then B7. At the B7 his playing becomes suddenly softer, as if he has arrived somewhere, and this leaves space for my bass notes to cut through. I have remained static under Curlew's shifting harmonies, keeping to a two-note figure, sliding between C and D. Curlew quickly moves on to a different way of playing, shorter, stabbing 7th chords (2:37). I provide a quaver-rumbling bass line</p>

underneath, with a three-note phrase, notes C, G, A (2:40), and up the octave to G and F (2:47). Curlew is now moving to higher stabbing chords which fall to a tone and quickly switch to a bass line, perhaps to join with my rumbling bass notes and three-note phrase G, F, A (2:55). The minute finishes on an A, looking forwards, towards a new section of the music.

This piano music contains a sense of sadness. In my reflective notes, I write in Figure 69:

The interview with Curlew was particularly sad; there was a lot of talk of loss and losing something creative. He seems to use the improvisation to express this. There is no hesitation between us; I immediately hear the joint tonality and join in, offering little supportive quaver motifs and phrases in the spaces between his chords – to communicate I am listening and with him.

The music feels authentic, expressive and present of the moment; it has flowed naturally out of his words.

Figure 69: Reflective notes – Curlew’s music, 20 June 2017.

Curlew’s emotions seem to be amplified through the act of playing the piano, perhaps searching for the thing he has lost – some creativity or connection with music and other people. Later, in minute four, Curlew picks up the shekere (a West African instrument made of a hollow gourd and covered in a netting of small shells), holds it and shakes it a little, commenting: *well that felt quite sad* (see Table 38).

Table 38: Curlew – minute four, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Curlew – minute four, syntactical/semantic analysis, piano and shekere cabassa (C), acoustic bass guitar (B)
3:03	Piano low notes, A to C.
3:04	A kind of diminuendo with the piano music coming to an end, chromatic movement for the first time, C#, D and E.
3:09	High A on piano, the tonic note?
3:15	Curlew picks up the shekere, shakes it but not with vigour. I respond by tapping lightly on the body of the bass.
3:22	I play three quaver high Ds on the bass. The rest of the minute is rattling of the shekere with pauses, and tapping of the guitar, moving around. Breathing, chairs creaking and room sounds.
	Ontological analysis

The intensity of the piano music comes to an end, with a chromatic movement between C# and A. Curlew picks up the shekere cabassa; it sounds like he is rolling it in his hands, trying it out, rather than intentionally making a sound. I respond with the bass, tapping on the body of the instrument, but leave spaces. I let the improvisation unfold and wait for him. At 3:36 he seems to abandon the idea of using the shekere and there are sounds of the creaking of chairs, breathing (or sighing), moving around the room. The feeling is one of space and waiting.

7.4.6b Response to instruments

The sadness is intensified by the use of the shekere.

The instrument elicits the memory of a vanished musical relationship. It seems for Curlew at this point that it is difficult to fully sound the instrument, as if

it might provoke emotions and memories which are too painful, so he simply holds it in his hands.

7.4.6c Silence

After sounding the shekere, he talks briefly about loss of musical relationships and we sit in silence, the atmosphere heavy and sad, with the ambient sounds of a watch ticking and chairs creaking. The silence is important; it allows space for processing the difficult emotions and emphasises the dynamic sounding and non-sounding of instruments. It envelops us, conveying the strength of feeling of loss and sadness.

7.4.6d Moments of aliveness

In minute seven he seems to begin to recover from the feelings of sadness and there are hints of Curlew's playfulness and musicality. In the music analysis this was demonstrated through shaking the ocean drum, a

tambourine pulse and semiquaver flourishes (8:56), and a glockenspiel melody (9:55). The instruments not only elicit painful memories, but are persuasive in that they open up opportunities to explore playfulness.

7.4.6e The musical research relationship

The analysis shows that the musical relationship is one of ease, where we immediately connect. However, in my reflective notes I write that there is a mismatch of energy, and I feel I want to express a stronger playful vitality. This *energy* produces a slight tension in the music, heard in the opening of minute eight, as Curlew plays the ocean drum and I fidget in the creaking chair. I embody an extraneous kinetic energy; may this be the result of transference? He seems to have a playful desire to explore, but for much of the music feelings of loss and sadness suppress this. The transference continues until the later passages in the music with

the glockenspiel where there are more continuous sounds and an increased place of liveliness.

7.4.6f Curlew's music – summary

The music analysis gives a sense of Curlew's intense feelings of sadness over loss of past musical relationships. He uses silence and stillness to reflect and process the emotions. In the past he engaged richly with improvised music and it has been an important aspect of his learning as a musician. This analysis suggests that at the time of the research encounter, Curlew was musically hesitant, with the past overwhelming the present, making it almost painful to play the instruments. However, in the music he moves from sadness (the piano music) and reflection on sadness (the silence) to small moments of playfulness and he gives a hint of his lively musicality (the finger rolls on the tambourine and glockenspiel melody).

7.4.7 Swallow

The improvisation with **Swallow** is seven minutes and twenty-eight seconds long, consisting of lap harp (**S**) and acoustic bass guitar (**B**). The analysis revealed six important aspects shown in Figure 70.

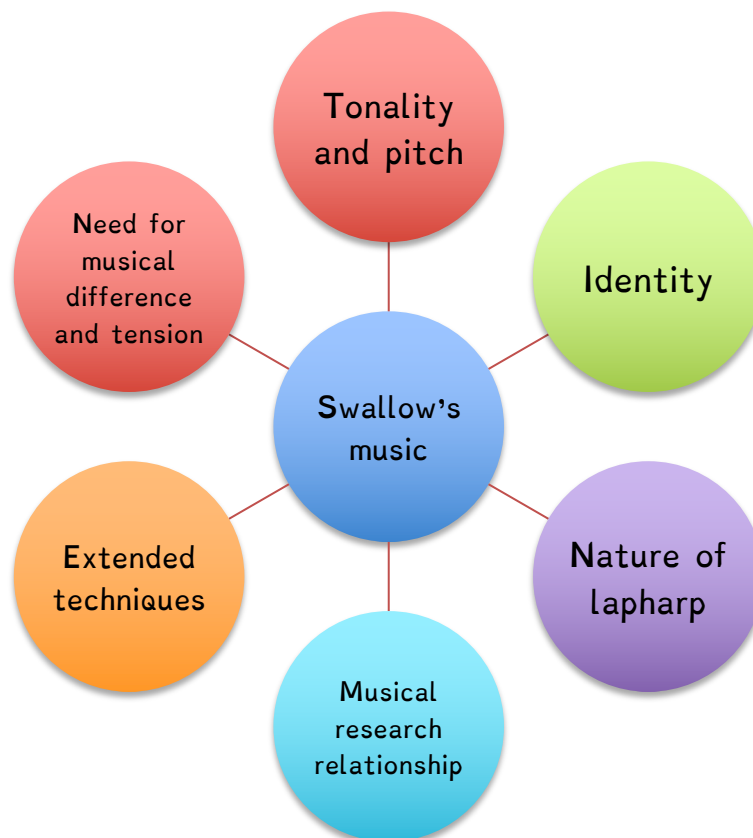


Figure 70: Analysis of Swallow's music: tonality and pitch, identity, nature of lap harp, the musical research relationship, extended techniques and need for musical difference and tension.

7.4.7a Tonality and pitch

Tonality is central to Swallow's phenomenological experience of music because of the nature of the lap harp. This instrument is one in which the musician usually decides upon the key before playing, since pitch is operated by a series of levers, which can be difficult to manipulate at the same time as sounding the strings. Her use of tonality is demonstrated in minute one (Table 39) as Swallow plays around E minor and in minutes three to four with C minor (Table 40).

7.4.7b Need for musical difference and tension

The physicality and cultural history of the lap harp has created for Swallow a specific embodied knowledge and mental representation of music. Swallow has learnt to play the instrument within a geographical cultural context, where traditional music is dominated by song forms, with diatonic tonality or the use of modes, as

often found in the traditional music of **Scotland**, Ireland and **Wales**. All these factors draw **Swallow** into a tonal or modal focused experience of music. However, this improvisation is full of tonal tension, as if she desires to pull away. This first appears in a **C** and **C#** (sharp sixth) semitone movement during minute one in **E minor** (Table 37, 0:02, 0:57) and becomes a feature of the whole piece.

7.4.7c Musical research relationship

The tension affects the musical relationship, and there is a strong sense of transference, where I feel she wants to explore outside the boundaries of modes of diatonic tonality. In minute one I respond with accented crotchets, **B** to **C#** (0:48), emphasising her sharpened sixth (highlighted in bold – Table 39).

Table 39: Swallow – minute one, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Swallow – minute one, syntactical/semantic analysis, lap harp (S), acoustic bass guitar (B)	
0:02	Swallow opens on the lap harp, with a bold three-note falling statement, E, D, C#, two quavers and a crotchet.
0:04	Lap harp moving to D and A.
0:10	Lap harp G, F, G.
0:16	Acoustic bass enters on low Ds.
0:27	E to D on lap harp.
0:28	On bass G, F, E, F, four quavers, and E, D, two crotchets – melodic phrase.
0:31	Lap harp G, F crotchets.
0:39	Accented moderately loud in lap harp, D to E, new dynamic and attack.
0:42	Falling melodic phrases.
0:48	Accented bass notes, moderately loud, B to C#.

0:57	In lap harp, C, G and so on, slow crotchets, falling glissandos in the bass, D to A, and use of the higher register.
Ontological analysis	
	<p>The music is gentle and considered. Swallow begins with a definite, bold opening phrase which sets the tone. The sound of the lap harp is sweet and gentle. The tonality seems a little vague (or this may be my hearing of it). I remember struggling to hear it at the time. It seems to be around E minor, but contains a C#.</p> <p>I come in gently on the bass with low Ds and a melodic falling phrase. There is a slight tension; is this in the tuning discrepancy between bass and harp, or in the semitone movement between C and C#? At 0:39 I play the stronger two accented crotchets (D, E) as if to acknowledge this tension, and later again at 0:48 (B, C#).</p> <p>The sound of the harp is sweet, but there is an underlying tension.</p>

In reflective notes I consider countertransference, as the music reminds me of a childhood television programme, and I wonder if the nature of the timbre of the lap harp also contributes to the tension, encompassing both sweetness and strength (see Figure 71).

It is hard to listen to this music without thinking about the strongly evocative and reminiscent reminder of the music of Postgate and Firmin, in their 1970s children's television creations (Grovdin, 2015). I was lulled by the sound, and had a very strong personal response to it. In addition, the sound reminds me of the soundtrack to Alan Garner's 'The Owl Service', a dark book and television series (Boakes, 2008). This could explain some of the tension I hear when I listen back, or alternatively perhaps there is an inherent tension between darkness and light in the sound of the

lap harp? Its tone is complex, suggesting sweetness and strength and darkness combined.

Figure 71: Personal reflection, Swallow's music, 15 July 2017.

Despite this tension Swallow establishes herself within the key of **C** minor. In minute four she sounds repeated **C**s in order to direct me towards the key. However, at 3:22 I respond by deliberately playing a dissonant semitone **B** natural against her **C**. Once again, I respond to the transference, but then immediately follow her into the **C** minor (see Table 40).

Table 40: Swallow – minute four, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Swallow – minute four, syntactical/semantic analysis
3:04	Swallow accented notes E_b to D , I play A_b and G underneath.

3:04	<p>On the bass I play accented fourths, E/A, C/G, E/A, Eb and Bb.</p> <p>Swallow plays quavers Bb and Cs.</p>
3:05	<p>She plays C, Bb, C, C; her music has many layers to it at this point, has become more complex as the improvisation continues.</p>
3:08	<p>Falling phrases from G to D, almost a return to the three-note opening phrases (I play C in bass).</p>
3:14	<p>I answer with a falling phrase from Eb and for the first time there is a pause in the music; she stays on repeated Cs.</p>
3:20	<p>I slide to a C on the bass.</p>
3:22	<p>I play a B natural (which is deliberate against her C) – creating a tension and dissonance.</p>
3:29	<p>After this brief pause, she returns to the three-note motif Eb, D and C.</p>
3:31	<p>In the pulse, G, F and Eb again.</p>
3:33	<p>I play C minor, weaving around her tonality and sounds. The rest of the minute is fairly static in</p>

	<p>C minor, with arpeggiated figures, rising and falling motif. I use octaves and stay with it.</p>
	<p>Ontological analysis</p>
	<p>Minute four starts off very bold, with the fourths and Eb and D and falling figures. However, at 3:14 it changes and she plays a C repeatedly; this is notable as the first pause in the music. Swallow later explained that she was trying to emphasise the key, asking me to join the tonality. Yet I felt a strong transference and need to add dissonant notes. I wonder if this feeling came from Swallow, that she was seeking something different, a little more rebellious? Even when she plays the repeated Cs at 3:14, I add in a B natural – creating tension. There was perhaps a need for dissonance that wasn't being expressed in her music. For the rest of the minute we both settle on the C minor tonality.</p>

	<p>Something unexpressed in her music?</p> <p>A need for tension, difference or rebellion?</p>
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I reflect that the music seems to elicit feelings of rebellion. This becomes more clearly delineated in minute five when I use extended techniques on the bass – hitting the body of the instrument with my hand (4:37). *Swallow* then pushes boundaries of tradition with forceful glissandos and hitting the body of the instrument (5:19) (see Table 41).

Table 41: Swallow – minute six, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Swallow – minute six, semantic analysis	
5:01	Begins with fast quavers on the body of the bass and <i>Swallow</i> plays a loud gliss on lap harp.
5:04	Up and down, finishing on F.

5:05– 5:08	Repeated glissandos, with some bass harmonics.
5:10	Falling figure Ab to F.
5:12	Bass is in the background, tapping.
5:19	Swallow also making percussion sounds on the lap harp, but it is difficult to distinguish between her sounds and mine at this point.
5:24	The pulse is breaking open, much more syncopated, and almost random, glissando and tapping continues.
5:26	I run fingers over the bridge and tapping continues.
5:29	I interject with strong rhythms.
5:30	I then scratch the strings, Swallow continues with glissandos.
5:33	Again a rhythmic interjection.
5:35	Her glissandos are syncopated, two dotted crotchets and a quaver.

5:37	Gs and Cs but notes seem so much more concrete and bolder, louder and with more attack.
5:39	Returning to the way of playing she had before, still in C minor, but bolder and stronger.
5:40	I return to a C and octaves, the music feels stronger, somehow more certain, very different from the beginning.
5:52	The pulse remains, the music is the same but different, I play with wide vibrating low Gs, like a heartbeat rhythm.
Ontological analysis	
	It is as if the act of tapping on the bass instrument breaks open some of the texture. She responds very strongly with glissandos and tapping on her instrument. The texture of the music changes, the pulse is almost lost at one point (5:24). The music becomes very intense, with more variety of sounds. I still

	<p>feel like I am pushing her a little to explore more, but she is responding with different sounds on her instrument. I still feel the momentum for this comes from a need in her; perhaps this relates to her identity and different ways of being in music? Towards the end of the minute, we return to tonal playing, but it has a stronger presence, is more certain somehow, is the same but different.</p>
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7.4.7d Identity

Her new emerging identity is sounded and embodied within the music. This music seems to encapsulate Swallow's emerging experience of rebellion. She expresses tradition, the lap harp as a melodic instrument, but also pushes at the boundaries of her music and cultural situatedness, which represents her new way of being in music.

7.4.7e Swallow's music

The music demonstrates Swallow's tonal musical traditions and phenomenological experience of music through the instrumentation of the lap harp. It shows how there is an underlining tension, experienced in the musical research relationship, which connects to her transformation as a trainee music therapist, beginning to find her own rebellious nature, which is bold and strong, experimenting with new sounds and new ways of playing.

7.4.8 Goldfinch

The improvisation with Goldfinch is twelve minutes, with double bass (GF), melodica and small hand percussion (B). The analysis revealed three important aspects, as shown in Figure 72.

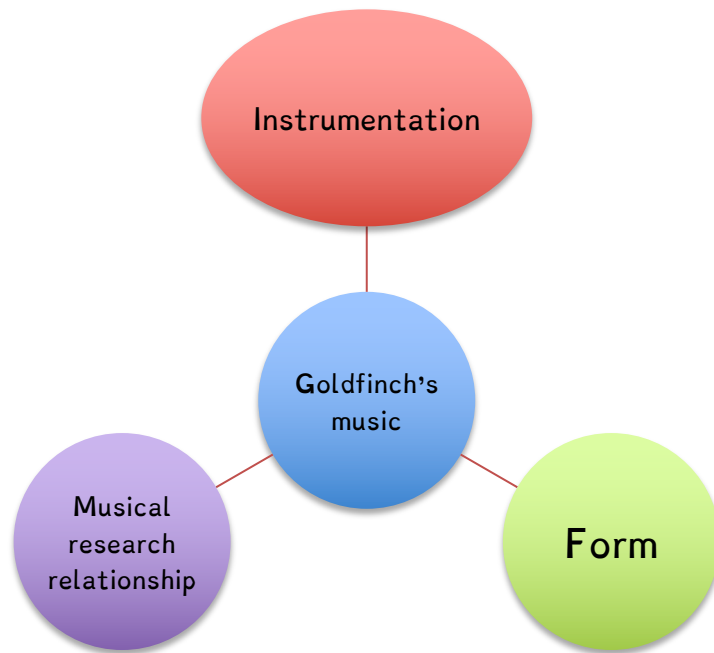


Figure 72: Analysis of music of Goldfinch, with form, instrumentation and the musical research relationship.

7.4.8a Form

In this music Goldfinch creates a spontaneous form; see Table 42.

Table 42: Goldfinch – music analysis, summary overview of form, syntactical, semantic and ontological analysis combined

Minutes	Goldfinch – music analysis, overview of form, double bass (G), melodica, belly dancing bells, wooden castanet clapper (rattle), maraca, thunder drum, Indian snake shakers (B)
Introduction 1	Opening statement, two quaver As and E, opening dialogue; 0:31 Fast-moving bass runs to a bottom F.
2	Quiet, different textures, harmonics, bowed notes, long breathy notes (melodica).
Middle section 3	Extended techniques, rich full textures, harmonics, bowed sounds, dissonance.
4	Thick textures, chaotic sounds

	3:21 melody.
5	Chaotic sounds begin to thin – 4:25 pause – tapping body of bass.
6	Percussion, bells, maraca, bouncing bow off strings and bowed notes.
7	Slower, more space, tremolo, density of sounds coming to an end.
Recapitulation 8	Return of opening statement – 8:31 melody – more static and stillness.
New material 9	Fragments and echoes changing to something new.
10	New sound, long legato bowed notes.
Coda 11	Chaotic sounds return, harmonics, glissandos.
12	Intensity quickly ends, crescendo and decrescendo, slow and fade.

As can be seen in Table 42, this music has shape and temporal balance, with a clear beginning (minutes one to two), middle (three to seven) and end (eleven and twelve), time is frequently divided at the thirty second mark (0:31) and there is an even balance of twelve minutes (common in jazz). This form is also illustrated visually in the graphic score, presented in a circular shape with bold purple lines representing the strong bass (Figure 73).



Figure 73: Goldfinch – minute one, graphic score. The score reads clockwise from right to left, with the thirty second mark at the bottom of the image. Purple shapes indicate strong bass sounds, and green shapes the melodica.

Goldfinch initiates and creates this form, demonstrating a high level of musicianship, temporal awareness and ability to hold an overall shape in mind.

This requires a conscious awareness, but also instinctive embodied choices. In the music he reveals the ability to execute musical intentions in sound, using extended instrumental techniques such as harmonics and bouncing the bow off the strings; see minutes three to seven, see Table 43.

Table 43: Goldfinch – minute three, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Goldfinch – minute three, syntactical/semantic analysis	
2:06	Juddering harmonics and vibrato notes, A to D, getting louder.
2:07	Melodica, D, E and D quavers and breathy vibrato, harmonics on the bass (A to D)?
2:13	The melodica sounds very full, moving between D and E, top register. The two sounds start to blend together, melodica becoming part of the harmonics. Goldfinch bows as well, moving down

	to F, E and D, and other lower notes. The soundscape is full and rich.
2:33	The sounds are full.
2:35	Low bass slide F to G, comes out of the texture.
2:38	There is a lull in the sounds, as if difficult to keep up that intensity.
2:40	The lull is very brief, and we quickly start again, G to D on melodica, bowed low Ds in Bass and harmonics Gs.
2:48	And a run down from D to D in bass, bowed and fast – perhaps echoing the run down in minute one.
2:50	Down to a very low E, vibrating round the room.
2:52	Ds and a G.
2:54	Although the tonality is static, the music does feel rich and moving forward.
2:55	C, G and C bowed in bass.
2:59	Glissando from C downwards in bass.
	Ontological analysis

The sounds are rich and full, like an orchestra tuning up. Goldfinch plays a mixture of bowed and harmonic sounds, I play vibrato full notes, pressing down many of the keys together in clusters on the melodica. This has the effect of the sounds blending together, especially since the melodica produces very strong dissonant beats when semitones and tones are played together. The melodica almost sounds like a fairground organ. This is very intimate, close playing, without holding back. There seems to be no power dynamic, in that I remember feeling on equal terms with Goldfinch. He seems to feel very comfortable, and at ease with playing on the bass in an expressive and intense fashion. There is a notable synchronicity and ‘attunement’, despite the stark contrast in the instruments. However, the exploration of different ways of playing gives opportunity to

	merge the sounds. There also seems to be enjoyment and joint play.
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7.4.8b Instrumentation

Instrumentation is a prominent factor in this piece, and the double bass and melodica are completely contrasted. This combination greatly affects the musical relationship and nature of the sounds. I frequently struggle to match the power of the double bass on the melodica; see minute two, Table 44.

Table 44: Goldfinch, minute two, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

	Goldfinch, minute two, syntactical/semantic analysis
1:04	Bb on bass, A in melodica, quieter and longer notes.
1:08	He begins to play harmonics (D?) quietly and gently, pulsing with the bow.

1:15	G in the bass, A on the melodica continues.
1:20	Melodica A/E, with bass harmonics.
1:26	Repeated Es on melodica, high harmonics continue.
1:35	Lower harmonics (Db bowed)?
1:39	High A in melodica.
1:43	E to G in melodica, higher harmonics.
1:46	B to a D in the bass.
1:48	G octaves bass.
1:52	G continues, high B – like the end of minute one.
1:52	Long B on melodica, with bass harmonics.
1:58	Juddering of bow against strings, creating harmonics and bowed notes together.
	Ontological analysis
	The music changes here; it becomes softer and employs different textures: harmonics and bowed notes (bass) and long breathy notes (melodica). There is a continued intensity between myself and Goldfinch, it seems we are

really listening to each other. The bass has a powerful presence, with many potential sounds, and I feel it is difficult to match this on the melodica. There is a sense of waiting and patience, waiting for the music to unfold, letting the sounds resound, taking time to follow the music. At the end of minute two, there is a specific point (1:51) where we become synchronised and he begins to judder the bass bow, as I create vibrato on the melodica. There may have been visual cues, but you can hear the connection and concentration between us.

7.4.8c The musical research relationship

There is an intense immediate connection between myself and Goldfinch as we play together. I experience him as having a powerful musical presence. In one sense, this is practical as the small melodica feels less effective set against the double bass, and I seek ways

of playing to increase volume and strength. The power dynamic is weighted towards Goldfinch as his music is full of intensity, and I have to work hard physically and cognitively, as the melodica requires a great deal of breath control and imaginative musical thought to match the bass sounds. As a result, in minute six I abandon the melodica, trying to discover alternative noises with hand percussion; see Table 45.

Table 45: Goldfinch – 5:00 – 5:41, music analysis, ontological

Goldfinch – minute six, ontological analysis	
5:09	I pick up the belly dancing bells and rattle, very quickly putting down the melodica. Not pulsed, thick dense textures.
5:23	Continues for some time, like a joint kinetic energy, something has burst out of us, maybe after the restraint of the interview? I hit the snake shakers together, holding several percussion instruments in my hands at once,

	<p>maybe trying to match his powerful presence.</p> <p>Perhaps the power dynamics are the other way round here? His instrument, the university, the teaching room, the large instrument. I have small percussion instruments. And he has some power here, perhaps I am trying to keep up? I remember feeling exhilarated and energised by his playing, encouraging my own creativity.</p>
5:24	<p>His playing becomes fast semiquavers, fast and equal, my sounds are more unformed and longer.</p>
5:30	<p>I quickly (the thirty second mark again) and maybe dramatically put down the handful of percussion instruments I am holding and quickly pick up the thunder drum, this sounds very loud for such a little instrument.</p>
5:37	<p>He starts to sound some notes, Gs and Es lower, rumbling sounds, hitting now on strings and letting the bow bounce off.</p>

5:41	I play the thunder drum and bells together, swinging them, this is a very kinetic energised piece of music.
	<p>The music becomes more bowed as Goldfinch moves from bouncing the bow off the strings to actually bowing the strings. The bells and thunder drum have large presence and sound like white noise, almost so thick. High and energetic playing!</p> <p>I wonder if my response to his energetic enthusiastic playing gave him the impetus to play more? It was the joint understanding of exploration, and permission to play out.</p>

The use of double bass and hand percussion results in a startling contrast of timbre; this is illustrated in the graphic score, where a wide variety of colours and shapes is drawn to depict timbre, attack, pitch and dynamics, as displayed in Figure 74:



Figure 74: Goldfinch – minute six, graphic score. Goldfinch plays double bass – purple shapes. Becky plays melodica – green shapes, Indian snake shakers – brown shapes, belly dancing bells – yellow, and thunder drum – grey. The score visually reflects the highly contrasting timbres, attack, pitch and dynamics present in the music.

Despite my struggle, there is a joint experience and the power dynamic seems to level as Goldfinch allows space in the music (found in minute eight). However, because of my role as researcher, I deliberately holdback from initiating too many musical ideas. This provokes questions about his lived experience of the music. In the analysis (minute nine) I ask, *I wonder did he want me to initiate more? What were his expectations?* These questions remained unanswered.

7.4.8d The music of Goldfinch

Central to the music of Goldfinch is form, instrumentation and the musical research relationship. The analysis suggests how training in jazz structures helps to develop an internalised sense of time and form. Goldfinch demonstrates that he has higher order skills, the ability to improvise structures and draw on a wide repertoire of musical internalised ideas.

The analysis also demonstrates a strong immediate connection between myself and the participant within the music, and a power dynamic weighted towards Goldfinch inherent in the unequal instruments and his intensity of playing. This power dynamic engenders questions over the musical role of the researcher (how much I should initiate, how much should I play my own music as the researcher) and the participant's expectations of the encounter.

7.4.9 Starling

This improvisation is five minutes and forty-seven seconds long, with grand piano (S), melodica and small hand percussion (B). The music analysis revealed four important factors as shown in Figure 75.

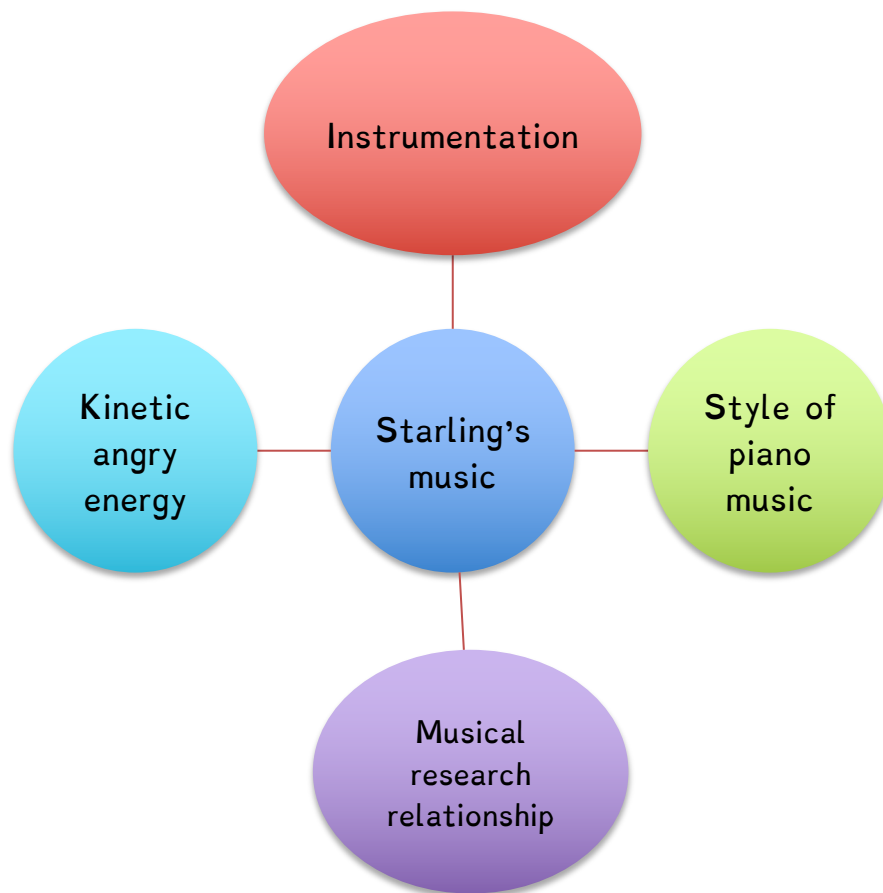


Figure 75: Analysis of Starling's music: instrumentation, style of piano music, the musical research relationship and kinetic angry energy.

7.4.9a Instrumentation

There is a vast discrepancy between the instruments in terms of size, materials and sonic capabilities. The piano and melodica are similar in that both are keyboard instruments containing metal materials, but the melodica is small, plastic, with metal reeds; and the piano, large, with hammers and metal strings. The photos below in Figures 76 and 77 illustrate this stark contrast.



Figure 76: Hohner alto melodica), a small plastic instrument with metal reeds. Operated by blowing into the keyboard and pressing down the buttons (Zoul, 2007).



Figure 77: Grand piano: a large instrument, operated by pressing the keys to operate hammers that hit metal strings (Creative Commons Zero, 2019).

Curiously, despite the differences, because of the joint metal materiality, there are some episodes when the sounds of these two instruments merge, for example, Starling plays an Ab by plucking the strings, creating a striking similarity to the timbre of the melodica (1:31).

7.4.9b Musical research relationship

Within the musical relationship there is a strong sense of dialogue and connection, which occurs naturally and without effort. However, in a scenario reminiscent of participant eight (Goldfinch), the power dynamic leans towards Starling, and I struggle on the melodica to have as much physical and presence as Starling. To try to overcome this I switch to the thunder drum. Once again, the materiality of the instrument – the wire of the thunder drum – has some resonance with the strings of the grand piano, as illustrated in Figures 78 and 79.

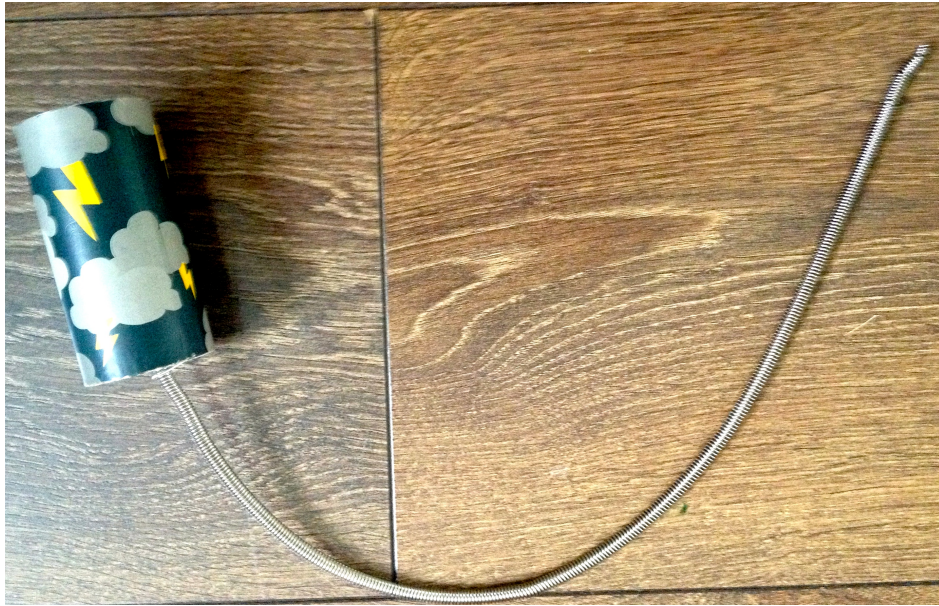


Figure 78: Small thunder drum with wire, similar to a piano string.

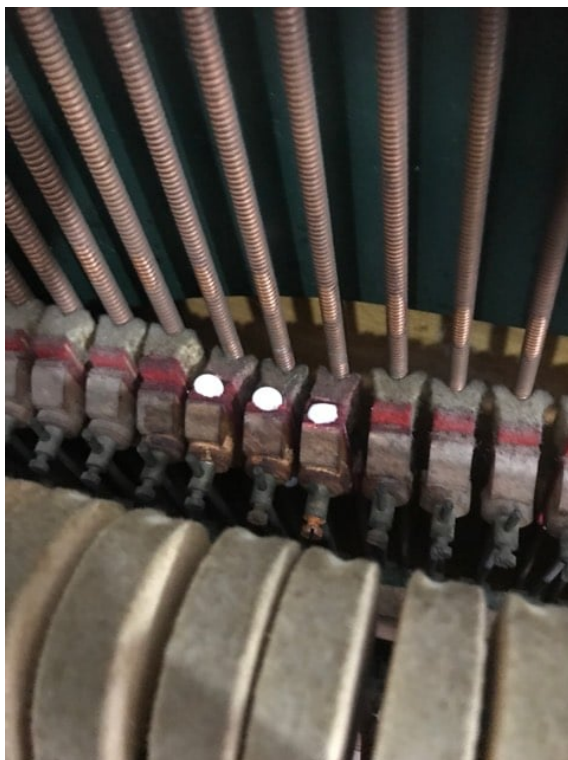


Figure 79: Wire of piano strings (Jay, 2019).

The metallic wire of the drum resembles a piano string. It is as if, when I play this instrument, its physical nature joins closely with Starling's intense, kinetic, almost wild, piano music. In the analysis of minute three, I comment; see Table 46.

Table 46: Starling - minute three, music analysis, ontological

At 3:26 I abandon the melodica and pick up the thunder drum, and this has the desired effect of a stronger presence, and more intimately matches the sounds of the piano strings. It almost has the material quality of a piano string, let loose, widely thrashing around, almost dangerously. I move back to the melodica, to play tonally again. However, the thunder drum seemed much more together and matched her expression.

I play the thunder drum in an unusually intense, kinetic manner, flailing the wire around in the air. My physical

actions are a direct response to the dynamic, gestural piano music. This may have been a transference response originating in *Starling* with the need for highly physical and dynamic sounds. This also occurs a second time when I play the castanet clappers in a frenzied manner; see Table 47.

Table 47: Starling – minute four, music analysis, ontological

I move to use the castanet clapper, I think to add a different sound, reaching for a sound that hasn't been used. It seems to be random, but the physicality of playing it, matches her kinetic hand energy. My playing of the clapper, is a bit like the thunder drum, wild and flailing around, squeezing sounds out of the small percussion.

There is also an angry expression: during the interview she had described her typical way of playing as *angry and aggressive*, and this clearly comes across in the

improvisation. I comment that it is as if she is *squeezing or stabbing* sounds out of the keys. This can be seen in minute four where the word *stabbing* is used three times (Table 48).

Table 48: Starling – minute four, music analysis, syntactical, semantic and ontological separate

Starling – minute four, syntactical/semantic analysis, grand piano (S), melodica, wooden castanet clapper (B)	
4:00	Quaver and two semiquavers accented in F# minor with interjections of the melodica
4:11	F# minor and G# major, loud full chords, minims
4:13	D# and D natural, the chords become more and more staccato. F# and G# again higher up
4:19	Chords on the melodica with wide vibrato. Rattle of the melodica keys, alongside piano chords.
4:22	Musical dialogue, F# minor, <i>stabbing</i> chords.

4:23	Melodica higher up the register to D, Starling follows up to a C#. The chords are still <i>stabbing</i> , the recording distorts, the music volume too much for the laptop microphone.
4:30	Upper registers, so the rhythmic patterns in the piano return, in a run down the instrument.
4:33	A to C# to F#, on piano (higher) possibly chords D, C# major, and F# minor
4:36	Melodica moves to rocking between E and F#, Starling on the piano plays chords underneath which are syncopated notes Bb, A and G
4:41	Becky plays the red wooden castanet clapper. Starling sounds become shorter, more spontaneous between the notes.
4:48	After a run down the keyboard Starling returns to creating a bass line (like the repeated Bs). Becky's wooden castanet clapper playing is loud, maybe a little frenzied, out of time and random.

Ontological analysis

The music is dense and thick textured, Starling begins to add chords at 4:11, which are almost like clusters of notes. She almost pushes her hands into the keys, like trying to squeeze something out of them, her kinetic energy in her hands is tangible. I again find it difficult to match her intensity, but with the chords some space arises, and I can add in particular single sounds (keys rattling, chords and notes in F# minor). The music sounds angry and stabbing, but is this really how she experiences it? Or is this like a mask? Is it her authentic self in the music? Or a default way of playing? I move to use the castanet clapper, I think to add a different sound, reaching for a sound that hasn't been used. It seems to be random, but the physicality of playing it matches her kinetic hand energy. My playing of the clapper is a bit

	like the thunder drum, wild and flailing around, squeezing sounds out of the small percussion.
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7.4.9c Kinetic angry energy and style of piano music

I question the role of anger within her music, asking, ‘Is this how she authentically feels? Has it become a default mode of playing, a musical mask to conceal her real self?’ Once again, these questions remain unanswered. However, in the interview she describes how she is seeking to practise ways of playing without reference to anger, through exploring differing musical styles. In this improvisation she plays in two ways: music reminiscent of Bartók (1881–1945), with chromaticism, angular melodies and tonal ambiguity, and music akin to Liszt (1811–1888), whose soaring melodies and rich harmonic language anticipated the chromaticism of the twentieth century. Her use of

these styles seems to be intentional, a means of utilising pre-composed music to develop her improvisational repertoire.

7.4.9d Starling's music

Starling's music is striking and dramatic; she seems to connect to the piano at an immersive embodied level, full of tension and kinetic pressure. This transfers powerfully into the musical research relationship, and in turn my musical gestures and intentions reflect her kinetic energy and emotion. We become caught up in an immediate connected dialogue of angry piano music with wild flailing melodic and percussion. In addition, the music analysis demonstrates how she is seeking to learn other ways of playing through utilising the music of composers to expand her improvisation abilities.

7.4.10 Chaffinch

The music with Chaffinch lasts twelve minutes and fifty-four seconds, and uses small hand percussion and melodica. The music analysis revealed four important aspects shown in Figure 80:

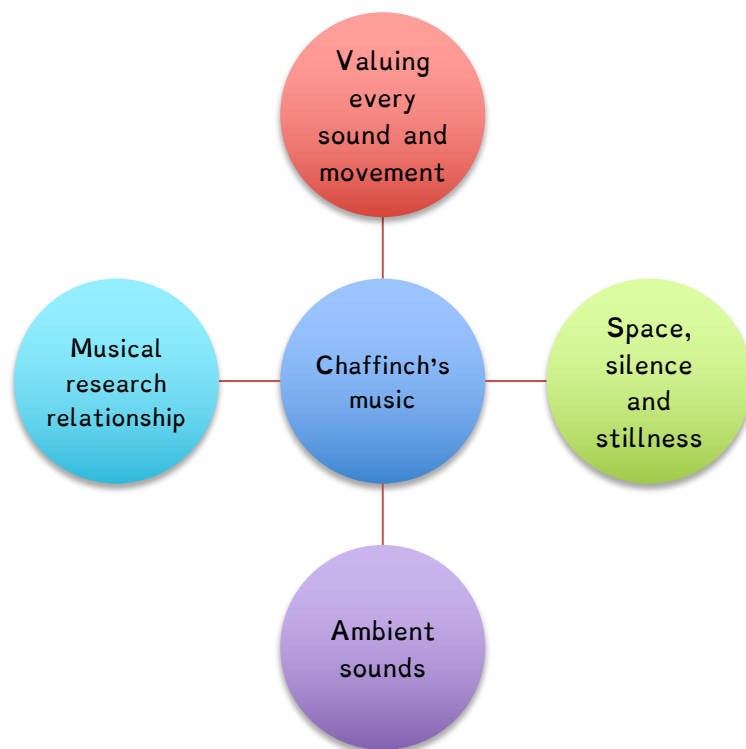


Figure 80: Analysis of the music of Chaffinch: valuing every sound and movement; space, silence and stillness; ambient sounds and the musical research relationship.

7.4.10a Valuing every sound and movement

Chaffinch seems to value every small sound, and makes intentional and considered movements. There is a pointillist or minimalist feeling. This is shown in the graphic score; see Figure 81.

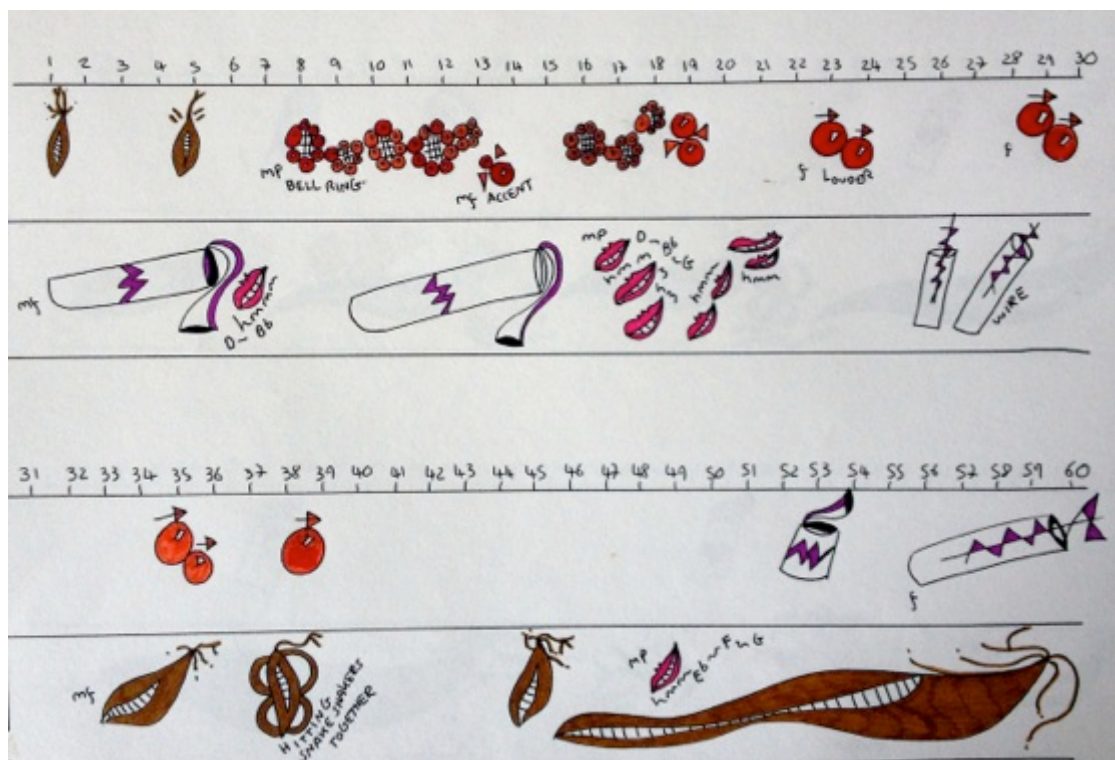


Figure 80: Chaffinch, minute two, graphic score. The visual impression demonstrates the emphasis on groups of shapes divided by space. The score is read from left to right, beginning at number one on the timeline. The first and fourth lines indicate the music of Chaffinch, with the following instruments: snake shakers, bell ring with varying accents (red circles) and thunder drum. A

space is left in the middle of the page. The second and fifth lines indicate my music, with the instruments thunder drum, vocalising and snake shakers.

She taps the snake shaker (1:00) and slides the wire of the thunder drum across the table edge. There is a dance-like quality to her movements, sensing instruments beneath her fingertips. In the discussion, she comments on learning to improvise with dancers; here it seems that movement and music are intimately intertwined. There is a strong impression that the thunder drum is an extension of her hand; it becomes like a sound amplification of her movements.

There is a highly explorative, childlike quality to her playing. During the interview Chaffinch had discussed how learning to improvise had become a means of *reliving childhood play*. It seems that she almost evokes aspects of childhood involving the attention to the tiniest detail in sound or materiality of the instrument, the exploration without preconceptions.

7.4.10b Space, silence and stillness

Her music has an emphasis on silence and stillness; see Table 49.

Table 49: Chaffinch – summary of analysis comments from music analysis on space, silence and stillness, syntactical, semantic and ontological combined

Minutes	Comments on space, silence and stillness, thunder drum, desk bell (C), desk bell, Indian snake shakers, melodica (B)
3	Chaffinch becomes stiller, simply sitting with the instrument in her hands. I follow, reducing my playing (apart from the desk bell) waiting to see what will happen next.
4	There is a sense of stillness and waiting.
5	This is a much stiller place.
6	There is a sense of stillness, maybe peace contemplation.

8	The music has become very slow and still, like we are hardly moving now, breathing slowly.
9	Intense concentration.
11	Despite our stillness there is an energy and intensity.

The silence and stillness are further illustrated in the graphic score; for example, in minute ten Chaffinch plays at just four points; see Figure 82.



Figure 82: Chaffinch – minute ten, graphic score. This extract demonstrates the space and silence in the music. Chaffinch can be seen to only play the thunder drum at three points on line four (40, 51, 53) and the desk bell once (57–58). Other marks (in green) refer to my playing of the melodica (lines two and five). Masking tape was used to cover mistakes in the score.

The stillness and silence are an active and conscious choice, and each sound is given time to resonate. The bell ring is fully investigated, the jingles on the snake shaker are given her whole consideration, her experiments are as those of a child, discovering the world in miniature. So, the stillness and silence allow

Chaffinch to notice the tiniest aspects of instruments and sounds.

7.4.10c Ambient noise

Due to the still nature of the improvisation, the street sounds and noises from other parts of the building play a role. The street sounds bounce into the room. There are five noticeable ambient noise events, listed in Table 50.

Table 50: Chaffinch – summary list of ambient noise events, music analysis, semantic, syntactical and ontological combined.,

2:23	An ambient noise from outside enters the room, the sound of a rubbish truck tipping bottles in the street, it sounds like a much louder and bigger percussive version of the snake shaker sounds.
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5:49	Strangely a car squeaks in high pitch, it sounds like an extension of the melodica, the ambient sound travelling up the building again.
8:24	A car horn from the street below breaks the concentrated sounds, the outside world interrupting our sounds.
11:12	A door slams in the background!
11:23	Another door slams – a metaphor for the ending? Silence until ...

The sounds appear innocuous, but their context within the sparse textures of our music gives them a dramatic presence, seeming to merge with the timbre of the intended sounds of the improvisation.

7.4.10d The musical research relationship

Chaffinch brings a small instrument case, and I anticipate that she will play the flute. However, she plays the percussion throughout. It may have been at

this point that the power dynamic weighted towards myself as the researcher was present and she felt anxious about revealing too much of herself and becoming overly exposed.

7.4.10e The music of Chaffinch

The improvisation with Chaffinch demonstrates how her present-day explorations with instruments relate strongly to childhood play. Through the use of silence and stillness she intimately explores the tiniest possibility of the sounds, showing how as a child she may have focused on the miniature in her musical environment. A key aspect to her development as an improvising musician has been to retain some aspects of childhood play. Chaffinch embodies the sounds through movement and senses them through touch. She presents with an improvisational world where dance and movement are woven naturally into music.

7.5 Role of music data

The analysis brought the music into sharp focus, placing it alongside the verbal data, with equal status. This correlates with arts-based research (Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015) which situates artistic processes and outputs as equal value and interest to that of text-based research methods. The music data played a unique role in the study, and could be considered a method of ‘thinking through improvisation’ (Haire, 2019; Haire and MacDonald, 2021) in which music reveals sensory, embodied, emotive and relational data and thus a deeper life experience and expansion of the phenomenon being studied. To expand on the purpose of the music data (Sections 7.1, 7.2) I first discussed how it may be understood as textual and hypertextual, drawing on Ricoeur’s (1991) texts as action. I proposed that improvised music can give an impression of hypertextuality, with the elements of music as a ‘weave of signifiers’ (Barthes, 1977, p.159) containing ‘referential’ and ‘presentational’ symbols (Langer, 1942,

p.223) and the hypertextual relationships to other texts (in the context of this study, the IPA and graphic scores).

7.6 Music analysis across cases

Important aspects of the music were identified for each participant through the use of a two-stage adapted version of Ferrara's (1984) phenomenological music analysis and the creation of a musical metadiscourse (Nattiez, 1990). These can be divided into categories; I will now briefly discuss the commonalities and distinctions shared across the cases.

There were three larger aspects found:

- The musical research relationship
- Instruments
- Emotions

In addition there were six smaller facets (but not necessarily less important); these consisted of:

- Identity
- Kinetic presentation and movement
- Childlike play and use of humour
- Silence
- Musical form
- Ambient sounds

7.6.1 The musical research relationship

An analysis of the musical research relationship enabled a greater understanding of the participants' experience of learning to improvise. Through awareness of this I was able to consider power-dynamics, embodied and sensory transference and countertransference, and how participants related to self and other within the music including relational nervousness. I will now briefly summarise these points.

7.6.2 Power dynamics

Before undertaking the research I had anticipated that there would be an inherent power dynamic, found in the researcher/participant relationship. As Holloway and Jefferson (2000) submit, in qualitative research, power dynamics are unavoidable and the researcher should 'examine' closely their 'subjective involvement'. With this in mind, I carefully employed music therapy relational techniques alongside consistent reflexive writing, which ensured a heightened awareness of my musical role (Wigram, 2004; Etherington, 2004). I was acutely aware of the potential to musically influence the participants, and considered questions similar to those of Streeter (1999a) who asks:

What shall I play in response to this person's music?

Why am I playing it?

How do I help the patient [participant] through what they play?

What do I choose to hear as significant?

(Streeter, 1999a, p.86).

In an attempt to minimise my musical influence on the participants I used the music therapy improvisation techniques from Wigram (2004) shown in Figure 83 (also mentioned in Section 2.6.13)

‘**Matching** ... music which fits the participant’s style of playing’ (p.84)

‘**Mirroring** ... doing exactly what the participant is doing musically’ (p.82)

‘**Modelling** ... playing in a way that encourages the participant to imitate, match or extend some musical ideas’ (p.99)

‘**Dialoguing** ... – communicating (conversation) through musical play’ (p.97)

‘**Frameworking ... providing a musical frame**’ (p.118)

‘**Grounding, holding and containing ... providing stable music ... an anchor or container**’ (p.91, p.97)

Figure 83: Music therapy improvisation techniques used to relate to the participants and minimise researcher influence (Wigram, 2004).

I was also aware, at times, of initiating new musical material, especially when I felt the encounter required what Beedell (2009, p.102) refers to as, increased ‘emotional engagement’ on behalf of the researcher. This is where the researcher may try to establish a balance between reserving personal information, or offering something new. In a musical translation, this meant deliberately choosing to play and initiate my own musical ideas and revealing something more of personal musicality. In addition, I occasionally became caught up in the momentum of the music or my own need to play; this is where the music takes on a life of its own and the musicians are driven forward by familiar structures such as the blues, or become

caught up in an intuitive enthusiasm for the sounds and interaction. At these times I used reflexive notes to consider my musical process and responses. An example of this is found in the improvisation with Goldfinch, which had a personal resonance. In figure 84 I state:

He scratched the wood, used the bow in different ways. I responded with melodic sounds, and when that frustrated me I used the belly dancing bells, and snake shaker. We played for around 20 minutes, going over time slightly. I thought I would like to play with him all afternoon. In a lot of ways he gave me something, some connection I hadn't had for a while and sorely missed. He reminded me of my desire and need to meet with people and play, and how I hadn't done any of this lately.

Figure 84: *Reflexive notes: personal response to the music of Goldfinch, 2 February 2018.*

Power dynamics were very prevalent in the cases of Linnet, Oriole and Goldfinch. Linnet demonstrated an emerging ability to direct the music, taking risks and initiate, with the power shifting between researcher and participant. With Oriole and Goldfinch the power dynamic was weighted towards the participants. In Oriole's case this was because of his struggles with using freer forms of improvisation and atonality in music therapy, which challenged me musically, while Goldfinch steered the music in his own direction, demonstrating his high level of musical experience and ability. Thus, it can be seen that an examination of the power dynamics was useful in that it revealed aspects of the students' learning, and how they were relating to others in a musical context.

7.6.3 Transference and countertransference

In this analysis I thought about the transference and countertransference that occurred at the time of the

research music. It is important to note that the research encounters were not in a therapeutic context, but influenced by my own personal situatedness as a researcher, and music therapist with psychodynamic training. Therefore, the music analysis was an interpretation through the researchers lens Cook (1987).

The music analysis was undertaken after the graphic scores had been completed. Thus, the insights gained through repeated drawing and listening (see Chapter 6) influenced the music analysis and created a suitable distance of objectivity. For example, when I analysed the music of Curlew, I had a heightened awareness of the sadness that was felt, while with Starling I had in mind the physical headache I had experienced when drawing the score (Starling often had headaches). This process of drawing and listening prior to the music analysis helped to create this awareness but also in part helped to bracket the emotional, physical and

memory responses I had first felt when listening back to the research music. Nachmanovitch (2019), in writing about the art of improvisation, describes the kind of objectivity I experienced. He states:

Objective ... meant seeing and feeling experience clearly. Objectivity in this sense is like the evenly hovering attention of mindfulness: emphatic, connection, compassionate but able to step back from our own emotional reactions and respond with clarity (Nachmanovitch, 2019, p.230).

The reflexive act of drawing and listening gave greater understanding to countertransference and transference from the participant.

Transference and countertransference were present in all the improvisations. However, transference was particularly illuminating in the cases of Oriole, Curlew, Swallow and Starling. With Oriole and Swallow I felt

a need to disrupt the tonality of the music, which seemed to be a transference response linked to their learning in breaking out of traditional and familiar ways of playing. Similarly, with Curlew and Starling I felt a strong desire for intense expression of creativity or gregarious movements. This appeared to be transference and possibly linked to Curlew's desire to express energy and aliveness within the music, and a response to Starling's almost wild physicality whilst playing. This transference was, at the time of the interviews, not only expressed through feeling states but also physically, as I responded by 'wildly flailing' around with the thunder drum (see Section 7.6.9).

7.6.4 Experimenting with different ways of relating to self and others

Dunnock explored differing ways of relating and forming identity through learning to improvise. The music analysis demonstrated his musical explorations and

showed, in the musical relationship, his associated need for supportive recognition from others.

7.6.5 Relational tentativeness

The research music of Bullfinch demonstrated her relational tentativeness and struggles with aspects of social interaction. The form and tonality of the music clearly shows how she struggles to 'initiate' and make a 'communicative connection'. I wondered if this was because she was very inexperienced and new to improvisation and so lacked the confidence to interact musically. There were also other considerations such as a low technical ability on the piano, and a sensitivity to the power dynamic; perhaps she did not choose to play the guitar (her main instrument) because she perceived me as the more powerful and experienced musician? In the verbal interview she discusses her difficulties with talking in social groups and this seems to directly correlate with her musical presentation. The

music of Bullfinch engenders the question, 'When a student is inexperienced in improvisation, is it common to present with relational tentativeness and hesitancy?' This would be an interesting question for further research.

7.6.6 Instruments

The use of instruments was highlighted in Dunnock, Linnet, Wren, Curlew, Swallow, Goldfinch and Starling. The participants responded to the instruments in many varied ways, according to their cultural, social, sensory, emotional and physical situatedness. Dunnock and Linnet expressed strong emerging instrumental relationships linked to learning and to developing identities as music therapists and improvisers. Five of the participants already had long-established improvisational musical relationships and it was apparent that three of these (Oriole, Swallow and Starling) were currently in a difficult process of

reshaping their technical and expressive skills in order to develop improvisation abilities.

The presence of the instruments, even silent, had a powerful effect. This was marked with Wren and Curlew, when the introduction of the bag of percussion evoked acute memories and emotional responses, eliciting past musical relationships and learning situations.

The selection of instruments influenced the musical relationship. Due to practicalities, I could sometimes only carry a small bag of percussion and melodica to the interviews. This had an impact on power dynamics, mostly demonstrated in the encounters with Starling (grand piano and melodica/small percussion) and Goldfinch (double bass and melodica/small percussion) where there was a pertinent imbalance of practical instrumental capability.

These factors demonstrated the vital importance of the role of instruments in learning to improvise: considering individuals' past and present relationships to instruments; musical identity; their sensory, embodied and emotional responses; and the sonic and physical capability of the objects themselves.

7.6.7 Emotions

The important factor of emotions was found in four of the participants (Linnet, Oriole, Wren and Curlew). Most strikingly, Linnet closely links her learning of improvisation on the music therapy course to increased emotional connection in music. During the music in the interview she uses overblowing on the tin whistle to express extreme emotion (*like screaming*). This strongly suggests that for some individuals, beginning to learn to improvise can potentially increase emotional connection in music. The other participants use the musical encounters to release emotions such as

sadness, anxiety and enthusiasm, linking improvisation to expression.

7.6.8 Identity

Musical identity is strongly demonstrated in the music of **Dunnock** and **Swallow**. **Dunnock** uses the guitar to explore differing identities, switching between the use of melody and harmony to the freer improvisational identity using timbre and textures. Similarly, **Swallow** explores new ways of being, breaking out from existing use of the lap harp as a tonal instrument and moving into atonality and extended techniques. Both of these examples show that improvisation can be a way of exploring differing ways of being and forming identity.

7.6.9 Kinetic presentation and movements

Kinetic presentation and movements are interwoven into the experience of learning to improvise. **Starling**

demonstrated gross motor skills and dramatic large movements to accompany her tense piano music.

Chaffinch employed slow deliberate movements and stillness, holding her body intentionally as she played the small percussion. Both participants relate their physical use of the sounds to their growing identity as improvisers, emphasising the embodied experience.

7.6.10 Childlike play and use of humour

Childlike play is found in the cases of Linnet and Chaffinch. As described in the literature review (Section 2.6.1), childhood play and improvisation with sounds is an innate developmental activity. I interpret the dynamic quality of Linnet's percussion as childlike, almost as if she discovers the instruments for the first time (which may well have been the case). Chaffinch deliberately explores the instruments to evoke childlike memories of play, and verbally discusses the continuum between her early experiences and adult development

as an improviser. In this way childlike practices and memories influence and intertwine with adult experiences of improvisation.

7.6.11 Musical form

Musical form can be understood as macro structures; for example, sonata form, made up of three parts: exposition, development and recapitulation. Form is surprisingly present in many of the improvisations in this study: with differing semblances, including Dunnock's structures through the devices of melody and timbres, or Linnet's division through instrumental sections. However, the keenest example of predictable structure is in the music of Goldfinch, who seems to have an intuitive and embodied sense of musical form and time. This music is divided into five sections and also has temporal balance, being frequently divided at the thirty second mark within each minute. Strikingly, this reveals that when musicians have long experience

with temporal music events and structures and a high level of skill, they can intuitively recreate structural and temporal events even when the music is unplanned, spontaneous and improvised.

7.6.12 Silence and stillness

Silence and stillness played an important role in the music of Curlew and Chaffinch. Curlew used silence and stillness to process difficult emotions connected to sadness and loss, and Chaffinch used silence and stillness to allow room for reflection on the smallest sounds produced by the instruments.

7.6.13 Role of ambient sounds

An unexpected aspect of the music analysis was the role of ambient sounds. With Linnet and Chaffinch, outside noise penetrated the room and the ambient sounds influenced and sometimes merged with the

production of the music. This underlined the importance of taking into account the ecology of the space, acoustics, possible (disruptive) noise and what impact this may have on the researcher and participant.

7.7 Music analysis summary points

Eleven summary points can be drawn from the music analysis. These will be expanded upon, discussed and combined together with the IPA analysis in Chapter 4.

The points are as follows:

1. Learning to improvise can be an opportunity for the development of risk-taking in social interaction (e.g., initiating).
2. It can uncover struggles and challenges with using unfamiliar forms of music, such as free improvisation or atonality.

3. It can be an opportunity to demonstrate confidence and accomplishments.

4. Learning to improvise can entail a struggle with unexpressed desires, such as seeking to break out of existing or traditional ways of playing.

5. It can give the opportunity to experience new ways of relating to self and other.

6. It can uncover struggles with social interaction.

7. When learning to improvise, instruments can provoke powerful memories and kinetic embodied responses.

8. Learning to improvise can sometimes be linked to increased emotional connection in music.

9. It can be a place to develop and explore identity.

10. Learning to improvise involves the physical, kinetic movement and connections to sounds.

11. Silence, stillness, slow movements and a focus on small details can play an important role, allowing the space for processing of difficult emotions or in-depth childlike discovery of sounds and instruments.

The next chapter is a literature review exploring musical identity; this was made in response to the SO theme found in the IPA of identity.

Chapter 8: Second Literature Review: Musical Identities

The IPA and music analysis findings revealed the SO theme of identity (see Sections 4.1 and 7.6.8). This theme was not explored in the first literature review, therefore a second was undertaken. Relevant literature was searched from the earliest possible date to 2020, employing the same journals as the first review and an additional journal: *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*. The literature was searched using the following Boolean keywords:

musical identities

music and identity

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to identities and musical identity (8.1). It then examines specific areas including childhood (8.2), adolescence (8.3), educators and performers (8.4), music therapists (8.5), health and disability (8.6), culture, ethnicity and

heritage (8.7), gender and sexuality (8.8) and improvisation (8.9).

8.1 Introduction to identity and musical identities

Identity is a complex subject area with a wide range of definitions. It can be understood as the inner emotional and cognitive life; or alternatively, as how an individual acts within groups, constructed through society, cultures, and position in the world. Historically, in the study of identity there has been a theoretical split between psychology and sociology. In sociology, Mead (1934) viewed individual identity as ‘externally’ constructed through interaction in society – an individual learns a set of behaviours through social interaction, which becomes ‘internalised’ and forms a sense of self. Central to Mead’s theory is the distinction between the ‘me’ and ‘I’, in which ‘me’ is cognitive reasoning and ‘I’ is formed through growing

interaction and relationships (Hammack, 2015, pp. 13–15). Mead’s theories have been highly influential, having, for example, an influence on Goffman’s (1963) later ‘theory of stigma’. In this, society is understood as categorising people into ‘normals and deviants’ (Carnevale, 2007, p.10). To avoid being labelled as a deviant an individual must present a public self which is performative (see Glossary), adjusting to fit with societal norms. Goffman (1963), drawing on feminist theory and gender studies, considers that this may also be the case with individuals with perceived disabilities or differences; the individual tempers the ‘visibility of a stigmatic quality’ (Carnevale, 2007, p.10) in order to adhere to society’s expectations. This has some relation to Sinason’s (1992) concept of ‘secondary handicap’ in which individuals with learning disabilities may perform an exaggerated disabled version of the self to conform with society perceptions.

In contrast, the psychologist James (1890) focuses on

an ‘internal’ view of identity, as it happens in a moment in time and is shaped by interior sensations such as thought and emotions. James also defines ‘me’ and ‘I’, but instead understands ‘me’ as the outside view of the person to the world, and ‘I’ as the private individual (Hammack, 2015, pp. 13–15). James’s influence is extensive in psychology, in particular on Erikson’s (1950, 1968) psychosocial theory of development. Erikson formulates that identity unfolds during adolescence, exploring a sense of self, values and experience with sexual and occupational growth. Importantly, he suggests that identity, rather than being fixed, is continually developed throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1950; Schachter and Galliher, 2018).

Musical identities is a relatively new concept used to describe how music can be integrated into identity.

MacDonald, *et al.* (2002) and Hargreaves *et al.* (2017) make a distinction between ‘identities in music, music in identities and performative musical identities’ (2017,

p.4). 'Identities in music' refers to labels we give ourselves and which are given to us by others, construed through culture and society, such as music teacher or composer, whereas 'music in identities' is how music is integrated internally, used to construct the inner self. A performative expression of musical identity is seen as the physical act and manifestation of being involved in music.

As in the wider literature on identity, musical identities studies are split into two groups, the development and perception of the individual linked to the lineage of James (1890), and wider societal construction (Mead, 1934). There are four life points commonly associated with development of musical identities: 'infancy, early childhood, adolescence and old age' (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2017, p.6). In each of these points an individual may take on a new identity or experience a transformational process; for example, early childhood may involve exploration with sounds

and adolescence relating to peer groups with similar musical interests. In contrast, other musical identity studies such as Greenberg and Rentfrow (2017) demonstrate that groups, society and culture can build identity. Finnegan's (2007) ethnographic study of musicians in an English town demonstrates that in reality there is often a concurrent development, as the individual relates to music through an internal construction and wider societal creation of identity. This is shown in Finnegan's account of amateur musicians using musical groups such as the brass band movement, musical theatre or country and western to develop an individual sense of self integrated with music, but also relate to a wider musical community.

8.2 Musical identities and childhood

Musical identities are an important aspect of infancy and childhood. As already discussed, the significance of music for the infant is demonstrated through the

theory of communicative musicality (see Section 2.5.7), where music is understood as innate, and the relationship between first caregiver and infant as musical (Trevarthen and Malloch, 2002; Papousek 1996).

This innate musicality can be enhanced at school music lessons or education (if available) and have the potential to build social or cultural norms, constructing a sense of self (O'Neill, 2002). Children are more likely to engage in long-term musical learning if they have a musically active, encouraging school culture (Evans and McPherson, 2014). In a study of teacher musical identity and classroom music, Kelly-McHale (2013) found that teachers had a direct influence on the musical identity of children, especially in directed learning, but this can be at the expense of wider cultural, linguistic and popular music integration and experiences of children. However, Hallam (2017) strongly demonstrates that autonomy is important for the positive wider musical identity of the child. She

underlines that teachers still play an important role, but need to be mindful of their influence, and of limitations in terms of musical knowledge or ability (e.g., a teacher may not have a knowledge of the popular music tastes of a child). Similarly, Westerlund, *et al.* (2017) advocates the significance of independence in childhood musical identity, with the ability to choose within school music activities giving a stronger sense of confidence and responsibility. Like Hallam (2017) they comment on the importance of teacher flexibility, and the skills of the pupils are acknowledged, with teachers not afraid to seek wider expertise in differing cultures, giving opportunity for co-creation and collaboration in ‘musical outputs’ (Hallam 2017, p.505).

8.3 Musical identity and adolescence

Adolescence is a time of transition and change, as young people begin to grapple with growing awareness

of sexuality, puberty, developments in desires, interests and the increased importance of peer friendships and groups (Steinberg and Morris, 2001). In adolescence development research, theorists have drawn heavily on Erikson's (1968) 'identity crisis' model, in which teenage years are viewed as connected to formation of goals, career, awareness of body and relationships. For example, Marcia *et al.* (1993) suggest four stages of development, from making no choices at all in early teenage years, to adhering to expectations of adults, exploring new concepts and making firm choices. However, as Crocetti (2017) indicates, Erikson's and Marcia's models do not address the nature of the actual change process. Crocetti (2017) suggests a three-stage model of identity transition in adolescence, namely: 'commitment' – the decisions made in relation to self, 'exploration' – in which the 'individual thinks about the commitments, and reconsideration of commitment – thinking about possible alternatives' (Crocetti, 2017, p.147). All of

these are affected by variables such as positive or negative family relationships, well-being and ability to embrace new opportunities.

Music can play an important role in identity formation, such as taking part in activities such as listening or playing instruments can become integrated into self, potentially building confidence, relationships and a sense of 'agency' (Lamont, 2002; Saarikallio, 2019, p.95; Krüger, 2019). In addition, it can support in significant 'live changes' that typically occur in adolescence, such as leaving the family home or going to university, aiding emotional regulation and being in new situations (De Nora, 2019). Symonds, *et al.* (2017) demonstrate that the growth of musical identity is closely interwoven with factors such as musical opportunities provided in and outside of school, access to instruments, music lessons and availability of technology. Most important is the influence of family, with individuals from affluent or privileged backgrounds

being more likely to own and practise instruments, receive private lessons, have appropriate transport and receive emotional and financial support (Green, 1997). The forming of peer groups is also significant, with musical identities created through musical preference and social activities such as playing in orchestras, wind and rock bands, hip-hop or beat box groups. These sorts of activities can sometimes serve as ‘deviant’, rebelling against adult influence (Brown, *et al.*, 1994; Cross and Fletcher, 2009; Symonds, *et al.*, 2017, p.522). An aspect to the forming of musical peer groups is the developing of ‘musical tribes’, in which adolescents may connect with a specific genre of music, wearing of the tribe’s clothes or using specific patterns of behaviour and language (Tarrant, *et al.*, 2002, p.134; MacKinlay and McVittie, 2017; Lamont and Hargreaves, 2019).

8.4 Musical identity, music educators and performers

Educators and teachers often have a variety of identities and roles. Russell (2012) found teachers generally developed a 'multidimensional' identity, such as educator, ensemble director, composer or entertainer. Teachers were commonly found to have a split between perceived and internal identity, being viewed by colleagues as educators, as opposed to seeing oneself as a musician (Isbell, 2008; Russell, 2012).

Performers are also shown to have multiple identities and a similar division between public and self-perception. Musicians' identities in the twenty-first century do not rely on single instrumental roles. Bennett (2007) demonstrates that initially when training in performance at conservatoires and universities, students tend to form musical identity through their instrument; this later widens out once

the individual takes up professional roles. This adaptability is important since illness, disability or financial loss can dislocate a fixed musical identity.

As in childhood and adolescence, it is the influence of the community, family and colleagues and musical opportunities that can help to form identity for teachers and performers. 'Distant others' and far-off musicians can be emulated, such as admired performers followed in live performance, on the internet or television (Dueck, 2017, p.383). In addition, special experience can influence musical identity (Rink, 2017; Davidson, 2002). The nature of a performer's characteristics, such as 'passion and drive' (Davidson, 2017, p.369) can make them susceptible to flow or special experiences, which can in turn reinforce musical identities. Hytönen-Ng (2013) examines the creation of identity through flow. She states:

musicians describe ... seeing themselves more

clearly, in a new, deeper way, during flow
(Hytönen–Ng, 2013, p.27).

However, this does not explain how special experience can build identity. At this point it would be interesting to further explore if special experiences are linked to musical genre or setting. Or alternatively are specific types of music more conducive to flow and identity experiences? There is currently a need for further research in this area.

8.5 Musical identity and music therapists

Music therapists also have multi-layered musical identities; for example, the music therapist Jackert describes herself as a

music therapist, musician, singer and therapist
(Jackert, 2012, no page).

Other roles can include manager, administrator, teacher, lecturer, accompanist, researcher and instrumentalist. There are some aspects of a music therapist's identity which are unique; Edwards (2015) comments that, as a result of working as an arts practitioner in a healthcare profession, music therapists often experience 'social status anxiety' (Edwards, 2015, p.2). This is where an individual is insecure in their identity in relation to colleagues. It is the case that historically, music therapists have often had to prove the validity of their profession, especially within medicalised contexts such as the NHS. The dichotomy of identifying as both an arts and a health professional does present challenges, and can potentially render the identity of the music therapist as outside the mainstream of the workplace.

A further unique aspect is the relationship between music (improvised or otherwise) in a therapeutic context and performance (Brown and Pavlicevic, 1996;

Darnley-Smith, 2013; Haire, White and Derrington, 2017). Loth (2006) gives an account of how her experience as a Gamelan musician (see Glossary) pervades her clinical, musical and social approach when working with adult groups in mental health settings. She discusses how the influence of the Gamelan causes her to think in polyphonic structures, with little hierarchy between group players (there is no soloist and accompanist). The influence of the Gamelan music affects her thinking about and experiences of the sounds in the music therapy groups. Connected to this, Jackert (2012) describes how her training as a music therapist prepares her for a difficult performance at a memorial service for a man who has committed suicide and killed two other people. She recounts how experience with psychiatric patients and knowledge of the 'Bonny Method of Guided Imagery' (Grocke, 2005) gives her the inner determination and strength to offer music to a traumatised congregation. This literature suggests that the dual identity of performer and

therapist can influence each other, with performance music being integrated into therapeutic work and therapeutic work impacting upon performance.

Music therapists share many commonalities of identity with teachers and performing musicians with multi-vocational roles. However, the nature of working as a musician within healthcare or educational settings, with the accompany need to produce evidence of the validity of the music therapy profession, can be anxiety provoking.

8.6 Musical identity, health and disability

Through acquired illness or disability a sense of self identity can become changed, with reduced independence and loss of physical health, communication, social connectedness and relationships (Magee, 2002, 2017). Studies have shown that taking part in music activities, educational, recreational or

therapeutic can have a positive impact on musical identity, engendering a healthy perception of self (MacDonald *et al.*, 2002; Ruud, 2017; Rickson, 2019). For example, Hense (2015) demonstrates that young people can utilise the performance of identities and regain health after mental illness through activities such as instrumental lessons, access to instruments and jam groups. Equally, Magee (2017) argues that taking part in therapeutic music activities can help an individual regain a sense of self through engagement with autonomy and control creating a new sense of self.

Where an individual has a lifelong disability, such as a learning disability or physical disability such as cerebral palsy, music can help to develop a sense of self and confirm identity. It can be utilised to express positive or negative emotions, communicate feelings to others, build self-esteem and confidence, experience autonomy and integrate new roles such as composer or

performer (Clarkson and Robey, 2000; Ockelford and Vorhaus, 2017; Echard, 2019).

Some music activities can have an adverse effect. It is well known that listening can be utilised for healthy emotional regulation and well-being. However, music listening can also be used for rumination and encourage unhealthy patterns of living (Saarikallio, 2017). McFerran and Hense (2017), in a study of music use of adolescents in a mental health unit, found music listening sometimes enabled social withdrawal and focus on illness as identity. They emphasise that work with adolescents with mental health issues should include healthy choices encouraging social interaction through activities such as song sharing and writing.

8.7 Musical identity, culture and ethnicity and heritage

Culture, ethnicity and heritage are large complex

topics beyond the scope of this thesis; this section therefore focuses briefly on national identity in music. It is important to acknowledge that culture, ethnicity and heritage can be defined in many ways. For example, culture can be understood as a *fixed* creation of meaning amongst large groups of peoples, such as the use of shared language, values or artistic practices (Barnett and Lee, 2003). It can also be known as socially constructed identity, where individuals change and adapt to fit into a smaller group dynamic (Hecht *et al.*, 2005; Hornsey, 2008; Baldwin *et al.*, 2006), or alternatively as an individual's perception of the world formed by social, political or geographical contexts (Ruud, 1998). Ethnicity can be defined as the commonality of a group of people in race or geography. The final term is *heritage*, which can be defined as the expression and features of a particular national, cultural or ethnic identity. Examples of heritage include the *bunad* national costume of Norway, varying from region to region (norway-hei.com, 2020) or the

dragon as a visual symbol of Wales (Pritchard and Morgan, 2003).

In musicology and ethnomusicology, many studies exist on the music and cultures of differing peoples (Nettl, *et al.*, 2001; Clayton *et al.*, 2003). To date there are very few authors who specifically examine musical identities and culture. The *Oxford Handbook of Musical Identities* contains seven case studies focused on music and cultural, ethnic and heritage contexts, from the Douz and music of Tunisia (Karass, 2017), where music festivals build social connection and establish ethnic group values, to the revival of the folk song in England during the late nineteenth century (Colls and Heathman, 2017).

Folkestad (2002, 2017) underlines the function of national identity in music. He suggests that large geographical regions can have embedded music, which both confirms internal social bonds and communicates

identity to outsiders. For example, the Welsh song 'Cwm Rhondda' (Bread of Heaven) pronounces national identity to rival teams at rugby matches (The Cinch Review, 2013). Folkestad also acknowledges that musical identity can be related to ethnicity and culture, but individuals tend to form it in 'many and varied ways' (Folkestad, 2017, p.123). Folkestad (2011) draws on the idea of an 'intertextual and discursive personal inner musical library' (Folkestad, 2017, p.128) to explain differing individual musical identities existing within the same culture and ethnicity. Put simply, every person has an internal repertoire of music, influenced by past and present experience, which informs and forms their musical selves. Interestingly this concept is often used in training of music therapists through the use of student musical autobiographies (Bonde, 2013).

This literature suggests that culture, ethnicity and heritage are important to musical identities on a

national, regional and individual level; large groups of people can use music to confirm and communicate identity, and individuals utilise intertextual facets to build personal repertoires of music.

8.8 Musical identity, gender and sexuality

Gender and sexuality is a large topic beyond the scope of this thesis. This section focuses on performance of gender and musical identities. Gender has traditionally been understood as either biologically or socially constructed. However, recent research has shown that neither categories are simple, since there exist many variants of biological presentations. In addition, societal influences are diverse, from labour roles to political and cultural perspectives (Dibben 2002; Kaplan and Rodgers, 2013). Similarly, academic discourse on sexuality has undergone a revolution in the twentyfirst century, and through new areas such as ‘queer studies’, sexuality has begun to be recognised as a

changeable aspect of identity with differing expressions such as 'asexual' and 'pangender' (Bain *et al.*, 2016). Music therapists have suggested the use of music therapy to 'empower queer identity' (Boggan, *et al.*, 2017, p.1; Scrine, 2019). Using a model of queer music therapy when working with LGBTQIA+ adolescents, Bain *et al.* (2016) use techniques such as creating musical autobiographies (repertoires of recorded music) and lyric and songwriting to underline and support queer identity.

In musical identities and gender, Dibben (2002) suggests that 'gender can be enacted' (p.121) through musical activities, choice of instruments and tastes (i.e., girls sing – boys play the guitar). Traditionally, women have been largely absent from historical narratives in Western art music, dividing music into the female domestic, and public and male arenas (McClary, 1991). In addition, societal influences such as family, teachers and peer pressure can direct individuals into a

stereotypical gendered approach to music. Green (1997) demonstrates that through the influence of family and teacher perceptions in schools, there are often wide differences between female and male music, with girls singing or playing classical instruments such as flute, and boys undertaking composition and using drums and technology. In addition, media (old and new), images, lyrics and public role models can all have a strong influence on the gendering of music. Adolescents draw on common narratives of music such as 'boys play rock' to affirm and enact gender identities. Interestingly, Richards (1998) shows that some individuals may actively adjust musical activities and tastes to present an acceptable performance of gender. Thus it may be the case that a boy enjoys listening to the female empowered pop band the Spice Girls (Spice World, 2020) but keeps his musical tastes hidden in order to conform to peer pressure.

8.9 Musical identity and improvisation

There is little in the literature that directly links improvisation to musical identities. Jazz and improvisational practices have been found to promote collective identity, such as social, political or musical (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). In a focus group study Wilson and MacDonald (2005a) found that jazz musicians tend to privilege collective identity, achieved through common use of styles and ‘swing feel’ (see Glossary), instrumental skills and harmonic knowledge. Further studies (Wilson and MacDonald, 2005b) found that differing groups such as jazz and free-improvising musicians talk differently and ‘construct their musical practice’ (2012, p.567) through verbal discourse. Jazz musicians tend to create collective identity through shared knowledge of genre and in contrast freely improvising musicians emphasise joint intuition and instinct.

Smilde (2013, 2016) makes a case for the importance of

improvisation pedagogy in higher education, arguing that improvisation creates the conditions for development of self-identity and connection with other. She underlines that through improvisation musicians are able to learn ‘mutual trust and reflection’ (Smilde, 2016, p.9) and experience reciprocal musical relationships. In addition, these interactions can sometimes elicit flow in performance, implying that flow and improvisation could be related to development of identity.

Several authors link improvisation to life and identity. Prévost in writing about AMM, a foundational group of the free improvisation movement (see Glossary), describes music as:

‘a vehicle for realising the inner image we have of the world and our place in it’ (Prévost, 1995, p.121).

He refers to free improvisation performance as, ‘the

art of becoming' (1995, p. 123), as the musician explores freedom and growing self identity. Sansom (2007) suggests that the real-time relational, communicative and semiotic (signs and symbols of music; see Glossary) nature of free improvisation can represent life, and therefore be experienced as a 'creative process central to the formation of identity' (Sansom, 2007, p.13). Nachmanovitch (1990) writes of the 'life' of the improviser as constantly challenging tradition in society, 'creating life as it goes' (p.22). Similarly, Ruud (1998) suggests the concept of the 'improvising individual', a person who lives life with steadiness but also practises improvised 'psychic flexibility (p.28), stimulating change and process within society and culture. He tentatively suggests that the music therapist may take this role through the practice of improvisation.

8.10 Summary

In this chapter I have examined the literature on musical identities, including childhood, adolescence, educators, performing musicians, music therapists, health and disability, culture, ethnicity and heritage, gender and sexuality, and improvisation.

This chapter has demonstrated that music can be central to identity development throughout the lifespan. In professional roles there are often multi-layered musical identities and commonly a split between the publicly and privately perceived. In music therapy, individuals often experience anxiety related to working as a creative practitioner in an educational or medicalised workplace (Edwards, 2015). There can also be a complex role between performer and therapist in music for therapeutic purpose and music as performance (Haire, White and Derrington, 2017). The literature strongly demonstrates that taking part in musical activities can increase health and sense of

self, helping with long-term and acquired disabilities and health conditions. Music can be important to the construction and performance of gender and sexuality, influenced by society, historical narratives, peers and family. In improvised music musicians use discourse to construct narratives of identity (Wilson and MacDonald, 2005a) and in the classroom improvisation can be considered crucial to pedagogy and identity formation, promoting social interaction and trust (Smilde, 2013, 2016). Finally, improvisation could potentially be considered as a metaphor for identity or life, a way of living, through which the artist or musician challenges or unsettles societal norms (Ruud, 1998; Nachmanovitch, 1990, 2019).

Chapter 9: Discussion

The IPA and music analysis revealed five SO themes, as shown in Figure 85.

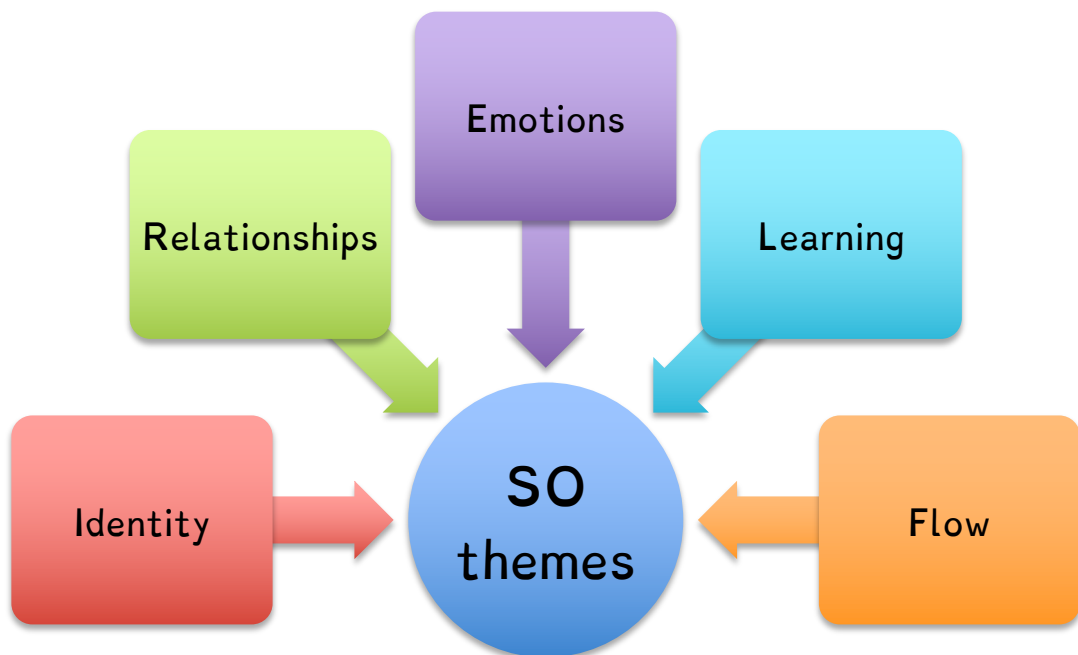


Figure 85: The five SO themes.

This chapter will present a synthesis discussion of the IPA and music analysis findings and literature examined in chapters 2 and 8. Also included is contemporary literature found between 2016 to 2022; this is due to the long time period between the original literature review and completion of the study.

9.1 Identity

The theme of identity was found in the IPA and music analysis. Through learning to improvise, participants described growth in self-identity with development of instrumental voice underlining experiences of choice, rebellion, and freedom, building confidence in social skills, and some changes to performative expressions of culture, heritage and gender.

The literature suggests improvisation can help develop a sense of individual and collective musical identities, promoting the building of social skills (Wilson and MacDonald, 2017; MacDonald *et al.*, 2012, 2017; Smilde, 2013, 2016). However, there is little to show the experiences of identity development through learning to improvise; this therefore, is one of the unique contributions made in this study. The findings clearly demonstrate that learning to improvise can influence musical identity. This occurs through a reshaping process, where new skills are habituated into

bodily and cognitive schemas, and instruments influence the phenomenological experience of learning. As a result, there can be a development of instrumental voice, changes to performance of gender, an embracing or breaking away from culture or heritage, new confidence in social interaction and use of spoken voice; accompanied by sensations of liberation caused through increased musical autonomy. A summary of the findings of the theme of identity is shown in figure 86.



Figure 86: Summary of theme of identity

I will now discuss the following sub-themes in relation to identity, these are shown in table 51.

Table 51: Sub themes of Identity

9.1.1	Becoming a real improviser
9.1.1a	Construction of improviser identity
9.1.1b	Pro[claiming] identity as improviser
9.1.1c	Realisation of choice and rebellion
9.1.2	Instruments, culture, heritage and gender
9.1.2a	Changes to gender performance
9.1.2b	Changes to relationship and culture and heritage.
9.1.3	Instruments
9.1.3a	Instruments, habituation and reshaping
9.1.4	Free/Not Free
9.1.5	Spoken Voice
9.1.5a	Rap and song writing

9.1.1 Becoming a *real* improviser

Chaffinch describes becoming a *real* improviser. Her use of the word *real* suggests transformations and although she does not explicitly state it, this possibly has connotations with the popular trope and children's story of Pinocchio, the wooden puppet that changes from wood to flesh (Collodi, 1996). The narrative is a growing-up journey tale, in which the puppet

transforms from wood (plant), to a donkey (animal), and finally becomes a *real* human boy. In his journey Pinocchio struggles with rebellion against authorities and learns to make choices not to lie, adjusting to society and becoming human because of his good heart (Staniou and Tsilimeni, 2011). Although there are differing interpretations (it is also understood as a tale of society's oppression of the rebellious child, Avanzini, 2016) the narrative can be considered as belonging to the German story tradition of *Bildungsroman*, an individual's discovery of autonomy, self and creativity in relation to society. As Panszczyk (2016) underlines, the important aspect of the story is not the final transformation itself, but the becoming. She writes:

... what is unique about Collodi's story, is that the narrative focuses on the period between Pinocchio's being a piece of wood and being a human – the two states of being an object and

being a boy bookend the journey, but are part of the journey itself – the journey is actually about the becoming (Panszczyk, 2016 p.192).

In Panszczyk's interpretation, the focus is on the puppet's being in a 'liminal' state, a threshold or being between worlds, as a rite of passage between one state and another (see Glossary). The music therapist Ruud (1995) considers improvisation to be a liminal state. He writes:

... improvisation is a transitional ritual, a way of changing position, frames, status, or states of consciousness (Ruud, 1995, p.93).

Similarly, Ansdell (2014) links liminality to Turner's (1975) 'communitas,' in which deep 'connection' between individuals is found with in-between transformational states with the qualities of 'improvisation, spontaneity, mutuality and flow'

(Ansdell, 2014, p.237). The passage of becoming an improviser, of learning to improvise, could similarly be imagined as a liminal voyage through materials, or different expressions of the self and identity, about the journey of becoming.

9.1.1a Construction of improviser identity

The findings show that the musical identities of the participants were both internally (James, 1890) and socially constructed (Mead, 1934), through personal discourse, statements, activities and public announcements such as performing, witness of audience and support of mentors (Polletta and Jasper, 2001).

For example, Chaffinch states improvisation is a *legitimate practice*, and for Starling, peers and audience create and affirm her identity. She recalls:

And it has happened very quickly as well, so I first started playing contemporary music in the

third year of my undergrad ... And that is when people saw me as a contemporary musician ... And then that also turned into, I had to do the improv work. (Starling)

Alternatively, with Dunnock (as an adolescent), the supportive encouragement of his mentor helps form his identity as a jazz musician. Evans and McPherson (2014) demonstrate that musical identities can be socially constructed in childhood and adolescence through family, teacher, peer and professional role model relationships. Mentoring relationships have traditionally been connected with learning in jazz. Berliner (1994) describes a 'jazz community' (p.486): studying through apprenticeships with older or more experienced individuals, friends and peers. Smilde (2009) shows that 'significant others, both personal and professional' (p.iv) can play an important role in the development of the musician, providing a social context in which to learn. This takes place through informal

learning in which the musician self directs, but draws on the advice and motivation of others (Folkestad, 2006). The mentor's role is important as a facilitator, but only so far, as they must allow the student freedom to find his or her own learning path (Rose, 2017).

9.1.1b Pro[claiming] identity as improviser

Within the support of a learning community, becoming a *real* improviser requires a bold personal and public pro[claiming] of identity. Participants offer strong statements such as:

This is a legitimate practice and a legitimate form of music making. (Chaffinch)

It is interesting to consider why it might be necessary to state that improvisation is a *legitimate* practice and to pro[claim] 'improviser' as an identity. Perhaps the

historical devaluing in Western art music has made this necessary (Nettl, 1998)? As Love (2003) states, the practice of improvisation was profoundly influenced by the Cartesian mind and body split during the Enlightenment (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) in which spontaneous arts became acquainted with the body and therefore diminished (see Section 2.4.2). However, as Chaffinch asserts, in contemporary times it is possible to embrace improvisation as a *real* and *legitimate* practice, but it still requires an assertive confidence, since it remains on the margins of society (Watson, 2004). The life of an improvising musician may take place with little or no monetary reward; performances may be in small alternative venues and the activity and sounds produced may challenge or confront audiences (Bailey, 1992). These factors may make it pertinent for an improvising musician to state their case as being *real* live flesh and bone.

9.1.1c Realisation of choice and rebellion

Realisation of choice and acts of rebellion are necessary to the development of the improviser.

Dunnock, Starling and Chaffinch all choose to play improvised music that rebels against previous adult, family or parental influences. Dunnock improvises on an instrument of which his father has no technical knowledge; Starling states she doesn't want to be a classical pianist, but instead play improvised electronic music and Chaffinch deliberately chooses to improvise on the flute, rebelling against the traditional repertoire of what she terms *dead white French composers*.

Realisation of choice may be connected to adolescent development (Dunnock learns as a teenager, Starling is a young adult and Chaffinch describes herself as *becoming an adult musician*). Marcia *et al.* (1993) demonstrate that adolescents commonly experience four stages of choice-making development, with the final stage being autonomous independence, and it is common at this stage to take part in musical activities

which rebel against adult influences (Brown *et al.*, 1994; Symonds, *et al.*, 2017; McFerran *et al.*, 2019). These choices are often inspired or provoked by peer groups and non-parental adult role models (Dueck, 2017).

9.1.2 Instruments: culture, heritage and gender

The findings show that learning to improvise can change relationship to culture, heritage and gender. In Section 8.7, culture was defined as either fixed amongst large groups of people, socially constructed with individuals adapting to group dynamics, or formed by an individual perception of the world (Ruud, 1998; Barnett and Lee, 2003; Hecht *et al.*, 2005; Hornsey, 2008, Baldwin *et al.*, 2006; Gosling, 2018). Connected to this, heritage can be understood as the characteristics of a specific culture. Traditionally, gender has historically been either biologically or socially constructed. In the twenty-first century

understanding has broadened to include differences in biological presentations and acknowledgement of diverse cultural and societal influences (Dibben 2002; Kaplan and Rodgers, 2013).

9.1.2a Changes to gender performance

Wren, Swallow, Starling and Chaffinch demonstrate how learning to improvise can change relationship to culture, heritage and gender. Starling and Chaffinch comment on the barriers they have faced in music as women and as women of colour. They chose not to work as composers or classical musicians because of traditional gender or colour restrictions on roles.

Women and especially women of colour have not generally been accepted into professions such as conducting; however, this has begun to change in recent years (Green, 1997; Davidson and Edgar, 2003; Bennett *et al.*, 2018, Bennett *et al.*, 2018). Despite, or conceivably because of these barriers, improvisation is

viewed as having fewer hierarchies, eliciting a different performance of gender and culture. For example, as has been previously discussed in Section 4.1.7, improvisation affords Swallow the opportunity to present her gender differently, from timid to rebellious.

Dibben (2002) explains that music can be used to create social performance of gender through choice of activities or use of instruments. Similarly, Shimanoff (2009), in *Gender Role Theory*, describes how gender is often socially constructed, presented through stereotyped roles and behaviours, with females in Western cultures expected to be ‘nurturing, co-operative and peaceful’ (p.2). Butler (1999, 2006, 2009) highlights that gender is essentially performative or ‘enactment’, and where it is seen as ‘external or internal truth’, is often actually a product of societal norms and power (Butler, 2009, p.1).

Even though the free improvisation movement (see Glossary) has traditionally been a male-dominated world (note – all the images in Bailey's 1992 seminal improvisation book are of male musicians). In the 1970s and 1980s there was an emergence of feminist improvising groups; these challenged existing forms of Western female gender and sexuality presentation. Through performance, these groups displayed converse gender roles, such as playing the traditionally male-dominated double bass, dusting of pianos, creating loud cackling vocal sounds, and public exhibitions of lesbianism (e.g., women kissing women). Groups such as FIG (Feminist Improvising Group), Scottish vocalist Maggie Nicols, pianist Irène Schweizer and bassist Joëlle Léandre subverted gender roles through improvisation performances (Smith, 2004). Throughout history Western art music has been gendered, with representations of women's bodies and sounds being restricted to acceptable cultural expressions (petite movements and quiet high sounds in domestic settings),

and music such as the screeching of Maggie Nicols is viewed as provocative because she dares to confront gender stereotypes of the quiet, petite woman, instead evoking the hag or 'madwoman' (Smith, 2008, p.185).

Thus it is possible that learning improvisation could afford women a new role as female improviser or the 'créatrice' (as suggested by Léandre in Smith, 2008, p.199), challenging existing gender norms.

9.1.2b Changes to relationship and culture and heritage.

The findings show that learning to improvise can elicit either a breaking away from or an embracing of culture. Here I refer to culture as fixed or socially constructed in groups. Chaffinch describes the process of rejecting the culture and repertoire of classical flute music, and, through learning to improvise, returning to her cultural musical identity, originally formed in her early years on

the harmonium. She connects her present interest in improvisation to these foundational experiences.

Similarly, Swallow describes *moving away* from her culture and heritage (with UK folk music) through learning to improvise in music therapy. Conversely, Wren uses improvisation to situate himself within culture, forming musical identity through joining differing musical tribes (Tarrant *et al.*, 2002, p.134).

I would like to question if the experiences of Swallow, Chaffinch and Wren are common. Do women, or other marginalised groups, typically use improvisation as a means of breaking down cultural barriers, and privilege and relatively advantaged groups employ improvisation to situate themselves within culture? This is a question which beyond the remit of this thesis and would be interested to explore in further research studies.

9.1.3 Instruments

The musician-to-instrument relationship is complex and can evoke ‘internal representations of music’ (Murphy McCaleb, 2014, p.52, see Glossary) found in the elements, relational aspects, or embodied experiences. ‘Representations of music’ can be built up through internal patterns of desire and action and come to characterise how music is created and experienced. The instrument becomes a physical extension of the musician, and movements and mental representations become wholly integrated into the body structures and forms; known as morphology (Murphy McCaleb, 2014; Nijs, 2017). Instruments can evoke cultural associations, be connected to social groups or have gendered connotations. Bates (2012) argues for the ‘social life of the instrument’ (p.3) in which they have their own background, narrative, stories and means of connecting people (as in the lap harp with its own repertoire of songs and stories Kinney, 2011). Equally, Halstead and Rolsvjord (2017) emphasise how

instruments can be strongly associated with gender, for example, the use of the electric guitar or the double bass as a representative of the male body (Smith, 2008). In Winnicottian terms (1971) instruments can act as transitional objects or me/not me entities, something which becomes a way of mediating for the musician between the self and the outside world and others (Nijs, 2017).

9.1.3a Instruments, habituation, and reshaping

The IPA and music analysis demonstrates that instruments can evoke a specific phenomenological experience of learning to improvise. This involves a ‘reshaping’ (terminology developed for this thesis) and relearning of instrumental skills. Swallow’s musical experience has previously been informed by the playing of the lap and concert harps in folk and Western art music, creating specific cognitive, physical and emotional schemas. Schemas are defined as knowledge,

patterns and structures in body and mind formed through interaction with environment and people (Barlett, 1932; Piaget, 2002). Learning to improvise elicits a challenge to break away from the existing mental representations, kinetic actions and schemas associated with the instrument, finding new ways of playing (literally moving and thinking differently).

Similarly, Dunnock explores new ways of playing on the guitar. In the research music he employs the schemas of traditional jazz guitar with melodic *concordant* playing, contrasting with a new *discordant* textured music. Improvisation gives Dunnock a fresh instrumental voice, the opportunity to create his own unique sounds with the development of a new musical identity – a *free self*. In this, the research music is considered more than a simple representation of his new self; it is as if he ‘inhabits’ the music (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a).

Merleau-Ponty describes this process as:

to habituate oneself to a hat, an automobile, or a cane is to take up residence in them, or inversely, to make them participate within the voluminosity of one's own body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, pp. 144–145).

‘Inhabiting’ requires an absorption of new schemas, as the *free* self is ‘habituated’ through a ‘grasping of a signification’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.144). I have previously defined this idea of grasping of musical significations as a literal taking hold of the elements of music in order to improvise (Chapter 7, p.468). This occurs within a hypertextual context, such as self, environment, forms and intentions, within which the improviser learns to wield the elements of music. These ideas will be explored further in Chapter 10.

Learning of improvisation can be framed through instrumental experience, involving the development of new cognitive or physical schemas, a ‘reshaping’ or

habituated process (See glossary), with the potential discovery of fresh ways of playing and forming of new musical identities.

9.1.4 Free/not free

The study suggests that learning to improvise can elicit changes, from feeling judged and restricted in music, to the experience of freedom. In the findings this occurs in Dunnock's learning of a new instrument in jazz, and rebelling against parental judgement in classical music. Dunnock's research music demonstrates an expression of his musical freedom. On the guitar he chooses to explore a wide range of dissonant textures and timbres, which he states are like a *rebellion* against the traditional melodic approaches to playing in jazz. Kanellopoulos, (2011a, 2011b) drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) literary dialogic concept of the 'oughtness of freedom ... the impulse to continue ... in a zone of proximity and contact' (p.32), links learning

improvisation to freedom – related to a new autonomy in expressing musical intentions, awareness of the ‘responsibility’ to keep the music going, being fully ‘present’ and responding to others (p.119). It is apparent that in the research music Dunnock is exploring musical autonomy and intention. This is enabled by the supportive frame of the musical research relationship, in which I provide focused listening and reflection.

Similarly, in music therapy experiential groups, despite feeling initially judged, Swallow and Linnet describe a sense of increased freedom and gain in creativity through intensified choice making and developed connection with peers. Improvised music in groups has been shown to involve high levels of choice making with opportunities for intense reflection and interaction with others (Wilson and MacDonald, 2015; Trondalen, 2016).

Thus, for all three participants, when given the opportunity to play music with wider choices, autonomy, room for individual expression and reflection from others, they experience a shift from judgement to freedom, and a greater sense of musical self.

9.1.5 Spoken voice

The findings show that learning to improvise can build social confidence in use of spoken voice, and improvising rap and songs can help form musical identity.

Bullfinch describes how improvising in the music therapy experiential groups gives her increased confidence to speak in social situations. Whilst beyond the focus of this thesis, historically, music has often been compared to language, with examples of various concepts such as the importance of ‘presentational and referential’ symbols of communication (Langer, 1942,

p.79): language as intellectual and cognitive, music as feeling and non-semantic, without connections to words (Seeger, 1976; Feld, 1984) or music as semiology (signs and symbols) made up of signifiers with referential and non-referential meanings (Nattiez, 1990). Improvised music has many similarities with conversation; as Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996) observe, musicians often use conversational metaphors to talk about jazz. In this study Bullfinch employs an array of phrases to discuss musical interaction, such as *jamming, locking and adapting*. Monson (1996) and Sutton (2001) both suggest that improvisation can be considered a particular form of conversation; although different from verbal language and without semantic meaning, it contains many of the elements found in verbal social interaction, such as turn-taking, dialogue, anticipation, silence, interruption, and interjection. Connected to this, there are many studies in music therapy that highlight the relationship between social interaction musicality (Pavlicevic, 1997; Trevarthen and

Malloch, 2000; Trevarthen, 2009; Stern, 1988, 2004; Trondalen, 2016). In the case of Bullfinch, learning to improvise in the music therapy experiential groups acts as a kind of practice arena and framework to make sounds, building social skills for verbal conversation. It gives her increased confidence in use of her own voice.

9.1.5a Rap and song writing

Wren describes the use of spontaneous rap and songwriting for identity development and emotional support, achieving social status and attachment within his community. Short (2013, 2017) demonstrates that rap can be a powerful medium for recognition of voice and building of confidence and self-esteem. In adolescence the use of music to create belonging, peer status or emotional regulation is common (Lamont 2002; Cross and Fletcher, 2009). Added to this, studies in childhood and adulthood show that songwriting is an exceptional tool in the exploration of a sense of self

(Bain *et al.*, 2016; Tafuri, 2017). Music therapy literature demonstrates that songwriting can provide, amongst other factors, connection to emotions, sharing of narrative, growth, and differing ways of seeing the self, circumstances or situations (Baker *et al.*, 2005; Baker and Wigram, 2005; Baker and MacDonald, 2013). Thus Wren uses improvised rap and song lyrics to create cathartic release and build a healthy sense of self, whilst connecting with a musical community. I will now examine the super-ordinate theme of relationships.

9.2 Relationships

The findings show that relationships are central to learning to improvise. Improvised music can reveal both how students relate to others and the level of musical skills such as relational tentativeness or the ability to make choices and take risks. The learning takes place within a 'community of learning' (term developed for this thesis), which can include friends, peers and mentors, in both formal and informal settings. The communities provide a place of encouragement, guidance and reflection, with opportunities for practice and performance. The nature of relationships formed through learning to improvise is often deep; when these relationships are at an end they can be experienced as intense loss. A summary of the theme of relationships is shown in figure 87.

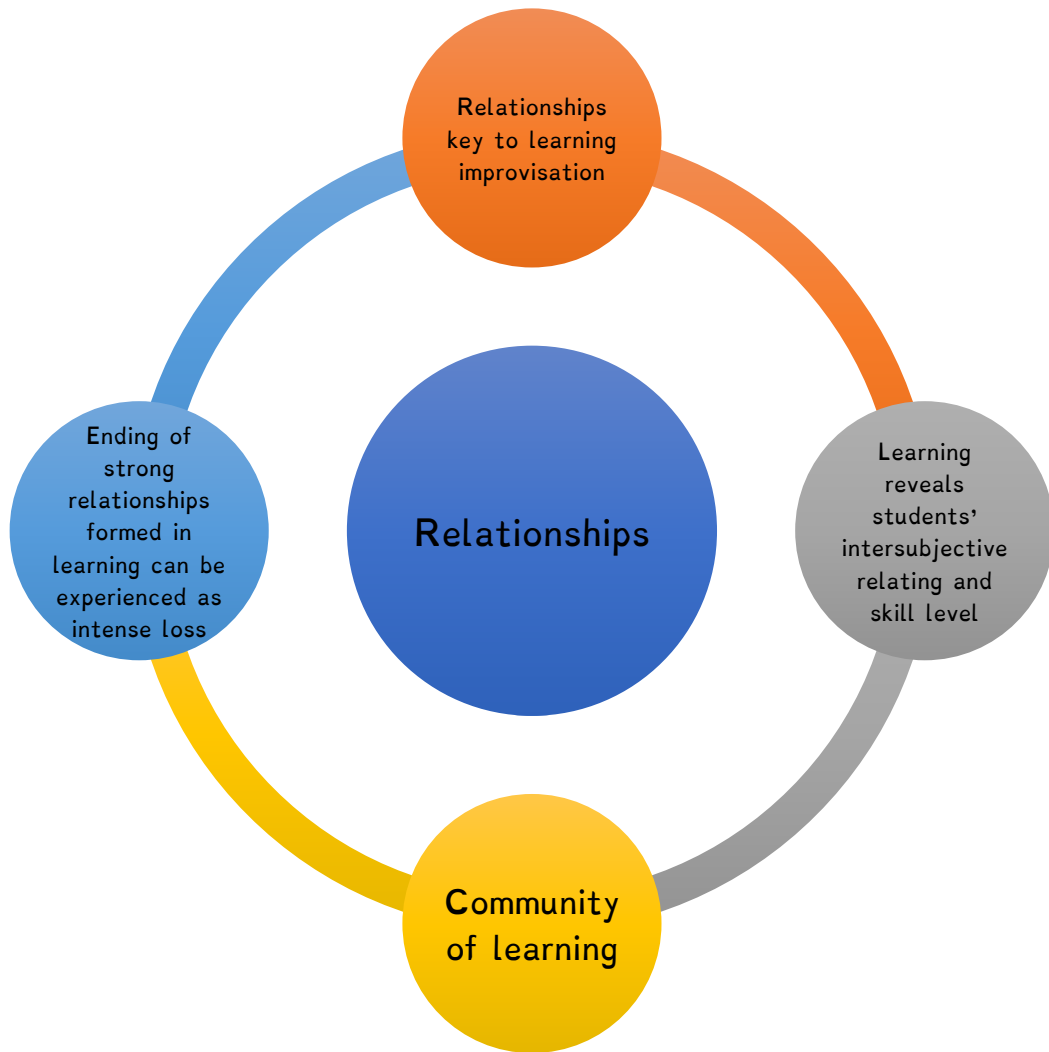


Figure 87: Summary of theme of relationships

The SO theme of relationships includes the following sub-themes shown in table 52. These will now be discussed in sections 9.2.1 – 9.2.4.

Table 52: Sub themes of relationships

9.2.1	The musical research relationship
9.2.2	Music connection with friends and peers
9.2.3	Music therapy experiential groups
9.2.4	Loss of musical relationships

9.2.1 The musical research relationship

A consideration of the musical research relationship strongly revealed the participants' learning, including power dynamics (7.6.2), transference and countertransference (7.6.3), differing ways of relating to self and other (7.6.4), and relational tentativeness (7.6.5). This theme suggests that learning to improvise can involve relational tentativeness at the start of learning, a developing aptitude for risk-taking, choice-making, initiating and leading, difficult challenges and struggles in gaining new skills and accepting the guidance of tutors, and an opportunity to demonstrate mastery and explore playfulness.

9.2.2 Musical connection with friends and peers

The study shows that relationships with friends and peers can be important to the development of improvisation skills. These relationships provide opportunities to practise and play, motivation, and social bonds. The intersubjective nature of improvised music can create connections of a deep intense nature, especially within small groups (Pavlicevic, 1997; Hytönen–Ng, 2013; Trondalen, 2016). Musicians respond to each other in the moment, on a cognitive, sensory, embodied and emotional level. This is demonstrated in the case of Curlew, who experiences friendships formed in adolescence and improvised music making as lifelong and deeply personal, engendering feelings of intense connection. Here I would like to draw on Berliner's (1994) jazz community and suggest that this can be thought about 'as a community of learning through relationships' (terminology developed for this thesis),

consisting of mentors, audience (see Sections 4.2.1, 9.2.2), friends and peers. It is through being part of this community that individuals learn and develop as improvisers.

9.2.3 Music therapy experiential groups

The idea of a community of learning through relationships can be extended to music therapy experiential groups. As previously discussed, experiential groups, often psychodynamic in nature, are designed to provide music therapy students with knowledge in group dynamics (Kolb, 1984; see also Section 2.6.14). In the specialised environment of the music therapy training course, the groups are focused on improvised musical relationships, and students have the opportunity to develop acute self-awareness and awareness of others (Pederson, 2002; Prefontaine, 2006). Linnet and Bullfinch describe learning in experiential groups as emotionally challenging

(discussed in the following theme of emotions, Section 9.3.4), but also providing a positive space in which to practise social interaction with peers.

9.2.4 Loss of musical relationships

The temporal nature of improvised music and the deep relationships formed through it may engender feelings of loss. Improvisation is music that occurs in the moment, and then is gone. Nachmanovitch (2019) expresses:

In this moment, preparing and creating, the technical and the sacred, flow together seamlessly like a devotional dance. And then the moment vanishes. We treat a fleeting encounter with the seriousness of deep play. Our meeting is one of a kind in the history of the universe. It will never be like this again ... nothing lasts forever. (Nachmanovitch, 2019, p.73)

Curlew and Linnet describe the painful absence of close musical friendships, past mentors and lost members of experiential groups. Curlew comments on the nature of these relationships:

... and there would be some people that I've played music with and I got a real essence of someone I think and of their personalities.

(Curlew)

This has an overlap with the **SO** theme of emotions. I will further explore the loss of relationships in the following **SO** theme (emotions) and in the sub-theme 'endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of sadness and loss' (Section 9.3.5).

9.3 Emotions

The SO theme of emotions demonstrates that learning to improvise can facilitate an increased capacity for emotional regulation and help access and express a wider range of emotions. It shows that learning in small groups can be anxiety provoking, with common feelings of being vulnerable and exposed, and tension over issues of right and wrong. Endings in music and the temporal and temporary nature of improvisation can elicit strong feelings of loss and sadness. A summary of the theme of emotions is shown in figure 88.

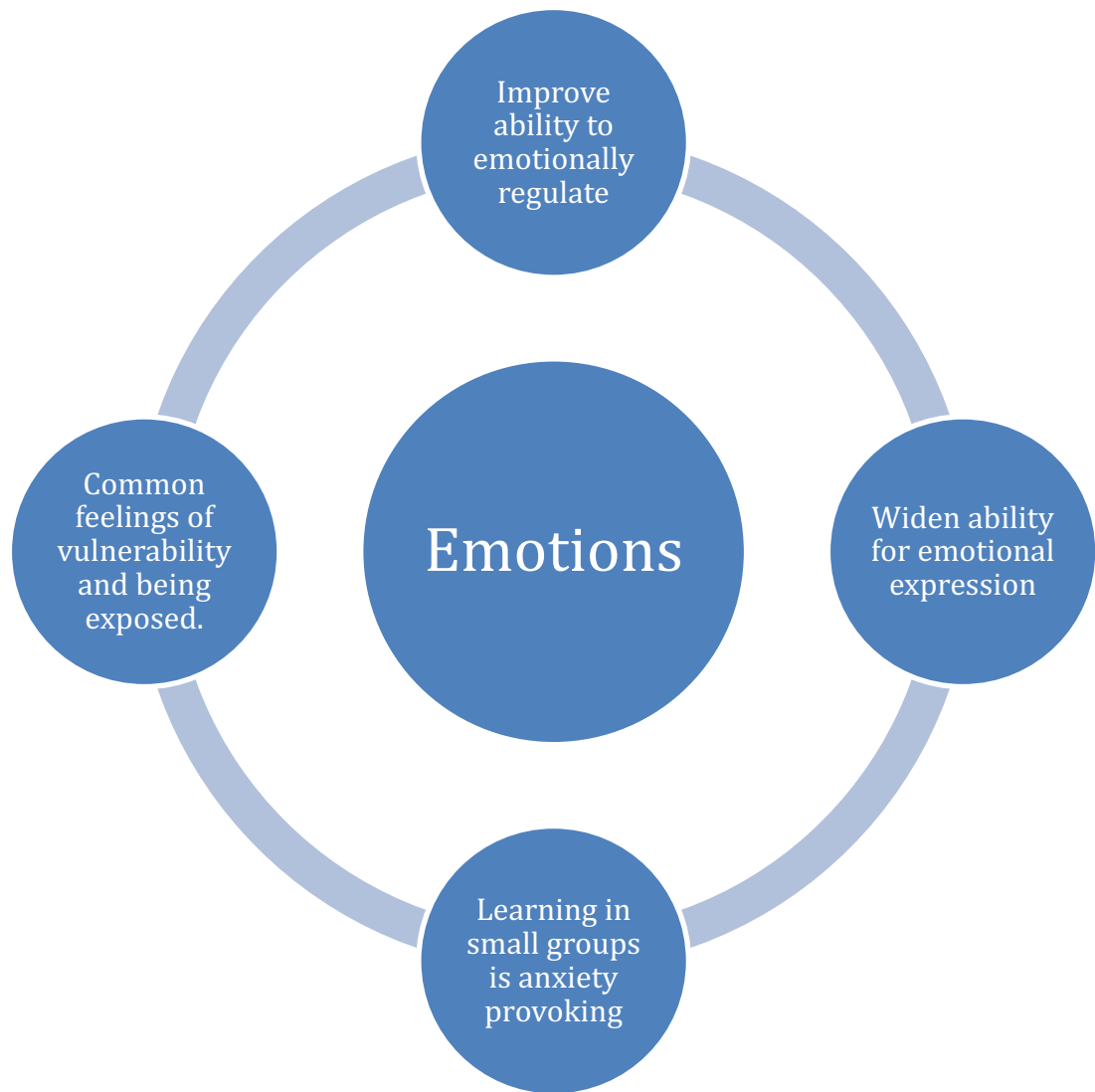


Figure 88: Summary of theme of emotions

The SO theme of emotions includes the following sub-themes shown in table 53. These will be explored in sections 9.3.2 to 9.3.5.

Table 53: SO theme of emotions

9.3.2	Learning improvisation can facilitate emotional regulation
9.3.3.	Practising improvisation can help broaden access to emotional expression
9.3.4	Learning to improvise in groups can be anxiety-provoking
9.3.5	Endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of sadness and loss

9.3.1 Introduction to emotions and music

The subject of emotions and music is extensive and beyond the scope of this thesis. I would like to briefly introduce the concept of emotions and how these might relate to music. Sloboda and Juslin (2010) understand emotions as:

... a scientific construct that points to a set of phenomena of feelings, behaviours and bodily

reactions that occur together in everyday life
(Sloboda and Juslin, 2010, p.75).

Emotions are highlighted as short-term, intensive states influenced by external and internal factors. Juslin (2009) considers emotions to contain six features, from 'cognitive appraisal' to 'expression and self-regulation' (p.131). This is different from 'moods', which are understood to be more like 'affective states', longer lasting and generalised (Sloboda and Juslin, 2010, p.75). Moods are also differentiated from 'feelings', which are considered 'mere sensations' with no strong attachment to thought (Juslin and Sloboda, 2001). It is also underlined that emotions can take place at three levels: 'phenomenological' – lived experience and feelings; 'functional' – incoming and outgoing information such as sensory processing; and 'hardware' – biological, hormonal, neurological (Juslin and Sloboda 2010, p.75). Added to this are complex sociocultural factors, with experience and

understanding of emotions differing across cultures. For example, in individualistic or collectivist societies (see Glossary), the expression and experience of emotions may be comprehended differently, with varying cultural norms or acceptable displays of emotions (Mesquita and Walker, 2003).

In music listening, live and recorded, studies have found that music helps to express how an individual feels and/or evokes new emotions, involving physiological arousal in heartbeat, blood pressure and changes to reported feelings (Zenter *et al.*, 2008; Juslin and Sloboda, 2010). Music listening has also been linked to emotional regulation, cathartic release and well-being (Vamuakari, 2017; Stewart *et al.*, 2019). The performance of music has been shown to involve high levels of autonomic nerve response connected to emotions (breathing, heart rate, digestion etc.). Nakahara *et al.* (2011), in a study of sixteen classical pianists, found that when listening to the same piece,

they displayed much higher rates of emotional musical perception when performing than when listening. This implies that performing music may be much more intensive in terms of emotional regulation than listening; however, other variables should be taken into account, such as differences in perception, social history and neurology, and the context and ecology of the music making.

It can be seen that emotions and music are closely linked. Emotions can be understood as short-term intensive states, provoked internally or externally, with psychological and biological reactions. Music can be an initiator or amplify existing emotions in an individual. It is suggested that music is linked to strong intense positive and negative emotions and potential well-being. The performing of music, including improvising, may possibly provide stronger emotional experiences than listening to music alone.

9.3.2 Learning to improvise can facilitate emotional regulation

Learning to improvise can facilitate emotional regulation. Dunnock vividly describes using guitar improvisation to create feelings of cathartic release after difficult conversations with his father, *getting rid of shit* and *heavy bad feelings*. Similarly, Linnet employs the use of the ocean drum as a means of controlling her anxiety in experiential groups. She states that playing improvisation is *always a great release* which amplifies and externalises her strong feelings and emotions. This is clearly illustrated in the research music; her overblowing of the tin whistle appears to have the quality of *release*, which she describes as *pent-up energy* and *acceptable screaming*. In psychological studies it is noted that music can evoke the perception of an emotion or intensify existing emotions (Gabrielsson, 2002; Zenter *et al.*, 2008; Kawakami *et al.*, 2014). It could be that the nature of the tin whistle, with its unique timbre, the

embodied use of breath and motor skills, and resultant overblowing of harmonics, simultaneously creates perceived and felt emotion in Linnet, generating the physical feelings and emotions of musical *screaming*.

I would strongly suggest that this specific moment of musical *screaming* is centered on learning how to release or regulate emotions. Emotional regulation is considered to be a key component in self-regulation, ‘involving the control of cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological experiences’, and to be vital for overall health and physical and social well-being (Sena Moore, 2013, p.199). In a systematic review of emotional regulation and music therapy, studies examining listening to and playing music and/or singing strongly suggest the use of music for emotional regulation, with a decrease in activity in the brain’s amygdala (associated with fear and anxiety) and an increase in the use of cognition and reasoning in the frontal cortex (Sena Moore, 2013). In addition, a small

number of studies in improvisation were found to have similar results, with increased emotional regulation and activity in brain regions such as the dorsal premotor cortex, associated with creativity (Bengtsson *et al.*, 2007; Limb and Braun, 2008).

Emotional regulation is known to be an essential aspect of the self, key to childhood and adulthood development (Leibermann *et al.*, 2007; McRae *et al.*, 2012). Although it is difficult to speculate exactly what processes are involved, it is interesting to link together the development of self-identity (SO) through learning improvisation with self-regulation. As discussed in the literature review Section 2.3 the first relationship can be understood as containing innate communication. Pavlicevic (1997) and Trondalen (2016) demonstrate that the core of improvisation is intersubjective, and personal growth is found in the ebb and flows of the improvised interactions. Crucially, in the ‘theory of dynamic form’, Pavlicevic describes

how 'vitality affects' afford development, as each person 'offers' something to the other alongside opportunity for emotional cathartic expression and release (Pavlicevic, 1997, p.135). This suggests that the learning of improvisation could possibly be a useful medium for the practice and development of emotional regulation, since it connects to growth of self-identity, and could potentially expand the experience of the emotional self, found in biological, cognitive and feelings states.

9.3.3 Practising improvising can help broaden and access emotional expression

In this theme Starling notes that the deliberate practice of emotional states helps to ease physical tension, and gives her a broader access to a range of emotional expression and feelings. Emotions are strongly connected to the body, and can often manifest as physical states and sensations (Van Der

Kolk, 2014). Emotional expression can be understood as the musician's special treatment of the elements and structures of music, to either 'portray' preselected or express genuine emotion. This could include, for example, changes to tempo, dynamics, adding in ornaments, alterations to tonality or use of harmony (Juslin, 2009, p.378). In music therapy, Bruscia (1987) considers self-expression to be an inherent aspect of improvisation, creating the conditions for the 'externalizing of impulses' (p.560). Pellitteri (2009) views improvisation to be

... an act of emotional expression that literally releases emotional tensions from within the body (Pellitteri, 2009, p.158).

This works through the creation of differing emotional experiences that the client is then able to notice and 'reflect upon' (Pellitteri, 2009, p.159). Similarly Starling observes that the practice of differing emotional

states reduces the physical and emotional tension she experiences at the piano. Although Starling is not in a therapy context, the improvising affords her different ways of *being* emotional. This could be understood as accessing new ‘dynamic forms of vitality’ (Stern, 2010; Trondalen, 2016, p.47) – discovering, through musical improvising, physical and sensorial forms of emotions, i.e., the bubbling sensation of joy found in up-tempo music, or swaying minor tonalities of sadness.

Furthermore, as a performer of both notated and improvised music, she is able to then apply and reproduce these feelings of ‘vitality affects’ and the resulting emotions to fit with the musical tasks at hand. The practice of improvisation increases her repertoire of emotional expression.

It is strongly suggested that the deliberate practice of differing emotional states can help broaden personal experience of emotions, and increase a musician’s

ability to reproduce and express emotion states in music.

9.3.4 Learning to improvise in groups can be anxiety-provoking

Accounts given in this study demonstrate that learning to improvise in small groups can be highly anxiety provoking. Participants describe being overwhelmed with feelings of *exposure* and *vulnerability*, with the desire to *hide* or *run out of the room* (Bullfinch, Chaffinch and Linnet). There are few studies which give voice to student experiences, with the exception of Webster (1988) who describes improvisation classes as ‘nerve wrecking and exposing’ (p.18). Feelings of exposure and vulnerability may be provoked by the intensely relational nature of improvisation and the intimacy of the small group. Linnet describes how the music stirred difficult feelings of grief before she was fully prepared to experience them or even reveal them to others. It is important to note that Linnet and

Bullfinch experience anxiety in the specialised environment of experiential groups. Prefontaine (2006) links the experience of vulnerability to emotional learning that takes place in experiential groups. She highlights how the learning involves reflective skills, changed relationships and an awareness of unconscious and conscious processing, which can be uncomfortable. Pedersen (2002), in writing about integrated experiential learning, states:

Exploring your life's experiences and the way you function ... can be experienced as threatening and anxiety provoking (Pedersen, 2002, p.173).

This implies that anxiety, exposure and vulnerability are inherent aspects of experiential music therapy training groups.

In performance, Chaffinch describes being troubled by the fear of right and wrong in music, and of not being good enough to be part of a jazz group.

Nachmanovitch (1990) and Werner (1996) refer to the fear musicians can sometimes experience when playing improvised music. Nachmanovitch describes this as ‘bugaboos’ or ‘blockages’ (p.135), dreads which have been internalised through past judgement by peers and teachers. Furthermore, as Smilde (2009) demonstrates, these can arise through past educational or bad performance experiences, where a musician becomes afraid of making mistakes and appearing foolish and inept in front of peers, audience and tutors. This is obviously the experience of Chaffinch, as she almost *cries over jazz* and feels unable to attain the technical and expressive standard of jazz improvisation demonstrated by her peers.

9.3.5 Endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of sadness and loss

Continuing from the previous theme of ‘loss of musical relationships’ (Section 9.2.4), the final focus in the SO theme of emotions is ‘endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of loss’. Oriole (and to some extent Bullfinch) describes how disappearance of the music in the experiential groups produces intense sadness.

Bunt and Hoskyns (2002) consider that improvised music can be thought of as taking place in ‘threshold’ or ‘liminal’ spaces (p.3) where beginnings and endings meet, existing between two places or states of being. Illustrations of thresholds include the imagined line between the sea and sky, or the moment just before beginning or ending an improvisation. Begbie (2000) confirms this, that music is ultimately a temporal art which contains ‘finitude’ (p.92), forever highlighting the fragility and temporal nature of our existence; he observes that music always begins and ends. This

implies that improvised music can amplify 'finitude', the very real temporary nature of the music, which as commented on by Oriole:

just begins ... and is gone. (Oriole)

Improvised music can act as a kind of metaphor, a reminder of the inevitability of death and ending, or what Begbie terms 'irretrievable loss' (2000, p.93). In psychotherapy endings are closely considered; it is recognised that these can often elicit difficult emotions in clients (Yalom, 2005). Music therapists are acquainted with the difficult emotions which can be evoked around partings, separations or loss, played out within the arena of improvised music. Kim (2011), for example, when working with children with autistic spectrum conditions, observes that they can experience intense anxiety and distress when therapy comes to an end or breaks, while Hudgins (2013) comments clients attending mental health groups in the community can

experience anxiety, fear and rejection when treatment comes to an end. In contrast, Lee (2016) eloquently describes case work with an adult with **AIDS**, and how improvised music provides a comforting and expressive accompaniment on the journey into a liminal space and ultimately death. Section 9 will now explore the super-ordinate theme of learning.

9.4 Learning

The combined findings of the IPA and music analysis revealed the **SO** theme of learning. This encompassed the following sub-themes found in table 54.

Table 54: Sub themes of learning

9.4.1a	Informal and formal learning
9.4.1b	Genres, styles and idioms
9.4.1c	Notation (as a visual prompt) shapes, patterns and stories
9.4.1d	Theory, instrumental and technical exercises
9.4.1e	Memorisation
9.4.1f	Musical form and time
9.4.1g	Music and the structuring of time
9.4.1h	Time and improvised music
9.4.2	Embodiment

9.4.3	Learning improvisation in music therapy can be transformational and cause a loosening of communication
9.4.5	Training and working as a music therapist can cause a loss of creativity
9.4.6	Childhood play with sounds
9.4.7	Fostering improvisation skills as an adult
9.4.7a	Lack of technical proficiency can be a barrier / practicing technical exercises
9.4.7b	Nurturing creative ideas
9.4.7c	Learning a new instrument
9.4.7d	Learning on the job
9.4.7e	Pushing out of comfort zone

In this study I use the word ‘mode’ to describe the differing ways the participants approach learning to improvise, these are discussed in sections 9.4.1a to 9.4.1h. A particularly important finding within learning is that of embodiment (9.4.2), demonstrating that

learning to improvised is not just cognitive, but encompasses embodied processes where learning can take place through activities such as interaction with dancers or through consistent repetitive practice of technical exercises. Sections 9.4.3 to 9.4.5 briefly look at learning within music therapy training, and sections 9.4.6 – 9.4.7e are taken from the conversation with Chaffinch, who discussed how improvisation skills can be developed and nurtured as an adult. The theme of learning demonstrates the variety and diversity of approaches that can be taken when developing improvisation skills.

9.4.1a Informal and formal learning

The first mode is informal and formal learning, shown in Figure 89. Informal learning is understood as any self-directed learning, and formal learning as teacher, peer or tutor directed, with both taking place in any setting (Folkestad, 2006). It was found that a diversity of learning experiences, both formal and informal, were

necessary to development of improvisation skills.

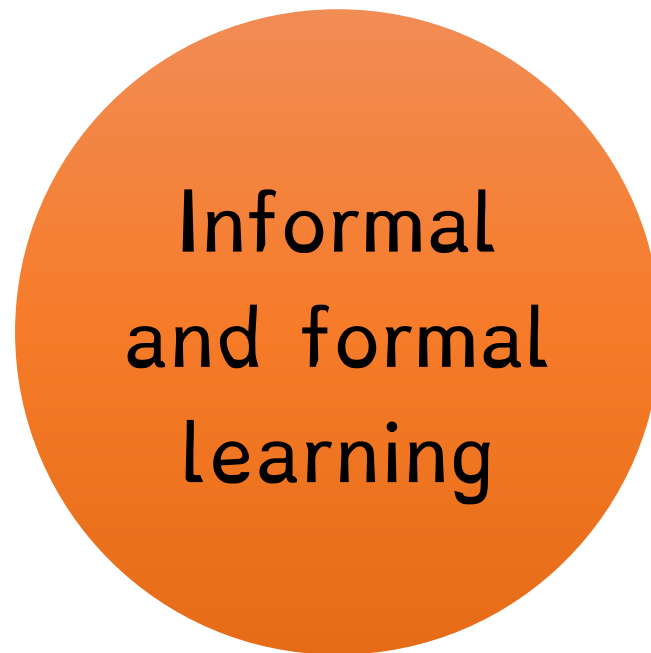


Figure 89: First learning mode – informal and formal learning.

Participants offer a wide variety of informal learning experiences from jam sessions to attending performances, going to workshops or being part of improvisation orchestras. All the participants describe some occasions of informal learning, but two participants, Goldfinch and Curlew, greatly emphasise its importance to their development. Folkestad (2006)

suggests that informal learning may be more to do with the intention of the student rather than the setting, proposing that this is where a student may be focused on ‘making music’, rather than ‘learning ... music’ (Folkestad, 2006, p.11). The educators Jorgensen (1997), Finnegan (2007) and Green (2002, 2008) are in agreement: in informal learning the intention is always directed towards the act of music making rather than learning. Jorgensen further adds that informal learning is often socially contextualised, taking place amongst peers or situated in a work-based context. For example, for a jazz musician this may be a jam session. It is possible that for Goldfinch and Curlew informal learning is prominent because it involves purposeful acts of intention with peers, directed towards music making in performance. Conversely, other participants give vivid descriptions of formal learning, such as with mentors or attending improvisation classes at university. Folkestad suggests that in formal learning the learning intention is carried by both the student

and teacher, as they are focused on ‘learning how to make music’ (2006, p.11). Berliner (1994) and Rose (2012, 2017) suggest the learning of jazz and improvisation does not occur through one single environment, intentional approach or social setting, but is built up through a series of experiences, consisting of apprenticeships, bands, classroom, performances, listening, mentors and individual practice. Thus, the depth of learning experiences described by all of the participants suggests that there is no one specific way to learn to improvise, and both formal and informal learning is valid, giving an impression of a multi-angled learning of improvisation.

9.4.1b Genres, styles and idioms

The second learning mode is genres, styles and idioms, summarised in Figure 90.

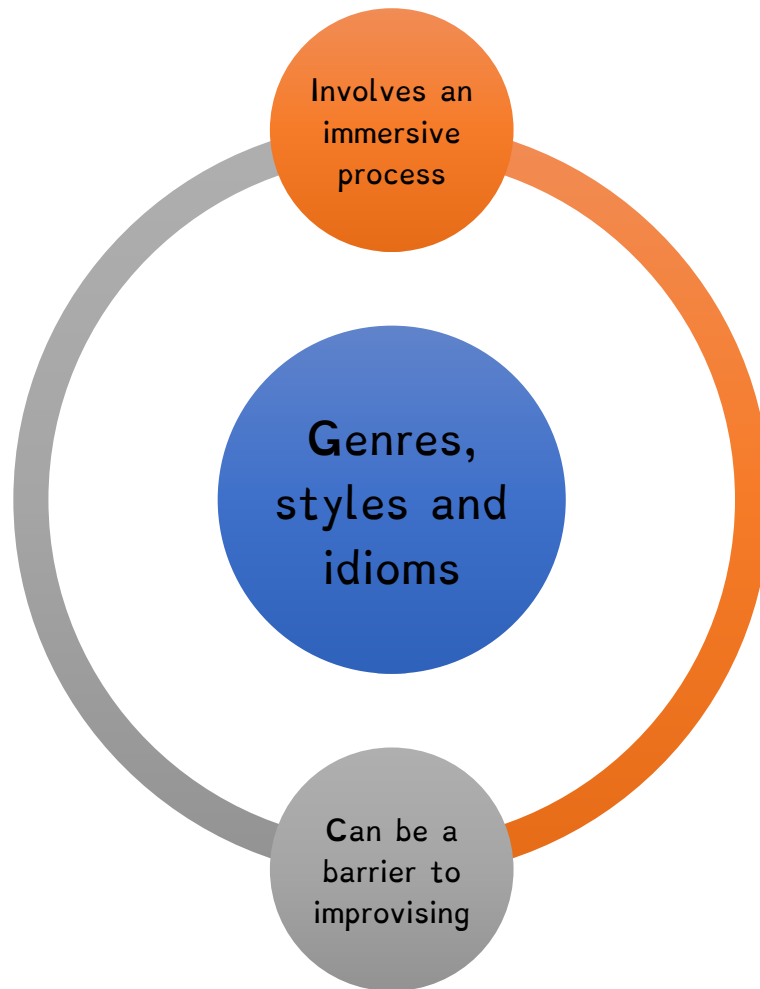


Figure 90: Second learning mode – genres, styles and idioms.

Learning to improvise in genres, styles and idioms was found to require an immersive concentrated process, with a commitment to learning and executing complex sets of musical rules. Without this process, genres, styles and idioms were experienced as a difficult barrier to improvising.

Three participants (**Starling**, **Goldfinch** and **Chaffinch**) recall learning to improvise through genres, styles and idioms (see **Glossary**). **Starling** recalls learning the piano music of Prokofiev and Liszt, **Goldfinch** has expertise in bebop and **Chaffinch** learns through jazz standards.

How to reproduce the technical aspects of genres, styles and idioms, such as structures, tonalities or rhythmic patterns, has been much explored in performance and music therapy textbooks (**Norton**, 2005; **Lee and Houde**, 2011; **Lee et al.**, 2015; **Aebersold**, 2015). As discussed in **Section 2.5.5**, this can involve an oversimplified reduction of a musical genre without reference to the cultural or social situatedness (**Agawu**, 2003). However, the findings in this study agree that something deeper than mere technical reproduction is required. **Starling** describes immersion in the pianistic styles of Prokofiev and Liszt, and

Goldfinch trains and performs in bebop, developing a depth of knowledge and high ability. Similarly, Berkowitz (2010) reports on the deep learning of the classical pianist Levin, who cognitively absorbs the style of J.S. Bach, including theoretical concepts, structures and harmonic language, but also develops an implicit sense of the composer's music. As Berkowitz points out, Levin, through long repetition and hours of focused practice, goes through a process where the music of Bach becomes integrated into his own musicality. This seems to suggest a fundamental principle in learning improvisation, that in order to really improvise within a specific genre, style or idiom, the musicians must immerse themselves. Perhaps, as Shevock (2018) suggests, this requires a fervour with accompanying fierce and powerful feelings. This is demonstrated through many aural traditions, where musicians are required to undertake an often lifelong immersive practice, learning from mentors (Lord, 1960; Berliner, 1994; Nettl, 2009).

The findings in this mode also suggest that learning through genres, styles or idioms can act as a barrier to improvising. This is clearly demonstrated in the case of Chaffinch, who attends a course at university, but because she hasn't the necessary background in jazz, is unable to completely access the course. There is insufficient integration of genre into her musicianship, and so she experiences jazz as a stumbling block to improvising.

The findings suggest that learning to improvise in genres, styles and idioms can require an intense immersion process, which can be lifelong, requiring passion and drive to continually engage and expand within the specialised area of music. However, genre, styles and idioms can also be experienced as a difficult obstacle to improvising, especially if the musician has not attained a good knowledge, standard and flexibility within that chosen genre.

9.4.1c Notation (as a visual prompt) – shapes, patterns and stories

The third learning mode is shown in Figure 91:

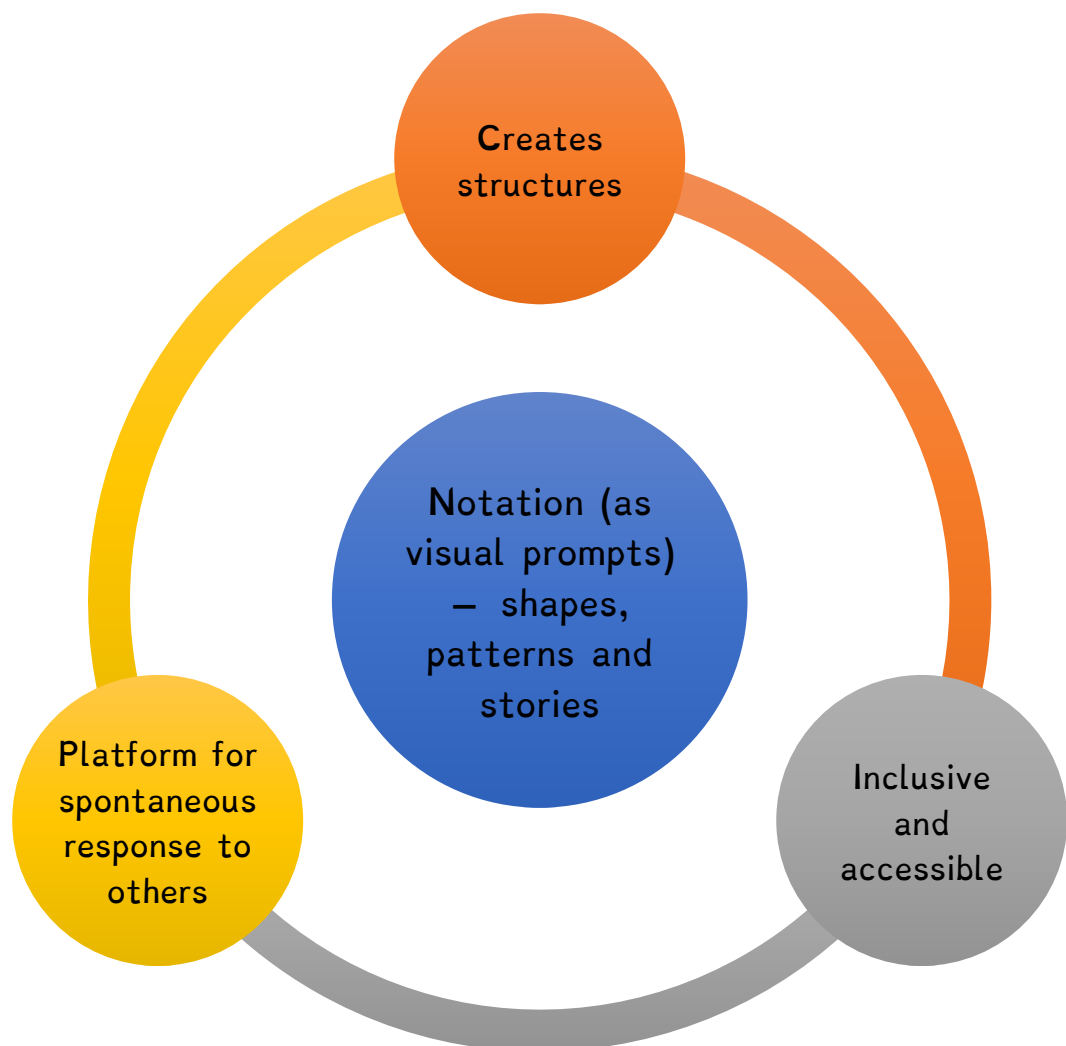


Figure 91: Third learning mode – notation (as visual prompts) – shapes, patterns and stories.

In the third learning mode, extra-musical material such as notation (experienced as visual patterns), other visual shapes, patterns and stories were used to create inclusive and accessible structures for small and large group improvisation. The use of these kinds of extra-musical materials enabled inclusivity (anybody can take part at whatever skill level) and facilitated learning which focused on spontaneous response and relating to others in music.

In this mode, notation (as a visual prompt), shapes, patterns and stories are used as stimuli for improvisation. Starling describes employing notation as a visual guide. This is a type of pareidolia (seeing shapes in everyday objects and things), where she uses the patterns of the notation made by the notes on the stave to initiate her own music. She also, in the context of an improvisation orchestra (see **Glossary**), comments on the use of extra-musical materials such

as pictures and stories to create platforms for large group improvising.

Historically there has always been a parallel between visual arts and music, for example in the eighteenth-century richly decorative late Baroque Rococo style with composers and artists such as Couperin (François) and Fragonard incorporating flamboyant natural shapes, colours, ornamental instrumental lines and wide varieties of dynamics (Rosenberg, 1988; Milam, 2011; Tunley, 2016; V&A, 2020). The use of extra materials in improvised music can be traced to the twentieth-century pioneering artists such as Kandinsky, Klee and Delaunay (Guy *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, in music, composers used objects and other materials to create new sounds, for example, Cage in his early works for improvised prepared piano with screws, nuts and bolts (Feisst, 2009). In 'abstract expressionism' with artists such as Pollock and Gorky, and music of the free improvisation movement (see Glossary) with musicians such as Bryars, Stevens and Bailey, art and music

mutually influenced each other, emphasising spontaneous creation, self-expression and finding new creative methods (Bailey, 1992; Sansom, 2001). The consequence was to loosen forms and emphasise a merging of the components of the arts, paving the way for musicians and artists to experiment with and incorporate extra materials into their work. This can also be seen in the liberal education movement of the 1970s (Dennis, 1970, 1975; Schafer, 1967; Stevens, 2007). For example, in 'Project II – patterns in nature', Paynter and Aston suggest children find an interesting natural object such as a stone or shell, take it back to the classroom and use it to inspire a spontaneous improvisation with instruments (Paynter and Aston, 1970).

Set within this historical background of changes to the arts in the twentieth century, and inclusive arts education, learning to improvise through pictures and stories can be thought about as a highly accessible and immediately inclusive mode of learning. As Starling

comments, this method enables individuals with little previous musical knowledge or education to participate quickly and easily in active music making. Rather than an emphasis on right or wrong notes, tonality or technical aspects, the learning focuses on the ability to *respond in the moment to others* (Starling), to make choices and develop a heightened awareness of people in music (Wilson and MacDonald, 2015).

Furthermore, when working with autistic persons, the use of pictorial structures can be very effective in dispelling anxiety and bringing groups together in music (White, 2015; TEACCH, 2018). The extra-musical material acts as a kind of structural container, holding the anxieties of the musicians, defending against any potential difficulties that could occur without any structural prompts at all (Winnicott, 1971). The role of the pictures and stories is to create relational connection and focus, eliciting musical responses which are made both to the pictures but also to the other musicians in the room.

In this mode the use of extra-musical materials, such as pictures, patterns, shapes, stories and notation (as image), has been suggested as an inclusive and easy means for individuals and groups to access improvisation. In addition, extra materials were understood to create structure, bringing groups together and managing anxiety, with learning focused on how to relate in the music

9.4.1d Theory, instrumental and technical exercises

The fourth learning mode is theory, instrumental exercises and technical exercises, shown in Figure 92.

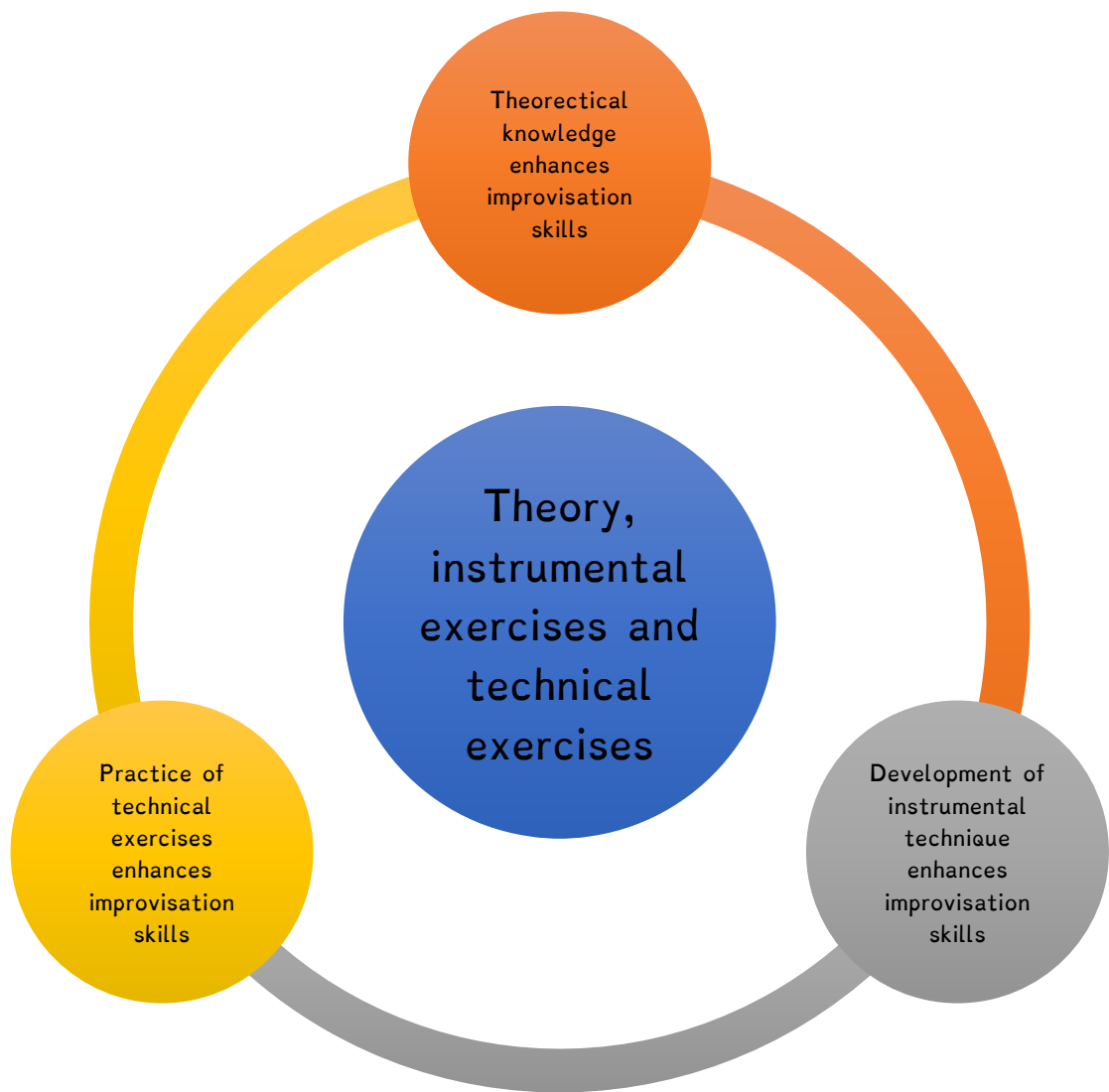


Figure 92: Fourth learning mode – theory, instrumental exercises and technical exercises.

The fourth learning mode shows that theoretical knowledge can aid improvisational fluency and flexibility. It also demonstrates that practising of instrumental and technical exercises can involve a (sometimes difficult) ‘reshaping’ (term developed for

this thesis) or ‘habituation’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.127, all see section 9.4.2, 10.2) process with the forming of new physical and cognitive schemas.

In contrast to the use of pictures and stories is a focus on theory, instrumental exercises and technical exercises used as a means of developing improvisation skills. Examples include practising improvisation through the use of intervals, the Greek modes (See glossary), chord sequences, scales, pitches, rhythms, melodic invention or key modulations. Oriole recounts learning jazz theory through attendance at a summer school and regular practice and performance. This gives him a fluency in *swing* – jazz, which becomes intuitive and physically embedded – *playing without looking at his hands*. Starling describes lessons with a tutor, learning through atonal and intervallic exercises designed to avoid existing tonal, melodic and harmonic conventions (reminiscent of Nieman’s teaching with the avoidance of tonal rules, Darnley-Smith, 2013). She

recalls this as *painful*, relating to the difficulties encountered in breaking out of existing motor skills and cognitive schemas, and long hours of repetitive practice. This strongly links to the ‘reshaping’ process (see Section 9.1.3a) where musicians develop new mental representations of music and embodied knowledge through the practice of improvisation. It can be a difficult process, as existing schemas can be hard to break away from, and could potentially require concentrated work and dedication on behalf of the musician.

Research shows that improvising musicians often draw on previously adopted technical materials (Pressing, 1988; Norgaard, 2011). But, as Johansen (2018) highlights, little is known about how these skills are developed. One of the closest accounts in literature, which links with Starling’s experience, is Sudnow’s (1978; 2001) ethnographic study of learning jazz piano. He describes the daily systematic practice of scales and chords, and the subsequent struggle to physically

form his hands around the notes. Over a period of six years with hard practice, the melodic patterns and chords gradually become embedded into his motor skill schemas. Sudnow's account suggests that the learning takes place not initially in the mind, but in his hands, becoming 'jazz hands' (Dreyfus, 2001, p.x). The process that Starling describes, and Johansen's question, are partway addressed, in that the ability to improvise is not 'developed' but 'habituated'. I will explore this idea further in Chapter 10, proposing a phenomenology of learning to improvise.

In summary, the findings connected with the learning of improvisation through theory, instrumental exercises and technical exercises, suggest that musicians must sometimes undertake a difficult 'reshaping' process in order to acquire new motor skills and cognitive schemas. This demands a focused period of practice and dedication, which can potentially be difficult and painful. However, the result is that new theoretical,

instrumental and technical constructs can be absorbed and habituated into the mind and body.

9.4.1e Memorisation

The fifth learning mode is memorisation, shown in Figure 93.

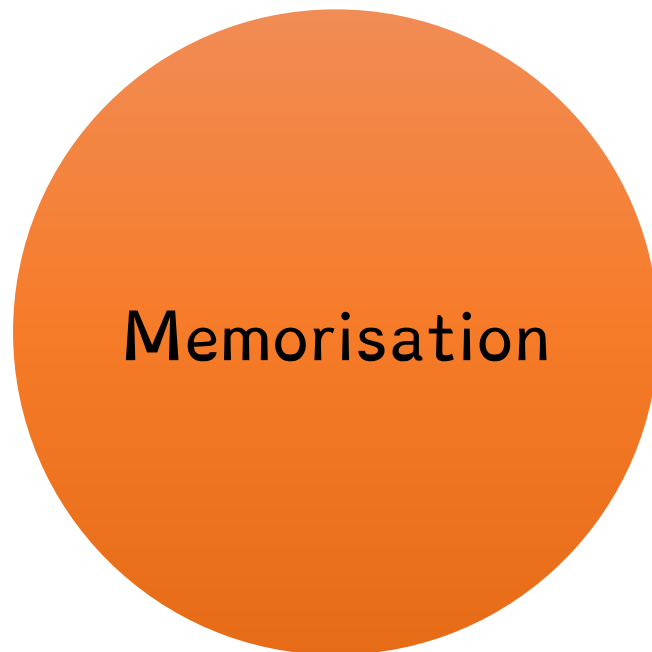


Figure 93: Fifth learning mode – memorisation.

In this mode, memorisation is considered a key skill in

improvisation, enhancing aural and visual imitation and the building of an improvisational 'referent' repertoire, and the ability to enact musical intention (Pressing, 1988, p.52).

The findings demonstrate that memorisation, also known as playing by ear, can enhance improvisation skills; this is the ability to commit to memory any musical materials either composed or improvised.

Starling and Chaffinch describe the benefits of memorising, aurally or through reading notation, as it creates a strong aural ability, in which they are able to form good mental representations and enact out sounds.

In jazz education memorisation occurs either through listening to live performance or recordings, and is a key ability for building repertoire and musical imagery (Berliner, 1994; Watson, 2010). In jazz, pre-existing music, both aural and notated, has been commonly

used for improvisation, the most obvious example being the playing of jazz standards, memorised songs with familiar melodic and harmonic structures (Gioia, 2012). In classical performance, memorisation usually takes place through the learning of notated music; musicians have been shown to recall music through utilisation of motor and auditory memory, using strategies such as retrieval of melodic and harmonic structures, and remembering expression marks and other retrieval cues such as pauses in the music or key changes (Chaffin, 2007). As described by Starling, once notated material is memorised it can then be used for improvisational purposes. Similarly, the classical musicians Levin and Bilson describe a process of

... memorising fixed repertoire as models from which improvisational principles can be abstracted (Berkowitz, 2010, p.87).

Berkowitz highlights that improvisation upon pre-existing memorised musical material has been common within much of Western art music, giving examples such as the free fantasies of C.P.E. Bach, or the use of Czerny's treatises as improvisational templates at the keyboard (Berkowitz, 2010).

Memorisation can be understood in the context of a formulaic ontology of improvisation, in which musicians commit to memory a repertoire of pre-existing ideas (Pressing, 1988, p.52; see Section 2.4.1). This involves developing 'musical intention', consisting of an internal embodied 'musical world' with a 'repertoire of gestural and motor activity', as well as cognitive ideas (Nijs, Coussement, *et al.*, 2012, p.240; Nijs, 2017).

It is suggested that memorisation is a key skill in improvisation, enhancing aural and visual imitation and enabling the building of an improvisational repertoire. Memorisation can take place either aurally or through

the learning of notated music, and musicians draw on complex cues, such as pauses, modulations or dynamics. Memorisation involves complex layers of different kinds of knowledge held in the body and mind, and can enhance and develop the ability to act out musical intention.

9.4.1f Musical form and time

The final learning mode is musical form and time, shown in Figure 94.

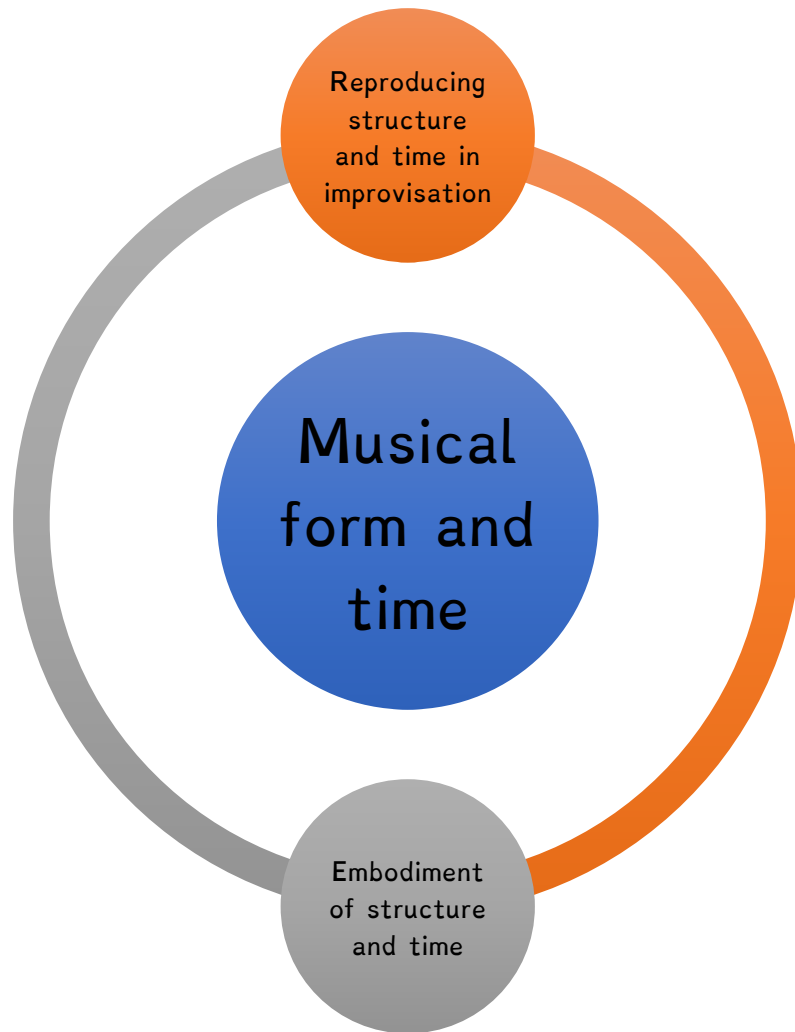


Figure 94: Sixth learning mode – musical form and time.

The sixth learning mode shows that through intense immersion in the structures of a genre, musicians can freely improvise temporally balanced musical form. This suggests that time and structure in music can become intuitive and embodied, part of the musician's physical and cognitive self.

The findings in this sub-theme imply that through learning a specific genre or style of music, for example Goldfinch's training in bebop, musicians can sometimes reproduce improvised music balanced in form and time. This strongly connects with the concept of structure as having an organisational function in music, where the musician is able to internalise structure on a psychological, emotional or physiological level (Sacks, 1973; Ansdell, 1995). The music analysis reveals that the improvisation with Goldfinch has a striking natural temporal shape: a beginning, middle and end, regular changes and/or pauses at a thirty second mark, and an equal twelve minutes in full (also see Section 7.4.8d). In order to expand on this further, I will now briefly explore some of the relationships between music and time.

9.4.1g Music and the structuring of time

Music is commonly associated with structuring experiences of time. Zuckerkandl (1959) describes how ‘musical events are the work of time’ (1956, p.247), in which time exists in a special musical experience of space. Put simply, working in a tonal world, he understands music to act upon time, and create primary structures through rhythm, metre and pulse. Time can be experienced as structured through musical events, but also perceived through music in layers, as simultaneous past, present and future, i.e., a melody can be heard in the moment, or as a whole. Alternatively, psychologists Trevarthen and Malloch (2000) understand music to be held within relational interaction and intersubjectivity. They strongly underline how temporal events created in the musicality of the infant’s first relationship shape experience of time. As referred to in Section 5.1.4, the theologian Begbie (2000) suggests that music gives us an experience of temporal structure and of our ‘own

time-embeddedness' (p.31). Furthermore, the psychologist Stern (2004) and free improviser Oliveros (2004, 2005) explains the experience of time in music as emphasising simultaneously the present moment and the whole (rather like Zuckerkandl). Although this is a vast subject, this brief overview strongly suggests that there is a special relationship between music and experiences of structure in time.

9.4.1h Time and improvised music

Improvisation is often reduced to only taking place in real time, in the moment-to-moment experience of linear events passing. However, Goldfinch highlights that when improvising he sensed both the moment-to-moment passing of time and the whole of the music. Després, Bernard *et al.* (2017) demonstrate that jazz musicians are able to structure improvisation using strategies such as filling in time whilst utilising old ideas and 'keeping a steady rhythm' to give temporal

‘coherence’ (p.153). However, these approaches seem to be only relevant to music with a predictable tonality or consistent pulse. In contrast, the improvisation with **Goldfinch** is both atonal and tonal, with and without regular metre, pulse, rhythm or pitch, yet still there is a striking temporal balance. **Goldfinch** seems to have an implicit sense of time and structure, perhaps gained through his training in jazz and bebop. As previously mentioned, Berkowitz (2010) demonstrates that in order to learn genre, style and idiom, musicians must go through an intensive ‘assimilation process’ in which musical knowledge becomes implicit and explicit (Berkowitz, 2010, p.xxiv, see also Section 9.4.1b). It therefore seems possible that **Goldfinch** has developed an intuitively embedded sense of time both perceived in the moment and as a whole. In relation to this, Rose (2017) comments:

... improvisation becomes understood through the body’s experience (Rose, 2017, p.122).

I would like to suggest that there is an ‘embodied cognition’ taking place (Ionescu and Vasc, 2014, p.55), in which Goldfinch has internalised the maps of the temporal structures of bebop, and is able to recreate them through spontaneous music. Ionescu and Vasc (2014) suggest that cognition, rather than being an abstract gaining of knowledge in the mind, is

grounded in sensory–motor processes ... and the body’s morphology and internal states (Ionescu and Vasc, 2014, p.55).

Linked to this, Merleau–Ponty (2012a) understands time as internal to the body. He offers:

Insofar as I have a body ... space and time are not for me a mere summation of juxtaposed points, and no more are they ... an infinity of relations synthesised by my consciousness ... I am not in space and in time, nor do I think space and

time; rather I am of space of time, my body fits to them and embraces them (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.141).

This suggests that for Goldfinch time is held in mind and body, and musical structures are internalised through embodied cognition. This is a different way of understanding the perception of time: rather than an outside force acting upon the body and which we perceive differently according to our state, time is internal and found within the body and mind. This makes it possible to physically and cognitively assimilate musical temporal structures. Thus, Goldfinch knows implicitly when twelve minutes have passed, or when the thirty seconds occurs, without any outside reference to a clock. Put simply, he feels time within his body and mind.

The findings show that through a deep process of immersion in music of a specific genre or style,

musicians can improvise temporally balanced musical form. This suggests that time and structure in music can be internally embedded, becoming part of the musician's physical and cognitive being, engendering an 'embodied cognition'. In this, gesture and movement in music become a way of experiencing and knowing time. The finding creates wider questions around the philosophical nature of time; whether it is to be perceived as an external acting force or originates as occurring internally within the body and mind.

9.4.2 Embodiment

The sub-theme of embodiment is shown in Figure 95.

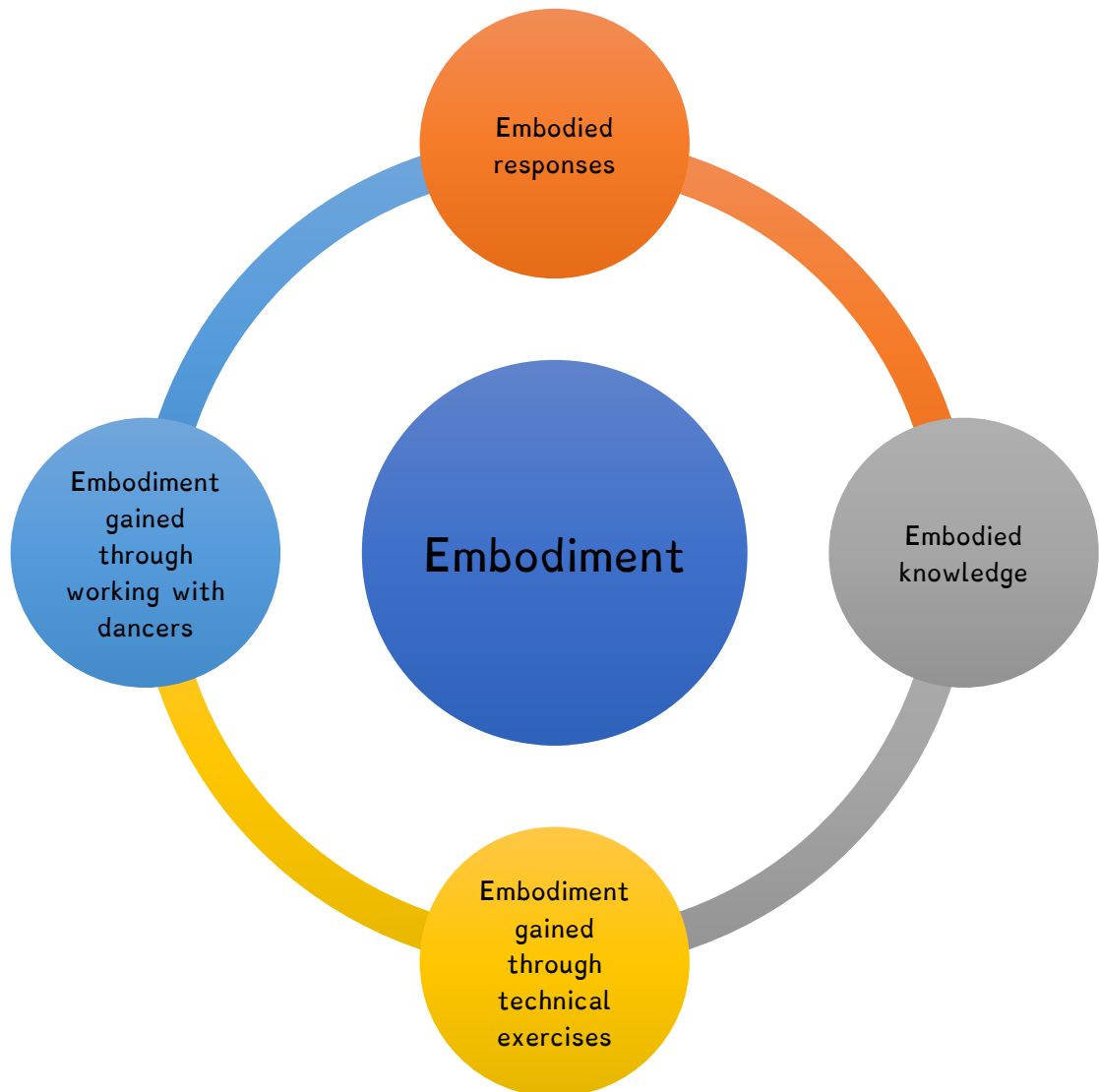


Figure 95: Embodiment sub-theme.

In this sub-theme, embodiment is shown to be an important and integral aspect of learning to improvise,

involving embodied responses expressed through movement and gesture. Embodied knowledge is gained through ‘situational spatiality, intentionality and habituation’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.127, p.172, p.143). Musicians develop awareness of body in space, heightened consciousness of specific body parts related to musical activity, and conscious directed intention towards new bodily schemas and patterns. The findings show two ways this knowledge may be developed: through the deliberate goal-orientated practice of technical exercises and the cross-modal practice of musically responding to and moving with dancers.

Related to musical form and time is the sub-theme of embodiment. **Starling** recalls practising improvised technical passages in order to relieve tension in her hands, and **Chaffinch** describes learning to improvise through moving with dancers. Both participants demonstrate embodiment in the research music, **Starling** through wide gross motor gestures at the

piano, and Chaffinch with slow, deliberate movements on hand percussion.

Embodied knowledge can be understood as physically internalised knowledge held within the body and expressed through movement. Merleau-Ponty (2012a) describes the body as possessing ‘situated spatiality’ (p.127), ‘intentionality’ (p.172) and ‘habituation’ (p.143). In ‘spatiality’ there is a constant awareness of the situatedness of the whole body in space, i.e., the feel of the limbs, torso and head through the proprioceptive (spatial awareness) and vestibular (balance) systems (Berger, 2002). Through often-repeated actions different areas of the body become emphasised. For example, musicians may experience a ‘situated spatiality’ of the hands through practising piano, or mouth, lips and breath in playing the flute. Gilbertson (2013, 2015) explores the role of the therapist’s hands; he makes plaster casts to explore the phenomenological experience of specific hand positions

in clinical improvisation. Gilbertson demonstrates how embodied knowledge can be contained within hands, and in music therapy there is a 'situated spatiality' of the body, which is directed to communicate with the client. In this the therapist has what Merleau-Ponty describes as an 'intention' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.139) towards the client, which can also be understood as musical intention. The embodied and cognitive being of the therapist is directed through movements into a channel of communicative relatedness. This is further evidenced through Murphy McCaleb's (2014) study of gestural communication in chamber music, where he suggests that music is essentially a 'physical, experiential and embodied' communicative art form (p.75). As chamber musicians move and create gestural cues, they reveal their musical intention.

Merleau-Ponty also considers that the body 'acquires habit' (2012a, p.143). As previously discussed in

Sections 9.1.3a and 9.4.1d, 'habituation' is the process of internalising and memorising schemas, incorporating new knowledge into the body. Thus, when Starling learns to improvise new technical patterns on the keyboard she is 'habituating' new embodied knowledge into her hands. Starling observes how practising improvised technical passages gives her a release of tension. It is possible that this, together with the practice of the openly improvised stylistic passages (see Section 9.4.1b), increases her technical fluency and relieves the pressure of right and wrong, affording an increased embodied flexibility to recover from mistakes (Smilde, 2009).

Chaffinch describes *learning how to respond musically* through improvisation with dancers. It is interesting that during the research music there was a dance-like quality, as if she was acutely aware of her body's situated spatiality and its relationship to the instruments (see p.599). Learning to improvise is

connected to movement. For example, in children's improvisations, Burnard (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006) found embodied interplay between movement and instruments, and Larsson and Öhman (2018) discovered that children created meaning in spontaneous music through 'embodied actions' (p.129). Chaffinch describes two embodied responses, dancing or responding musically to dancers. As this occurs, she both experiences and imagines movement in her body. The movement is then translated into sounds. This can be understood as a multisensory dynamic flow taking place in the 'vitality affects', or felt shapes of emotion, and communication between the dancers and musician (Ammanti and Ferrari, 2013; Stern, 2010), almost as if the felt shapes of the emotions of the dancers is transferred to the musicians and converted to sound.

It can be seen that learning to improvise engenders embodied knowledge in which musicians can develop an

acute awareness of their body in space (situated spatiality), heightened consciousness of specific parts of the body in relation to musical activity (habituation), and a conscious directed intention with the learning of new bodily schemas and patterns. The findings in this section give two possible activities through which this knowledge can be gained: the deliberate repeated goal-orientated practising of technical exercises, or through the cross-modal practice of responding to and moving with dancers.

9.4.3 Learning improvisation in music therapy can challenge students' existing ontologies of music

The sub-theme of learning to improvise in music therapy is shown in Figure 96.

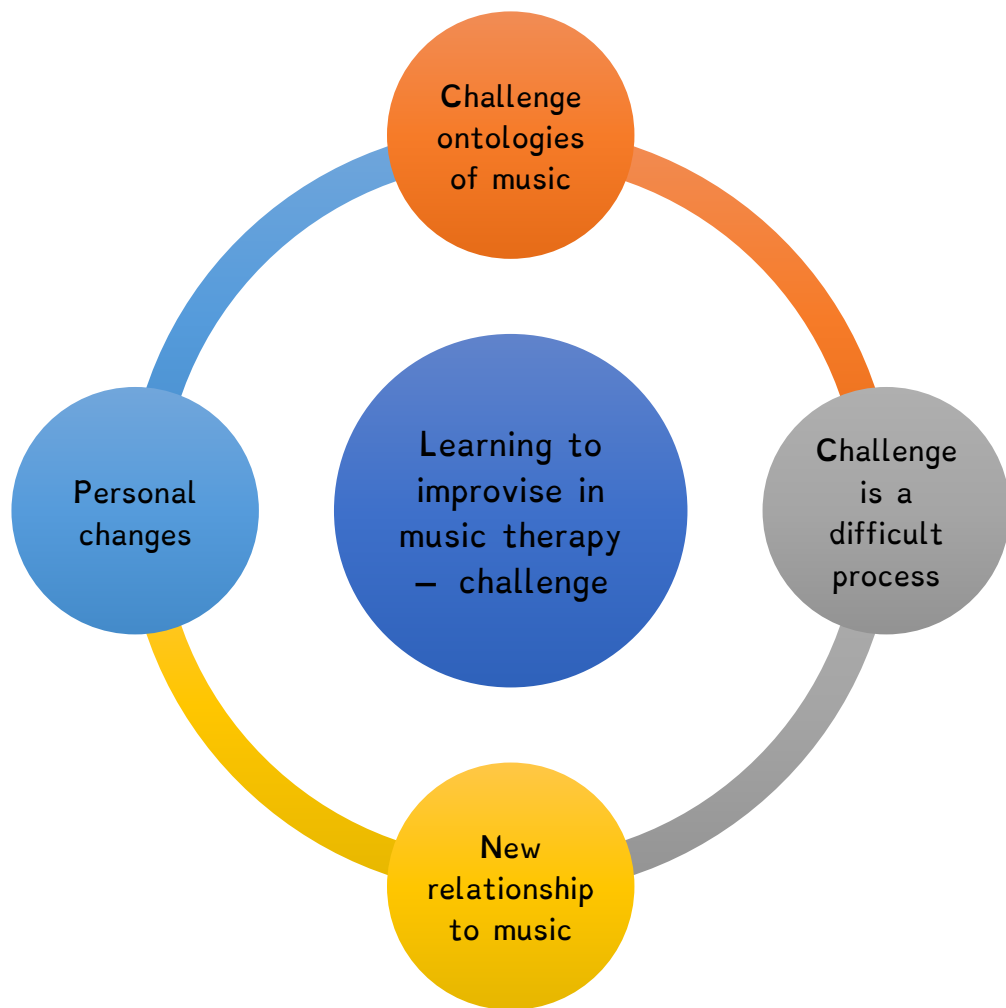


Figure 96: Sub-theme: learning to improvise in music therapy – challenge.

Learning to improvise in music therapy can challenge students' existing ontologies of music. This challenge can be experienced as difficult but can sometimes result in new a relationship to music. The changed relationship can then elicit personal developments; the nature of these was not specified in the sub-theme,

but drawing on the theme of identity it could relate to development of identity or new self-expression.

Oriole struggles to move away from song-based jazz and embrace music with fewer structural boundaries. In his research music (Section 7.4.3c) there is tension, revealing the learning of the new ontology, i.e., music focused on relationships rather than aesthetic performance. In addition, the transference in the research relationship uncovers a seeking after challenge and musical disagreement. It is possible to think about Oriole's experience as the forming of new embodied cognition (Ionescu and Vasc, 2014). He is asked to consider a new understanding of improvisation through 'body, social situatedness and environment' (Moran, 2011, no page). In this, gestures and movements in the context of music therapy are embedded and internalised through social situatedness – with client and other students he gains a knowledge of how to interact and develop intersubjective skills,

all whilst experiencing the specialised ‘site-specific’ environment of the therapy room, or clinical encounter (Darnley-Smith, 2013).

Darnley-Smith (2014) comments that this challenge to ontology of music can be a common experience for music therapy students, and reversing or considering a new way of giving meaning to music ‘can be difficult to grasp’ (p.64). On a personal note, in my music therapy training I vividly recall the programme leader Sarah Hoskyns (2000) commenting that training as a music therapist can ‘change your relationship to music’ (no page). Perhaps this challenge to ontology is what lies at the heart of the ‘changed relationship’?

Furthermore, Oriole goes on to describe how the training in improvisation prompts personal shifts. At the time of interview he is unsure of the nature of these, but begins to realise a connection between the personal and musical processes. To speculate, these changes may have involved a different musical identity,

or new self-expression involving experiences of liberation.

The findings in this section strongly suggest that learning to improvise in music therapy can involve a challenge to ontology of music and musical improvisation, potentially prompting a *changed relationship to music* (Hoskyns, 2000), and in turn, become the cause of personal changes, the nature of which is unspecified.

9.4.4 Learning to improvise in music therapy can be transformational and cause a loosening of communication

The sub-theme of learning to improvise in music therapy (transformations in musical communication) is shown in Figure 97.

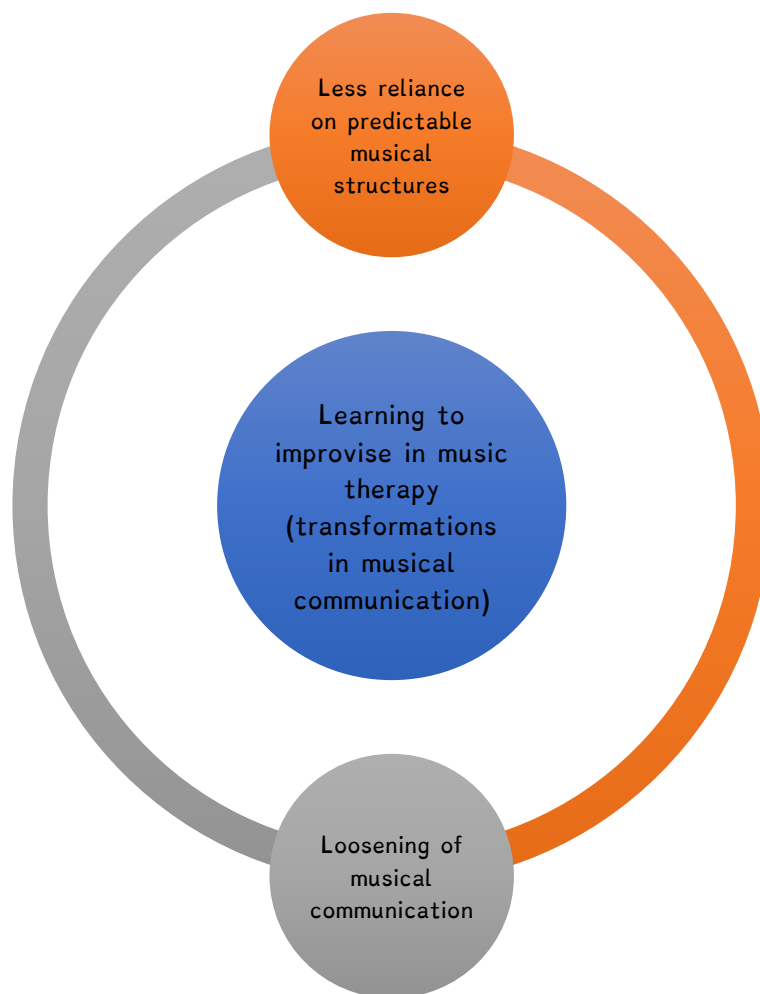


Figure 97: Sub-theme – learning to improvise in music therapy (transformations in musical communication).

Learning to improvise in music therapy can be transformational, with a *loosening of communication* (Curlew). Students can develop, through clinical improvisation skills, an enhanced 'communicative musicality' (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009, 2000, p.3) with less reliance on predictable structures and a large increase in musical adaptability and flexibility.

In a similar way to Oriole, Curlew comments that training in clinical improvisation is the catalyst for personal changes. He states the course was *transformational*, helping him to *loosen his communication* in music. Whereas in the past he felt his musicality was insular and tied into grooves or songs, through music therapy training he learns to find flexibility within structures. Wigram (2004) describes this sort of musical elasticity as 'frameworking' (p.118, see Glossary), in which a therapist encourages communication using structure which can be adapted to a client's needs. The training in clinical improvisation

literally *loosens* Curlew up to relate more directly to others in the moment. This suggests that learning to improvise in music therapy may be transformative, enabling students to reduce reliance on rigid structures and to develop an increased adaptability and flexibility to spontaneously communicate in music.

9.4.5 Training and working as a music therapist can cause a loss of creativity

The sub-theme of ‘training and working as a music therapist can cause loss of creativity’ is shown in Figure 98.

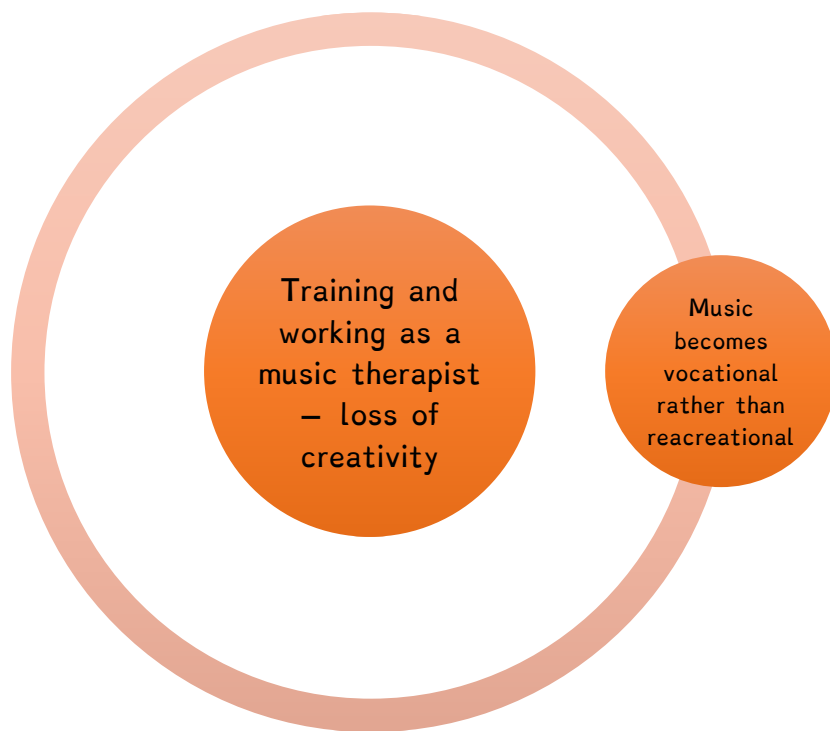


Figure 98: Sub-theme – training and working as a music therapist can cause loss of creativity.

In this sub-theme it is discussed that training and working as a music therapist can result in a loss of musical creativity. However, this theme focused on training and working as a whole, and was not specifically related to learning clinical improvisation. It was considered that the loss of creativity may be to do with music becoming a vocational activity rather than recreational.

In the IPA analysis Curlew comments that training and working as a music therapist can cause a *loss of creativity*. However, it is important to note that Curlew, rather than specifically discussing clinical improvisation, was referring to music therapy training and careers as a whole. He states that this involves a further changed relationship to music, one that becomes work based rather than recreational. Perhaps this is a hazard of all music vocational-based work roles? According to a recent integrative review on burnout in music therapists, Gooding (2018, 2019)

comments that it is important for therapists to find new ways of relating to music for themselves, or even withdraw from music at times. Thus, the therapist cannot be content with their new-found ontology of music or means of communicating, but the relationship to music must remain alive and relevant, continually changing. This would be an interesting topic for further study.

9.4.6 Childhood play with sounds

The sub-theme of childhood play with sounds is shown in Figure 99.

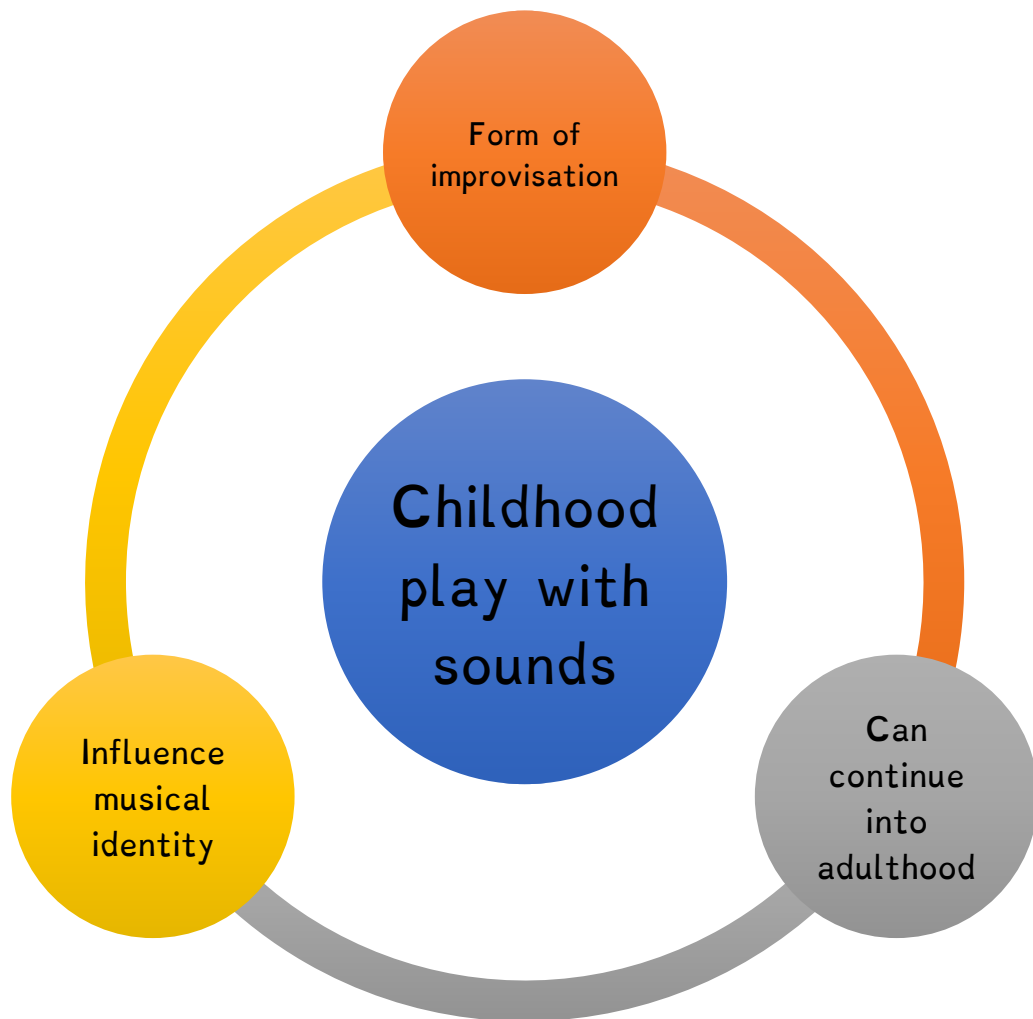


Figure 99: Sub-theme – childhood play with sounds.

Childhood play with sounds can be considered an early form of musical improvisation (Moorhead and Pond,

1941–1951; Papousek, 1996; Marsh and Young, 2006).

This play can continue into adulthood and have a strong influence on adult musical activities. It can be a catalyst for adult musical identity and influence professional career choices.

This study has some resonance with Burnard's (2000a, 2000b) meaning making in children's improvisations (which also draws on Merleau-Ponty, 2012a). In this she finds that children apply meaning through four areas, 'body, time, space and relationships' (Burnard, 2000a, p.323). This seems to suggest that children may instinctively understand some of the nature of improvisation experienced through embodied play. This also implies that developmental models of children's creativity and spontaneous use of sounds are drawn from an adult perspective and expectations of creativity, as found, for example, in Swanwick and Tillman's (1986) spiral of musical development with progression of technical musical skills, or

developmental use of instruments. Wren and Chaffinch demonstrate the importance of childhood play with sounds for adult improvisation. In Wren's interview the instruments evoke powerful childhood memories of *first* melodies. He explains how his early experiences of improvising and singing 1980s power ballads for his mother influenced his decision to become a songwriter as an adult. Wren's research music is heavily influenced by the childhood experiences, as he plays piano and bass guitar using structured but improvisatory power chord sequences in A and B minor, highly reminiscent, for example, of the songs of Poison (2020) or Whitesnake (2020). As discussed in Section 4.1.12, these songs seem to function as lifelong transitional objects (Winnicott, 1971) possibly providing a connection to relationships and enabling a means of secure attachment and security throughout life.

Similarly, Chaffinch demonstrates how childhood experiences have influenced her decision to work in

improvised music. She recalls as a child intensely improvising songs and melodies on the recorder and Casio keyboard. In the research music her play is highly explorative and childlike, as she seems to value every small sound, movement and tiniest detail of the instruments. This almost has a *pointillist* or *minimalist* quality (see Glossary). This aspect of the music is also illustrated in the graphic score with wide spaces between points of sounds (see Appendix I). In early play, Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015) note how children learn and pay exceptionally close attention to small details in their environment, examining how children discover the outdoors through the miniature world of ants and worms. With these diverse but linked ideas in the arts and children's play, it is possible to think of the research music of Chaffinch as recreating a childhood small life world, exploring the tiny possibilities of the instruments. This focused attention seems to have been an important aspect of her learning in childhood and adulthood.

During the interview Chaffinch states that adult improvisation has become a means of *reliving childhood play*, rediscovering liberty she had lost through school and university. Marsh and Young (2006) underline the strength of children's abilities to freely and independently create music. Wassrin (2018) also advocates for a formal music education, which acknowledges children's musical agency with the ability to create and self-express in improvisation.

It is underlined that childhood play with sounds is a developmental form of play and improvisation (Marsh and Young, 2006). Chaffinch further remarks that childhood play can transform into *something more* during adulthood, a *legitimate* practice with life experience, interactions, intentions, emotions, performance, audience or performative activities.

9.4.7 Fostering improvisation skills as an adult

The sub-theme of fostering improvisation skills as an adult is shown in Figure 100.

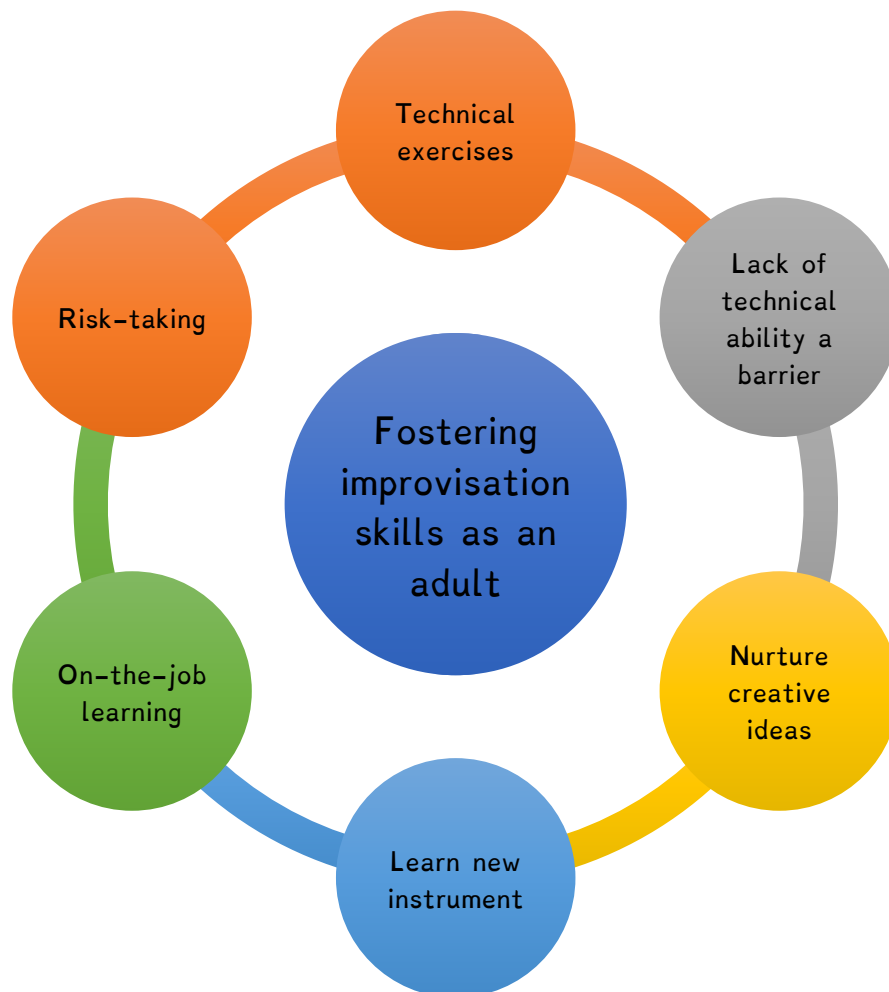


Figure 100: Sub-theme – fostering improvisation skills as an adult.

The final sub-theme examines the skills needed to continuously develop improvisation skills as an adult.

Technical proficiency is important, and lack of technical skills can be a barrier to expressing musical intention. The nurturing of creative ideas is important; this can be done, for example, through utilising musical song structures. Learning a new instrument can be extremely helpful, creating new musical schemas and flexibility. On-the-job learning (such as performance, jam sessions or music therapy practice placements) can be crucial for development as an improviser, providing a real-life context in which to learn and opportunities to draw on practitioners' experience. Finally, risk-taking is vital, as learning often requires stepping out of comfort zones and trying out new skills.

Childhood play with sounds can transform into adult improvisation with music. As a child practises playing, so too an adult musician can maintain and practise improvisation skills. This chapter began with a discussion initiated by Chaffinch on becoming a *real* improviser (Section 9.1.1). In this final theme Chaffinch

offers a further dialogue on how to develop as an expert improviser in adulthood. The ideas are wide-ranging, demonstrating the variety and complexity of the tasks involved. These ideas will now be discussed in turn.

9.4.7a Lack of technical proficiency can be a barrier/practising technical exercises

Chaffinch states that a *lack of technical ability can be a barrier* to successful improvising, affecting the aptitude to express spontaneous musical intention. She recommends practising atonal exercises or learning difficult notated music in order to extend technical skills. This is similar to Starling's descriptions of practising atonal exercises to acquire improvisational flexibility (see Section 9.4.1d). The educator Johansen (2018), in considering the importance of technical ability for the jazz musician, agrees that 'deliberate'

(p.50) practice of technical exercises, with specific goals or a focus on problematic aspects of performance, can enhance improvisational proficiency.

9.4.7b Nurturing creative ideas

Chaffinch also considers ‘explorative practice’ (Johansen, 2018, p.56), referring to practice without goals, intuitive creative practising which allows unconscious ideas to emerge, solo jamming or experimenting with imagined hypothetical performance situations. In explorative practice the musician is more likely to draw on the existing repertoire of ‘referents’ (Pressing, 1988, p.52). The musician plays with past ideas, creating new combinations and methods of expressing musical formulas. Chaffinch refers to this as a *nurturing of creative ideas* or an *establishing of creative frameworks*.

9.4.7c Learning a new instrument

Chaffinch comments that *learning a new instrument* can be a particularly effective method expanding improvisation skills. This is supported in literature through informal accounts by musicians such as the jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine's (2020) learning of the bass clarinet to increase his musical flexibility and repertoire, or the multi-instrumentalist and improvising musician Anthony Braxton (Bailey, 1992). Chaffinch and Dunnock both describe learning new instruments. It is possible to think about this type of learning as a transfer of musical intention from one instrument to another. The musical intention remains the same (e.g., to play the scale of D minor) but the method of execution is changed (D minor from the violin to the piano). The musician must learn to control the new instrument, grapple with motor skills, discover the instrument's expressivity and timbre, all of which builds to create a new habitation of bodily schemas and patterns.

9.4.7d Learning on the job

The fifth aspect of fostering improvisation skills as an adult is ‘learning on the job’. In this theme Chaffinch refers to learning whilst working for an improvising dance troupe, responding to movement and communicating musically. Similarly, Oriole describes honing his improvisation skills through on-the-job jazz performance.

This can be understood as ‘practice or work-based learning’, occurring in the workplace and combining theory and practice (Billett, 2010, p.1). It is an effective mechanism in many professions such as business and the arts, providing opportunity to ‘learn from experience’, whilst engaging in the ‘needs of the workplace’ and developing ‘critical reflection’ (Williams, 2010, pp. 626–629). Practice-based learning is embedded within traditional models of musical learning, found for example in the genres of jazz and rock, where learning through peer-led jam sessions,

rehearsals or performance is essential to the development of the musician (Berliner, 1994; Green 2002). In music therapy training, practice-based clinical learning is an established aspect of education, with students learning on placements in settings such as schools, hospitals and mental health units (Wigram *et al.*, 2002). The experience of Chaffinch suggests that learning to improvise ‘on the job’ can be effective in the development of adult improvisation skills, providing opportunities to improvise within relevant working contexts.

9.4.7e Pushing out of comfort zone

The study suggests that pushing out of *comfort zones*, taking risks and feeling anxious could be an integral part of learning to improvise. This has arisen in the accounts of learning in small groups. For example, Linnet and Bullfinch describe feeling exposed in music therapy experiential groups while Chaffinch almost

cries in a jazz ensemble (Section 9.3.4). In literature there are few examples related to learning and pushing away from comfort zones or resultant anxiety, with two exceptions: Nieman on teaching free improvisation at the University of London:

... the first problems were psychological – to overcome self-consciousness, shyness, violent repression, the junk of worn-out clichés, the actual fear and sense of exposure (Nieman, quoted in Darnley-Smith, 2013, p.52).

Webster describes improvisation classes in music therapy as, ‘nerve-wracking and exposing’ (Webster, 1988, p.18). It is suggested that risk-taking is important to learning to improvise. Risk is possibly connected to special experiences; this will be discussed in Section 9.5.

9.5 Special experience and flow

The findings show that special experiences and flow in learning to improvise music have a specific form, which is elicited by the nature of improvised music. This includes: intense intersubjectivity, feelings of being exposed, challenge, risk, flow and transformations.

Through this form special experience and flow can motivate, encourage and progress the learning of the student, with repercussions for identity, relationships, emotions as well as lifelong learning. Special experiences can be viewed as an intense microcosm of learning in the wider arena of improvisation, rather like a distilled version of the overall experiences. However, flow is unique to this process, and was not reported in any other aspect of this study. Even though it was only discussed by two participants out of ten, the flow experience clearly has a marked and differentiated content with a specific lexicon related to spiritually, magic and altered states.

This section presents a discussion of findings related to the second research question, as follows:

What is the nature of special experiences students have when learning to improvise music?

It is suggested that the nature of special experiences and learning to improvise has a specific form with a six-stepped mechanism. This is summarised as follows:

1. *Challenge* – related to tasks set by tutors or audience, with skill level at optimal levels, participants autonomously exploring and receiving feedback and guidance.
2. *Anxiety* was present because of the nature of the challenges and improvised music, with feelings of being exposed and vulnerable.

3. *Risk* was found to be essential to overcome challenge, with a sudden stepping out into the unknown. This is when anxiety was highest, just before risk was taken.
4. Improvisation and special experiences can create *intense interpersonal connection*.
5. *Flow* can sometimes be present and experienced as magical or spiritual. It can be difficult to talk about in these terms. Social flow may occur – a changed sense of time – and some instruments can induce trance-like states.
6. Special experiences in learning and improvisation can result in *transformations* with increased confidence, developed musical identity, feelings of liberation and long-term positive repercussions for musical and career development of individuals.

These steps are discussed in the following sections,
9.5.1 to 9.5.5

9.5.1 Challenge

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests that challenge is central to special experiences. The findings show that when learning to improvise, in order for special experience to occur, there needs to be challenge, incorporating an initial invitation and task. A crucial aspect of challenge is student autonomy. Custodero (2005b) found ‘self-assignment and correction’ to be crucial to flow experience in children’s learning of improvisation. She describes flow as a ‘state of inquiry’ (p.193), with accompanying guidance from teachers, as children continually reflect on their own learning through aural and physical feedback. Similarly, Rose (2017) suggests that student autonomy is crucial to successful learning, with the teacher creating the

initial task and providing a ‘supporting and guiding role’ (p.107).

9.5.2 Anxiety

Students can still experience sensations of anxiety and discomfort, even when the task is well within their ability. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests that flow and special experience takes place in the psychic space between boredom and anxiety (Holt, 2017). This study suggests that a transition from boredom into anxiety, and overcoming this through risk-taking is vital to special experience. Hytönen-Ng (2013) comments that jazz musicians seeking flow:

constantly take risks, plunging without hesitation into challenging situations where humiliation is a distinct possibility (Hytönen-Ng, 2013, p.28).

Thus it seems that even where the skill level is equal to challenge, the prospect of being exposed or made vulnerable makes anxiety an important mechanism for special experience.

9.5.3 Risk

Risk-taking is a central component of special experience and learning to improvise. Waterman (2015) makes the distinction between risk which ‘manifests fear’, and risk with ‘boldness’ (p.59). The first can create atrophy, the second expand learning and enable conquering of challenge. Waterman further reflects that it is only with an element of trust that the improviser is able to take risks, trusting fellow improvisers, the music or process. Music therapist and free improviser Trevor-Briscoe (2010) considers trust to be an aspect essential in improvised music. He states that

it is trust that provides the key to creative quality in improvisation ... this is an abstract type of trust which goes beyond skill or experience, trust in each other's intentions rather than trust in each other's ability, the shared belief that the other person is improvising in search of genuine quality within the interpersonal experience taking place (Trevor-Briscoe, 2010, p.25).

For the participants there has to be a certain level of trust, in the music, audience or tutors, and a leaping into the unknown (Rose, 2017). It is perhaps just before risk occurs that anxiety is at its greatest. Dunnock recalls a moment of anxiety, risk and trust in performance. He states:

I just felt really yeah, positive, difficult and positive, difficult because I you know had that panic, had that like ... like really, ohh, overwhelming feeling of just 'get me off, get me

out of here, this is the worst thing ever', and then the next piece, like it was like so much better. (Dunnock)

Maslow (1959) comments that during peak experience individuals can become fearless and negative feelings dissipate. This seems to be the case with Dunnock; as he overcomes his fears of performing and improvising, then positive feelings occur. Thus, it is suggested that anxiety and risk-taking are central to special experience and the learning of improvisation.

9.5.4 Interpersonal connection

The nature of improvised music can elicit intense relationships and moments of deep relationship and intersubjectivity; see sections 4.2 and 5.2.2 (Pavlicevic, 1997; Hytönen–Ng, 2013). Csikszentmihalyi (1975, p.42) acknowledges this through ‘social flow’, in which groups of people intuitively connect in experiences such

as sports and the arts (Section 2.7.4). Five participants in this study describe special experience within different group contexts, from music therapy sessions to performance. This strongly suggests that groups and interpersonal connection are a firm mechanism with the learning of improvisation. There is need for further studies in this area, examining groups, flow, special experience and improvised music.

9.5.5 Flow

The findings suggest that flow is an aspect of special experience and learning to improvise, but it is not essential. Two participants used a spiritual or magical dialogue to describe their flow experience. This linking of flow in music to spirituality is commonly influenced by religious beliefs and world views (Gabrielsson, 2011; Hytönen–Ng, 2013). For one participant there was an obvious reluctance to talk openly about her experience as spiritual. This could be an indicator of difficulty in

personal discussion, or could alternatively be connected to the historical reticence on spiritual dialogue within the profession of music therapy. Even though there has been a growing trend in recent history towards an acknowledgement of the importance of spirituality in music therapy, there is still some need to expand on this discourse (British Society of Music Therapy, 2002; Ansdell, 2005; Kishtainy, 2019). Tsiris (2018), in a survey of music therapy, spirituality and therapists' perceptions, found that out of a sample of 358 participants across theoretical approaches, 78 per cent discuss having a 'spiritual experience in music therapy', 57 percent state they did not have sufficient training in the spiritual, and 49 percent would like it to be 'addressed more' (p.315).

Other aspects of flow and learning to improvise include deepening of interpersonal relationships and use of instruments to induce trance-like states (discussed in Section 5.1.5). Flow is also found to be connected to

transformations. Three participants describe a new confidence, sense of identity and positive feelings of liberation, all of which have long-lasting repercussions for personal and professional identity. Maslow (1959; 1968) links changed views, development of confidence and increasingly integrated sense of self to peak experience and self-actualisation. In addition, Rink (2017) and Davidson (2002) connect special experience and development of musical identity, and Hytönen-Ng (2013) examines growth in musician identity during flow experience in performance. This suggests that flow, special experiences in learning and improvisation can result in individual transformations, which can have a marked impact upon development of musical identity confidence, and long-lasting effects on the professional musical lives of the participants.

9.6 Conclusion

This discussion in relation to the findings in the IPA

and music analysis, literature reviews chapters two and eight, and further relevant up-to-date literature, demonstrates the complex, nuanced and multi-layered nature of learning to improvise music. It is not a simply a matter of spontaneously ‘making it up as you go’ or creating music in the present moment, but can have very real implications for a student in the areas of identity, relationships and emotions, with many and varied ways and modes of learning, such as use of images, memorisation or immersion in genres and styles. Learning to improvise has been shown to be a whole, embodied, habituated process, involving special experiences, changed perceptions of time, relationship to instruments and relationships to others. It is dependent on the context and learning needs of the student in both formal and informal learning. I will now draw on this discussion to suggest a phenomenology of learning to improvise, based on the writings of Merleau-Ponty. This is presented in Chapter 10.

Chapter 10: A Phenomenology of Learning to Improvise: Embodied Learning and Learning Towards

This chapter presents a phenomenology of learning to improvise through habituation and embodiment, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1981, 2012a, 2012c) theory of expression and *Phenomenology of Perception*. This chapter combines the IPA and music analysis findings, literature reviews (Chapters 2 and 8), and additional phenomenological and philosophical literature.

As Kanellopoulos (2011a, 2011b) argues, there can be problems when using the work of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, in that meaning is often shifting and difficult to pin down. Taking philosophical works out of context and applying to music and improvisation is an act of interpretation, where some of the original meanings may be lost or transformed. I acknowledge that there may be issues, spaces or limitations in my interpretation and use of Merleau-Ponty's theories and

consider this chapter to be a work in progress, which may be expanded upon or updated in further studies. The chapter is structured through nine sections: a brief background to Merleau-Ponty (10.1); embodied learning and habituation (10.2); learning to improvise as a grasping of signifiers (10.3); improvisation as leaning towards and an act of expression (10.4); the act of expression transformations and identity (10.5); the act of expression as relational (10.6); summary of a phenomenology of learning to improvise (10.7) and further thoughts on relevant literature and conclusions (10.8).

10.1 Background to Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to Western philosophy was to highlight individual perception as mediated through the body. Writing during the mid twentieth century, he was influenced by phenomenologists Husserl and Heidegger. In Husserl's theory of

intentionality of consciousness, a distinction is made between objects and the contents of consciousness. The mind is directed intentionally towards objects producing abstract perceptions, but there also exists a real essence (or fundamental nature) of a thing (Carman and Hansen, 2005). In *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012a) Merleau-Ponty acknowledges Husserl but also argues for subjective perception and the impossibility of a real essence (a thing can only ever be subjectively perceived). Heidegger had a similar influence, emphasising the need to focus on the mind and cognitive perceptions of people rather than things themselves. However, unlike Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger little considers the experience of the body, instead viewing it as a limited ontic investigation. Heidegger instead sees the real locus of lived experience to be found in the life beyond the body (Aho, 2005). Put simply, this is what Heidegger terms 'Dasein', an understanding of 'being in the world' (Heidegger, 1996, p.12) or how we experience, 'understand and interpret'

the world with others, including our culture, history and society (Aho, 2005, p.5). However, it can be argued that a life with others is only mediated through the experience of the body, and this is where Merleau-Ponty's philosophy lies.

In addition to twentieth-century German phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty was also influenced by Gestalt thinking and Saussurain linguistics. In Gestalt theory and psychology pioneered by Wertheimer (1938), Köhler (1959) and Koffka (1935), micro perceptions formed by the mind are organised into patterns and experienced as a whole; the sensing of patterns is understood as a kind of intelligence (Carman and Hansen, 2005). Gestalt theory had an important influence on Merleau-Ponty's theory of *Phenomenology of Perception*, as he investigated 'the perceptual field': a thing is always in a context, always in the 'middle of some other thing' (2012a, p.4). Equally, the linguistic theories of Saussure (1915, cited in Bhatt, 1988) had a

pervasive influence. In these, symbolic language structures are sought out in relation to perception, and the signs and symbols of language are understood as having the potential to reveal lived experience (see Section 7.1). This is reflected in Merleau-Ponty's work, for example in his notion of the 'grasping of signifiers' (2012a, p.144), in which an individual has an experience of the world (the sign) through a leaning towards structural elements (the signifiers). I explore this later in relation to the elements of music (Section 10.4).

10.2 Embodied learning and habituation

An important thread running throughout this thesis is that learning to improvise is an act of the mind and body combined, where we become truly focused on music within the body. It is precisely because of the uncompromising nature of drawing mind and body together that improvising can be challenging. In

learning, we open up to new embodied cognitions (Ionescu and Vasc, 2014) and habituations (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a), assimilate bodily schemas, movements, gestures and ontologies of music and develop new identities.

Improvisation confronts the Cartesian mind–body split encountered in Western scientific thought and philosophy, where the body is separated as a physical entity from the mind (Love, 2003; see Section 2.4). Descartes viewed the mind as ‘immaterial’, setting up the body to be considered a ‘machine’ (Hess, 2008, p.74) influenced by thought, or in other words, the reduction of ‘living experience to ideas’ (Hess, 2008, p.19). Counter to this, one of the central components of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is the idea that lived experience is grounded in the body, and all perception arises from this. He states:

I consider my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.73).

He argues that perception is always individual and takes place within the limitations of, and with reference to, the body. In 'spatial perspective' objects are sensed differently from all sides, and body parts are experienced in relation to themselves and in space. With 'temporal perspective' each present moment is witnessed in relation to the time of others. Thus objects are seen from 'all times and all places' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.71). The mind is inseparable from the body and can only sense the world through it.

Music can be considered in different ways: as an outside physical force acting upon the body, as part of an interconnected ecological system or interconnected with relationships (Ansdell, 2014). But music is also internal and biological, held inside the body and mind.

Music therapists have historically considered this to be the case: Alvin (1975) writes about the ‘physiological and psychological effects of music’ (p.73), highlighting that rhythm and melody are to be found in movement, vocalisations and cardiac pulse. It follows that every individual has an innate musicality, which first arises in early infant sounds and movements developed in relationships (Papousek, 1996; Wallin *et al.*, 2000, Trevarthen and Malloch, 2000; Bunt and Stige, 2014; see Section 2.5.7). The psychologist Storr comments that ‘music is an activity rooted in the body’ (Storr, 1992, p.24).

If music is ‘rooted’ in bodies, then learning to improvise takes place not purely through abstract thought (although this may be present) but through embodiment and habituation.

Habituation is understood not only as the behavioural forming of habit through repetition, as has been

defined in psychological studies (Rankin *et al.*, 2009), but in the sense of the phenomenological lived experience. Merleau-Ponty states:

... to habituate oneself to a hat ... is to take up residence ... or inversely, to make it participate within the voluminosity of one's own body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.145).

The habituated object (e.g., an instrument or a musical 'referent', Pressing, 1988, p.135), (see Section 2.4.1), becomes part of an altering of body and mind.

Participants experienced a habituation and/or a reshaping process, where they develop new musical embodied cognitions and kinetic schemas. For example, Swallow describes the relearning of instrumental skills, playing atonally with new ways of moving and thinking (Section 9.1.3a). Furthermore, Starling and Chaffinch habituate skills (Section 9.4.2), internalising new motor schemas using piano atonal exercises (Starling) and

learning to respond to and improvise with dancers (Chaffinch, Section 9.4.2).

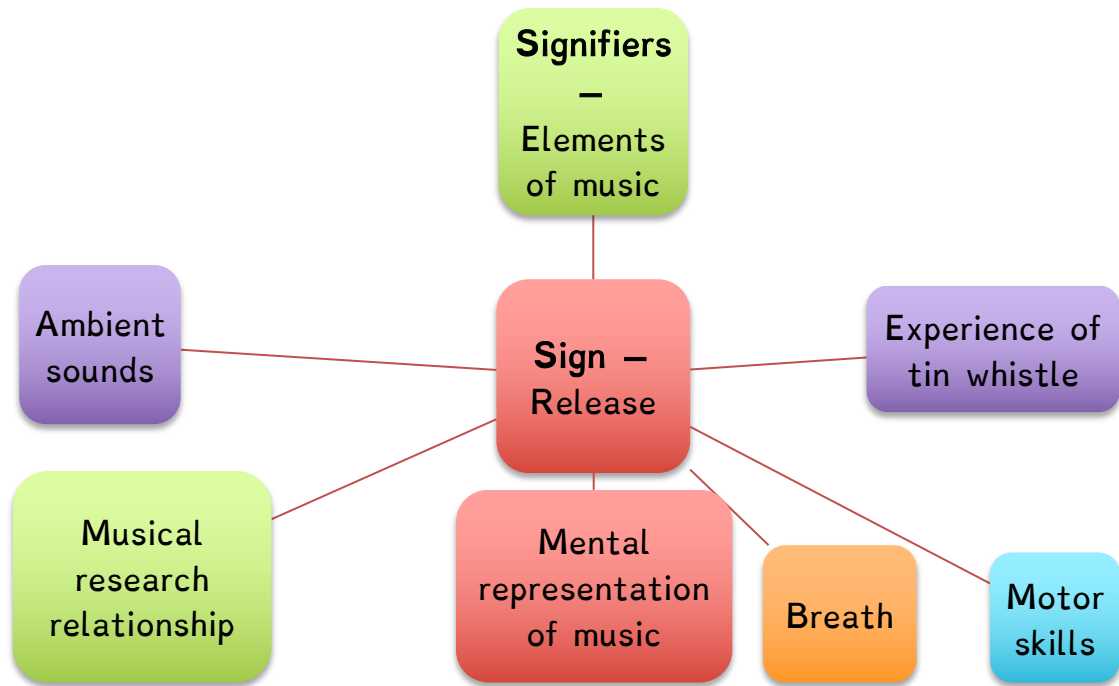
10.3 Learning to improvise as a grasping of signifiers

The habituation takes place through a ‘grasping of signification’, through the ‘synergy’ of the things of the body and ‘things of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.144, p.36). In this he is influenced by, but differentiated from, Husserl, who considers lived experience to be a combination of the mind and objects of the world, but views the body as problematic and a ‘thing inserted between mind and world’ (Carman, 1999, p.204). Instead Merleau-Ponty considers

... living experience emerges through the symbiotic intertwining of one’s own pulsing body ... and the overflowing, transcendent world of things (Hess, 2008, p.146).

Similarly, in improvisation there is a communion between the music of the body (the biological musicality) and the external music of the world (such as the physical vibrations of the air). At this point I briefly return to the discussion on the hypertextual nature of music (Section 7.1) and Barthes's (1977) view of text as a 'weave of signifiers' (p.157). The elements of music could be considered signifiers (i.e., 'timbre, pitch, loudness, duration, silence, rhythm, melody and harmony' (Bunt and Stige, 2014, pp. 54–79) which are both 'referential and presentational', pointing to signs or the 'life feeling of music' (Langer, 1942, p.223; see Glossary). Dewey (1934) also considers this, viewing 'melody and tones' (p.66) as comparable to the raw materials of expression and emotion. For example, Linnet's description of tin whistle playing as a *release* (see Section, 6.1.2e) could be considered a grasping of the signifiers, including pitch (Hz), loudness (dB), timbre (tone colour) and rhythm. This grasping occurs

within a larger hypertextual or even ecological context (to extend the Western art conception of the elements) consisting of the phenomenological experience of the tin whistle (9.1.3), accompanying embodied experience of motor skills and breath, a mental representation of internal musical ideas (Nijs, 2017), the musical research relationship (9.2.1) and external ambient sounds (7.6.13). This is shown in Figure 101.



*Figure 101: Hypertextual nature of Linnet’s music: the grasping of signifiers and playing of **release** on tin whistle.*

It is through this grasping that the habituated and embodied learning takes place. The learning contains a ‘situational spatiality’ and ‘intentionality’, understood as an awareness of situatedness of the whole body in space, and ‘intentional direction’ towards the object (Nijs and Coussement *et al.*, 2012, p.127, p.172).

The findings show that this process can take place through many different ‘modes of learning’ (9.4). The mode used depends on the context and needs of the student. For example, participants describe learning a new instrument (9.4.7c), practice of technical exercises (9.4.1d), the use of memorisation (9.4.1e) or the learning of genres, styles and idioms (9.4.1b).

10.4 Improvisation as leaning towards and an act of expression

Learning to improvise can be considered an act of ‘expression’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.387); also described as ‘an embodied creative way of arriving at truths and communicating with others’ (Hess, 2008, p.155). Merleau-Ponty’s theory of expression is the point at which he considers the creative life, initially explored in the chapter entitled ‘The Cogito’ in *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012a, pp. 387–431) and developed in his later works, *An Unpublished Text*

(2012c) and *The Prose of the World* (1981). An individual, rooted in the body, is an open system of possibilities, into which there can be a living interaction with the object. Through this interaction there is a possible transcendence and new insights. The original 'thing is reorganised to radiate new meaning' (Hess, 2008, p.160). In *An Unpublished Text* Merleau-Ponty describes this process in literary terms as 'great prose', in which there is a 're-creation of the signifying instrument' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.9). Here Merleau-Ponty revises his original notion that perception is brought about by a primary object (as in a completely new single notion or sensation); rather it is created in the process of the re-combination of ready-made thoughts and sensations (Hess, 2008). Here it is as if he is describing formulaic theory (see Literature Review, Section 2) in which improvisation is understood as the reweaving of existing formulas (Lord, 1960; Pressing, 1988). The act of expression begins in the recreation or reweaving of the elements of music.

The expressive act continues as the internal music of the body synthesises with the external music of the world, creating a living hypertextual interaction. Put simply, in Linnet's music, the breath, motor skills and mental representation of music can be considered internal, and through the grasping of the elements of music, she moves in synthesis to the external ambient sounds, research relationship and the phenomenological experience of the tin whistle. This is visually depicted in Figure 102.

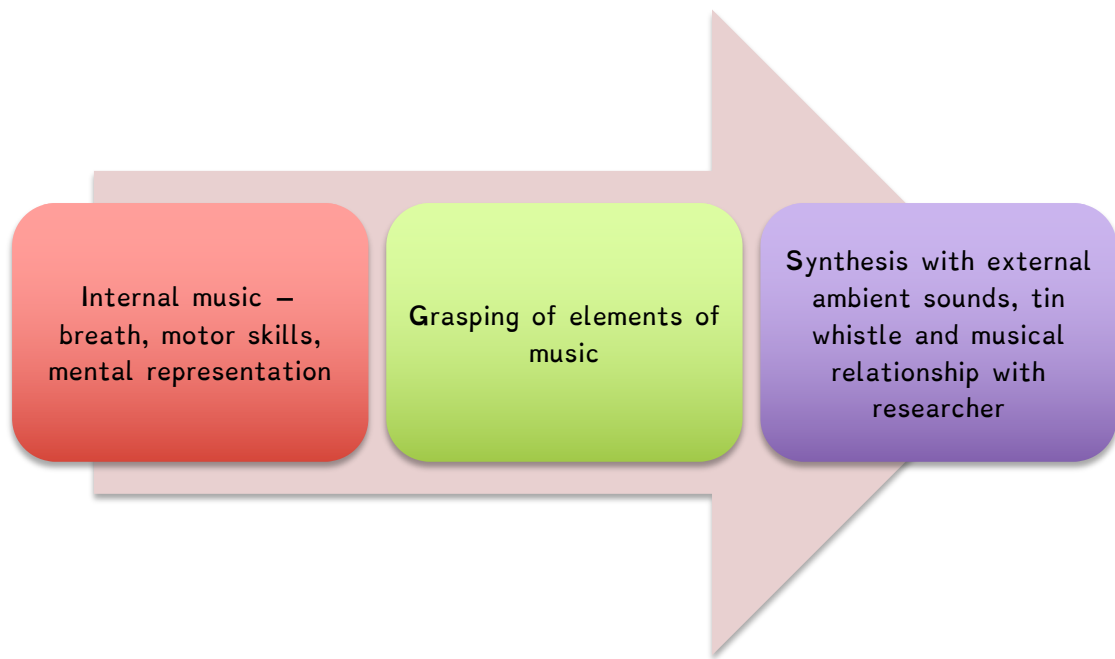


Figure 102: The act of expression, Linnet's playing of release.

This interaction involves a focused 'intention', where the object must be 'brought to light' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.32). The act of intention is informed and formed by the perception of the body (an object can only be perceived from one side at one time) and linked to the previous experience of the thing. Thus, when Linnet plays the tin whistle, she has focused attention upon it, and her experience of it is informed by the sensation of holding it in the hands, blowing, and by any previous experience. In the intention there is a

‘being in and towards the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.80).

Linnet ‘intentionally leans towards’ the tin-whistle through the ‘intermediary of her body’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.140). This act of expression amplifies Linnet’s internal biological music; it intensifies the core of who she is, there is a literal ‘sounding of the self’ (Smeijsters, 2005). As Wiskus (2013) states:

In music there is not representation or repetition, but resonance with being. Being enacts being. We experience an increase in amplitude; we feel a singular joy. It is for this reason that music, above all... is a call to expression (Wiskus, 2013, p.8).

It is only then, in this state of openness, interaction and amplification, that new ideas can form and transformations take place. In this way learning to

improvise involves change, new identity, and transformation.

10.5 The act of expression, transformations, and identity

The act of expression is transformative. Hess states:

Expression is about the creative transformation of some previous data or experience so that it yields new knowledge or radiates a powerful new sense without the original data disappearing or being covered up (Hess, 2008, p.155).

Participants testify that learning to improvise creates a new sense of identity. It is in the synthesis of the internal, named the 'invisible', and the external, or the 'visible' that transformations take place (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.159). When Swallow and Dunnock inhabit new instrumental improvisation skills (9.1.3a),

their internal music combines with the external world to become fresh movements, sounds, mental representations and intentions. The result for **Dunnock** is what he terms a 'free self' (9.1.3a), and for **Swallow** a 'rebellious self' (9.1.2a).

This appears to be a straightforward process; the old is combined with the new to elicit transformations. However, it is important to consider that **Merleau-Ponty**, writing in the context of the mid twentieth century, did not take into account 'body politics' (Hess, 2008, p.94), the body as socially constructed through societal norms and practices. For **Merleau-Ponty**, the body is a purely sensing object without masks, sexual difference or political or gendered constructions. Improvisation and psychological studies suggest that the phenomenological experience of the body can be performative, influenced by gender, cultural and heritage narratives (**Goffman**, 1963; **Yong**, 2005; **Carnevale**, 2007; see **Section 9.1**). For example,

in this study, Swallow before learning to improvise, tempers her body in music, and she performs a kind of musical femininity through a cultured, societal and gendered dialogue (i.e., girls play sweet high-pitched music and only make small instrumental movements, Smith, 2004). The act of expression opens up the possibility for a different performance of self, which is loud and rebellious; she just wants to *rahhhhhh!* As Pavlicevic observes:

‘improvisation offers an opportunity to re-create ‘ways of being’ in the world’ (Pavlicevic, 1997, p.134).

Through improvisation Swallow experiences a transformation, breaking away from previous body and gendered performance. In this way the act of expression unlocks possibilities for development of identity and recreation of ways of being.

10.6 The act of expression as relational

Merleau-Ponty states that the act of expression, (great prose) is always relational, always directed towards the other and is fundamentally an act of communication. He offers:

Great prose is the art of capturing a meaning which until then had never been objectified and of rendering it accessible to everyone who speaks the same language (Merleau-Ponty, 1964 p.9).

Similarly, in Pavlicevic's (1997) theory of 'dynamic form', she states:

In music therapy, [dynamic form and 'vitality affects'] may be signalled through the expressive quality of musical improvisation, e.g., those of tempo (accelerando, rubato, ritardando), dynamics (sforzando, crescendo) or modulations of timbre

and pitch – where an intersubjective, musical context is generated (Pavlicevic, 1997, p.121).

Pavlicevic seems to describe the grasping of signifiers as creating intersubjectivity. Applying this to learning in improvised music, a musician must learn to lean towards the other, grasping the elements of music in order to create dynamic form. The leaning towards the other requires an amplification of the self. This is depicted in Figure 103.

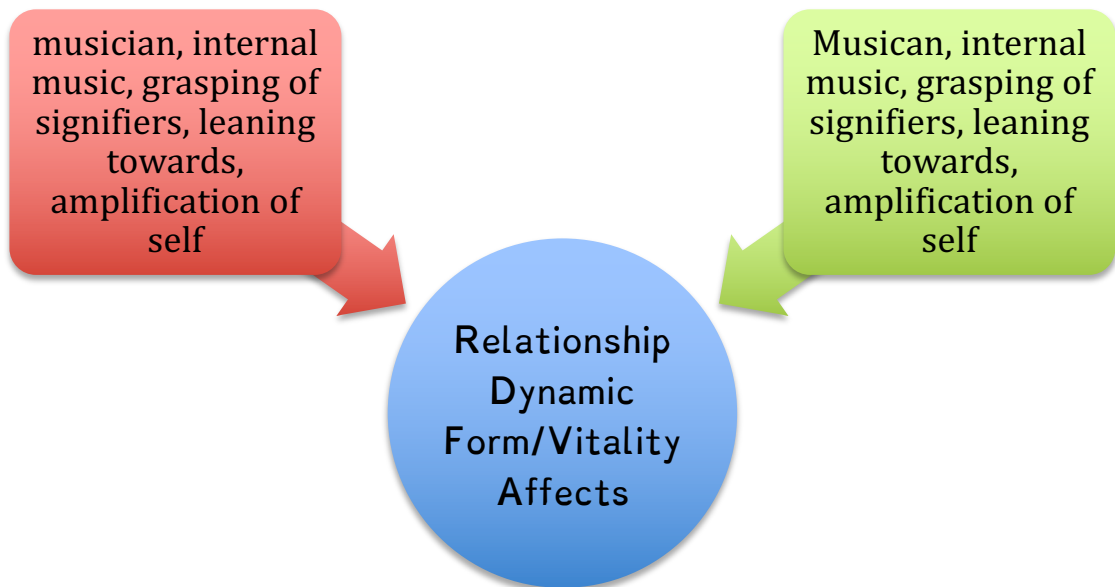


Figure 103: Leaning towards the other in improvised music.

The intersubjectivity occurs in a feedback loop, as there is a constant movement backwards and forwards in the dynamic form between the two musicians. As was demonstrated in the findings, improvisation can create conditions for intense and exceptional deep relationships (musical connections with friends and peers, 9.2.2; music therapy experiential groups, 9.2.3; loss of musical relationships, 9.2.4). For example, Curlew described the forming of intense lifelong relationships through improvising with a group of adolescent friends. The act of expression and leaning towards the other, creating a joint amplification of selves, perhaps explains how or why these deep relationships occur – it is a joint sounding of the selves, with each resonating towards the other.

In clinical improvisation, disability, mental health issues or physical impairment can atrophy the full ability to lean towards the other. Thus the therapist has to create a leaning towards which is greater and there

must be an enhanced intentionality. This is perhaps a special kind of musicality, in which students learn enhanced intentionality, including, as in the case of Curlew, an increased capacity for adaptability and flexibility (9.4.4). As Pavlicevic comments, the therapist utilises musical ‘mechanisms’ specifically designed to draw the client into the relationship, for example mirroring and matching (Pavlicevic, 1997, p.125; Wigram, 2004). It can be argued that ‘leaning towards with enhanced intentionality’ is to be found across music therapy traditions and theoretical models. For example, in the psychodynamic case studies of Priestley (1994), Kim (2016) and Short (2017) or creative practice described by Nordoff and Robbins (2007), Ansdell (1995) and Guerrero *et al.* (2015) there is a commonality of reaching out towards the client with the intention of making something new possible. Ansdell (2014) refers to this as a ‘turning towards’ in which the therapist gives the client ‘full attention’ (p.175). In a case vignette he observes:

Max [the therapist] turns towards the woman not just physically, but also with his full attention and presence as a person and musician. He addresses her with an I-You stance – not as a patient or as an old woman with dementia, but as a whole person. He looks and listens to how she is here and now, searching for any potential point of contact between them (Ansdell, 2014, p.175).

It is suggested that ‘turning’ or ‘leaning towards’ is located within the listening presence of the therapist. Here Ansdell draws on Buber’s (2002) dialogic notion of turning, in which there is a directed attitude of listening and acknowledgment of the other’s uniqueness (Friedman, 2002). Ansdell continues:

When Max turns musically to the old woman, he orients himself through his playing towards her in a particular way, both calling to her with his own musical character and practising what Buber

called 'obedient listening' as he takes in her reality through his skilled listening-in-playing. He has faith in her ability to respond as a musical person (Ansdell, 2014, p.175).

This seems to suggest that 'leaning towards' involves both the presence and absence of sounds, a waiting and 'calling' out. It is worth noting that in this extract, drawn from creative music therapy, the therapist's 'musical character' is highlighted, and this may be in contrast with other examples such as those found in psychodynamic music therapy, e.g., the work of Sutton and De Backer (2009) where there is an increased emphasis on the holding back, waiting or even silence, being slower to reveal the therapist's music or musical personality.

'Leaning towards' may be a common experience amongst musicians who play improvised music. Monson (1996) writes about jazz musicians 'listening in an

active sense', having to 'pay attention to what is transpiring if they expect to say things that make sense to the other participants' (p.84). Rose (2017) refers to a 'holistic attuning of the body, focusing on aspects of perception and awareness ... as a desired state for improvisation' (p.129). However, it is the enhanced intentionality that differentiates clinical improvisation from improvisation in performance. Brown and Pavlicevic (1996) have previously explored this difference with findings that the basic contrast between therapist and performer is in the intention. As Wilson and MacDonald (2015) demonstrate, in performance, individuals may deliberately choose not to attune and adjust their music to others, instead attempting to block, 'contrast' or 'change' the musical presentation of another (p.1035). The concept of deliberately drawing out another's musical and psychological presentation through specific techniques may not be a priority for a performing musician.

However, this is a subject for further exploration and welcome debate.

10.7 Summary

In this chapter I have presented a phenomenology of learning to improvise. It can be summed up through the following seven points:

1. Learning to improvise takes place through embodiment, involving habituation of new skills and reshaping of old, with the development of embodied cognitions and schemas.
2. Habituation and reshaping take place through a grasping of the elements of music, located in a synthesis of the music of the body (internal innate music) with the music of the world (music outside of the self). This synthesis always occurs in a hypertextual context involving features such as

ambient environment sounds, relation to other or phenomenological experience of instrument.

3. The learning can occur through a wide variety of modes, depending on the context and needs of the student, for example, learning through genres, styles and idioms, the deliberate practice of technical exercises or the development of memorisation skills.
4. Entering into improvisation is a creative act of expression, engendering possibilities for transcendence, transformations and new identities.
5. The act of expression involves a directed intentionality or leaning towards the world.
6. The act of expression is always relational, towards the other and things. It is an act of

communication. As a result, learning to improvise can create intense interpersonal connections, the locus of which is found in the leaning towards the other, involving dynamic form (Pavlicevic, 1997) and 'vitality affects' (Stern, 2000).

7. The music therapist may be required to employ an enhanced intentionality in order to create a therapeutic relationship.

10.8 Discussion on further relevant literature and conclusions

I would like to acknowledge that scholars have touched on similar ideas in improvisation to those formed in this thesis, although with differing emphasis. Stensøeth (2017) suggests 'an answerability theory of improvisation in music therapy' (p.107), in which she draws on the characteristics of Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic. In this she understands improvisation as a

state of being, with meaning created through the interactions between client and therapist. Stensøeth proposes three views: firstly, 'practical-relational' music therapy improvisation is always specifically situated in bodies, place and music, like Bakhtin's 'carnival'; it is a place of play, transformation and experiment (p.154). Secondly, Stensøeth suggests music therapy improvisation is always social, it is co-created between client and therapist; and thirdly, she writes that 'musical answerability' is existential because client and therapist 'share existence as an event', or they reach out to each other (p.153). It is this third view which resonates strongly with ideas in this chapter, imagining improvisation as a way of leaning towards the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.80). It is interesting that Stensøeth considers improvisation more than a musical act, a cognitive collection of repertoires, or way of connecting or attuning socially; rather, it is a magnification of being. As the individual leans in, they encounter the world and possibilities are

opened up for transformation, changes to identity, new expressions of emotions, intense relationships and new learning. Ruud (1995) provides a summary:

Improvisation may also be understood to create a situation where change, transformation and process come into focus. In this sense, improvisation not only means to get from one place to another, but from one state to another. In this sense, improvisation means to change a relation to other human beings, phenomena, situations- maybe the very relation to oneself. In this sense, improvisation is a transitional ritual, a way of changing position, frames, stature or state of consciousness (Ruud, 1995, p.93).

Ruud (1998) further proposes the idea of an 'improvising individual' (p.28), a person who can

live in a process in which inner stability and safety, as both presuppositions and results of the ability to improvise, enable psychic flexibility. This would be someone who not only can readjust herself to a changeable world, but whose verbal descriptions of reality are extensively based on bodily reactions, their psychic rewriting, and an understanding of the cultural processes and their interaction with her society's political and economic structures (p.28).

Similarly, the free improvising bassist Léandres suggests the idea of the 'créatrice', the female creator, who usurps and challenges culture and gender dialogues in society. She states:

Free improvisation is beauty – risk – love – story – life. To be open to change, to engage interactively with the other, to listen to experience, to work extremely hard, to make your

mark in history as a woman – are all components that combine to make a créatrice (Léandres, quoted in Smith, 2008, pp. 198–199).

Like Ruud and Léandres I would suggest that there is a value in improvising individuals, a value to society in which there can be people who are readily able to adapt and instantly respond in our challenging and changing times. Perhaps this is even more pertinent and important in the world situation of Covid-19.

Learning to improvise is an opening, a leaning towards. We are the music, and as the music we lean in, sing and reweave the world. So, to conclude with a poem:

Poem: Leaning towards

Let me lean
Towards your uniqueness
I hear the sound of you
Upon my skin
and I express my being
Leaning towards and outwards
The music inside
Unfurls
Uncurls
and I can no longer
Hold it back
My desire
Is to sing the world
To let out the light
See the darkness dispel
To radiate towards
and as our fingertips touch
We improvise.

Becky Lockett, 2020

Chapter 11: Conclusion and Key Finding of Embodied Cognition

A key finding to this study is that learning to improvise is the development of an improvisational embodied state of being. This was emphasized in specific findings such as sections 4.4.6, 4.4.6a and 9.4.2, where learning was closely linked to working with dancers or the physical repetition of musical technical exercises. However, embodied cognition, as ‘knowledge gained through the body’s morphology and internal states’ (Ionescu and Vasc, 2014, p.55, also see Glossary) is a thread present throughout the whole of this thesis, it is to be found in the immersive nature of the musician embedding genres and styles to memory (9.4.1b), as musical time structures become part of the body morphology of the jazz musician (9.4.1f), or is present as the music therapy student attempts to discover new ways of playing their instrument in a ‘reshaping’ process (9.1.3). In chapter 10 I drew on Merleau Ponty’s (2012a) phenomenological concept of the world

perceived through the body. In this I considered that learning to improvise can open up new embodied cognitions, habituations, bodily schemas, movements and gestures, and even afford new bodily identities (as in performative changes to gender, 9.1.2a). If as Storr suggests music is ‘rooted’ in our bodies (1992, p. 24), then we are in our bodies – with the music of the body, and we interact to the music of the world. Through learning to improvise we are practicing a state that is about flexibility and adaptability in ‘leaning towards to world’ (Merleau Ponty, 2012a, p.80). The world is defined as, how we experience, understand and interpret others, including culture, history and society (Heidegger, 1996). The leaning is a type of creative act, an enaction (van der Schyff, 2019, see Glossary), where there is a potential for transformation and change. The findings show that on an individual level, these can be changes to identity, emotions and relationships (see Chapters 4 and 9).

These ideas, which require a kind of philosophical imagination, can help us to understand the lived experience of music making, what it is we are actually experiencing when we attend a music therapy improvisation class, play at a jazz jam, or sit in on a session with an improvisation orchestra. There can be an opportunity to experience amplification of and development of self. This is what Pavlicevic (1997) referred to when she thought about improvisation in music therapy as a potential for creating different ways of being.

At its central core, learning to improvise is developing an improvisational adaptable embodied mind with an intention to interact with the world. This is the reason Schlict's (2008) pupils after taking an improvisation course said that their music gave them:

'true colours', a musical renaissance and freedom' (see Chapter 1 introduction, Schlict, 2008, p.13).

11.1 Summary and Research Questions

This study examined the lived experience of learning to improvise for music and music therapy students. Its origins developed out of anecdotal evidence of students and colleagues, and personal experience of learning to improvise. This was an arts-based qualitative study contributing to education and learning in music improvisation and performance. The research generated rich data on lived experience, with multiple applications for higher education music curricula and trainings.

This chapter provides a summary of the following:

- study and research questions (11.1)
- meta-structure of analysis (11.1a)
- findings and themes (11.2 – 11.6)

- phenomenology of embodied and habituated learning in improvisation (11.7)

This chapter then briefly explores key terms (11.8) a methodological and method evaluation (11.9), contributions of the study to music education, music therapy, arts based research and philosophy of music (11.10 – 11.10.4). The chapter concludes with a dialogue on limitations (11.11), ideas for further research studies (11.12) and final ending thoughts (11.13).

This was an arts-based qualitative phenomenological study (Ledger and McCaffrey, 2015), employing IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009), phenomenological music analysis (Ferrara, 1984) with reflexive and hypertextual methodology and method (Etherington, 2004).

Participants took part in semi-structured interviews, with musical improvisations together with the researcher. The verbal interviews were analysed using IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009), and music data employing a two-stage adapted version of Ferrara's (1984) phenomenological music analysis. Graphic scores were drawn in response to the research music, with the original intention of creating data through member checking (Colaizzi, 1978; Bergstrøm-Nielsen, 2010). The transcripts of interviews and graphic scores were returned to participants for comments. In this way further data was generated, and analysed using the same IPA process employed on the original transcripts. However, the scores generated unexpected responses from the participants, some giving further comments on their experiences, others not giving comments, or making observations on the aesthetic visuals of the scores. In addition, the graphic scores changed in meaning, from eliciting member checking to becoming a

reflexive act of drawing, informing interpretation of the data.

The first research question was as follows:

What is the nature of experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

In answer to the first research question, four **SO** themes were generated through the IPA of the transcripts and participants' graphic scores comments and phenomenological music analysis; these were:

- Identity
- Relationships
- Emotions
- Learning

The second research question was:

What is the nature of special experiences that students have when learning to improvise music?

In response to the second question the same four themes were identified, with an additional smaller SO theme of

- Flow

All the SO themes revealed the complex and multifaceted nature of learning to improvise, with far-reaching implications into students' lives, including changes to identity, development of deep relationships, expanded emotional experience, varied learning, and special experiences with flow.

11.1a Meta-Structure of Analysis

This thesis incorporated a meta-design in the analysis of codes and super-ordinate themes, this was across the IPA analysis of the interview transcripts, graphic

score comments and music analysis. The meta design is shown in figures 104 – 105.

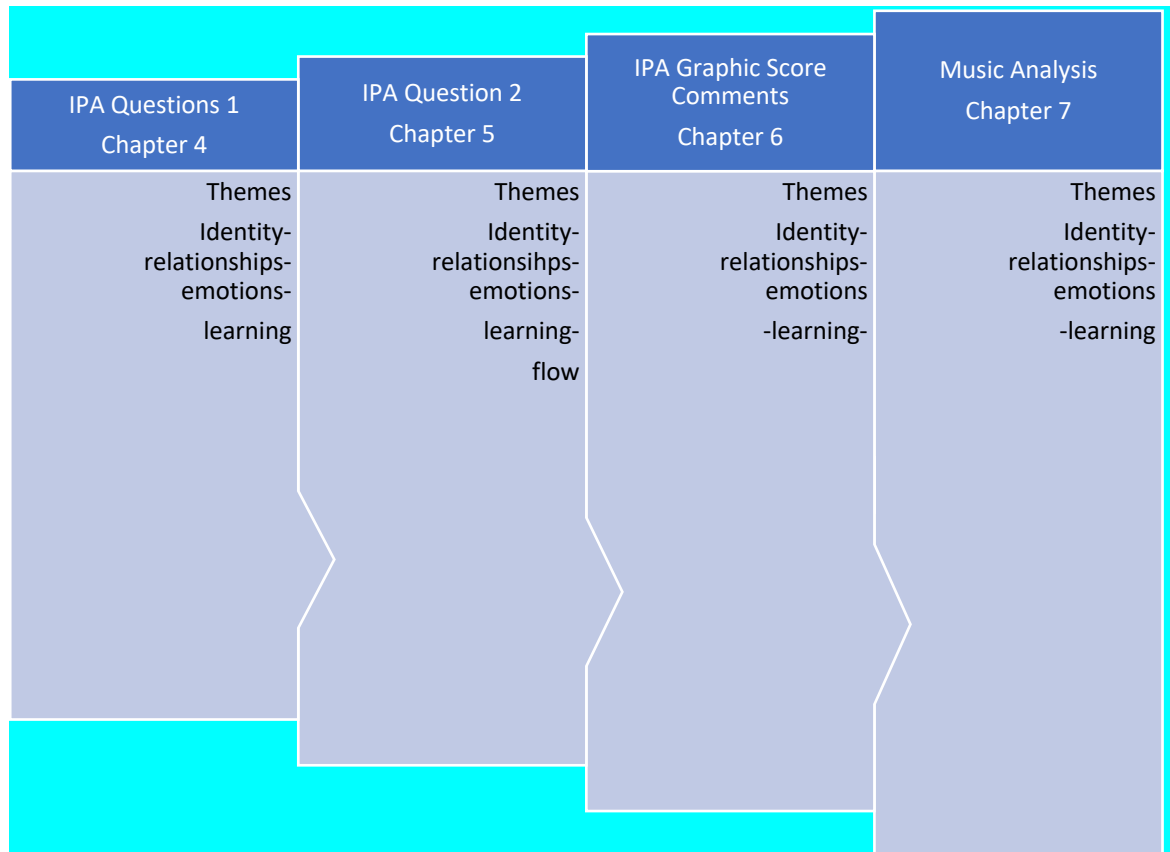
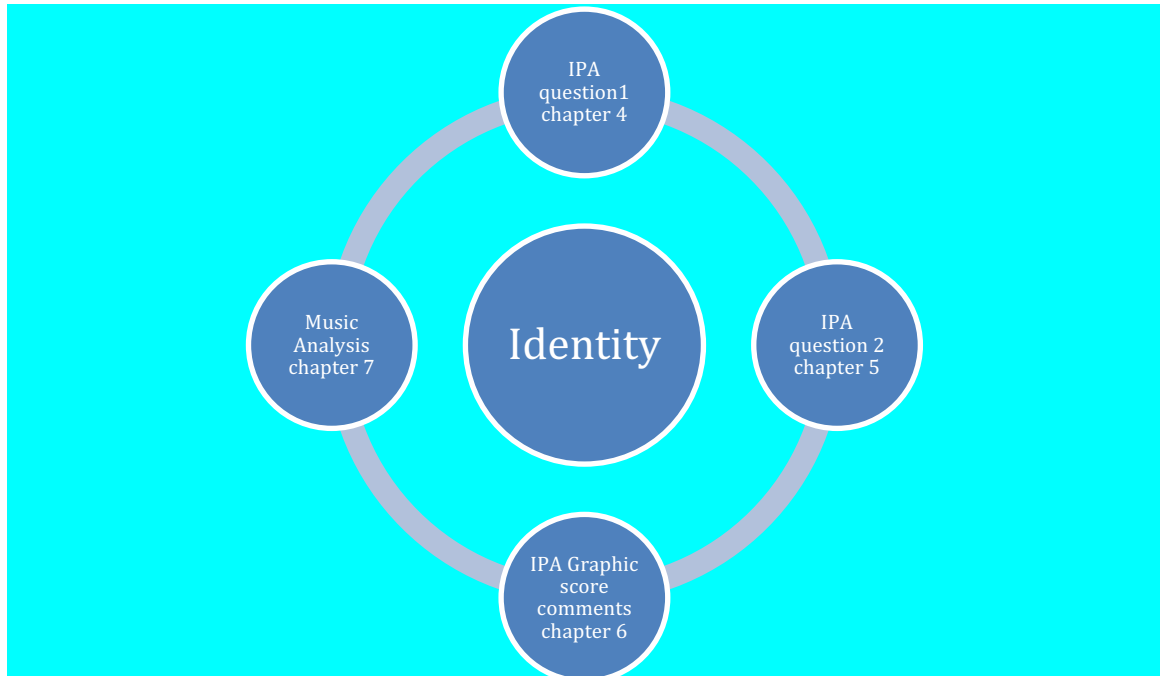


Figure 104: Meta design of analysis, themes and chapters

Figure 103 shows meta build-up of themes found in each analysis chapter. It can be seen that themes are common across all apart from chapter 5, which has the addition of flow.



IPA Question 1 – Chapter 4: Becoming a real improviser
 – Pro[claiming] identity – Identity and supportive relationships – Instrumental voice and identity – Realisation of choice – Rebellion – Culture, heritage and gender – Instruments – Instruments form improvisation experience – Instruments form identity – Free/not free – Spoken voice and rap (Sections 4.1.1 – 4.1.12)

IPA Question 2 – Chapter 5: Special experiences and identity (Section 5.2.1)

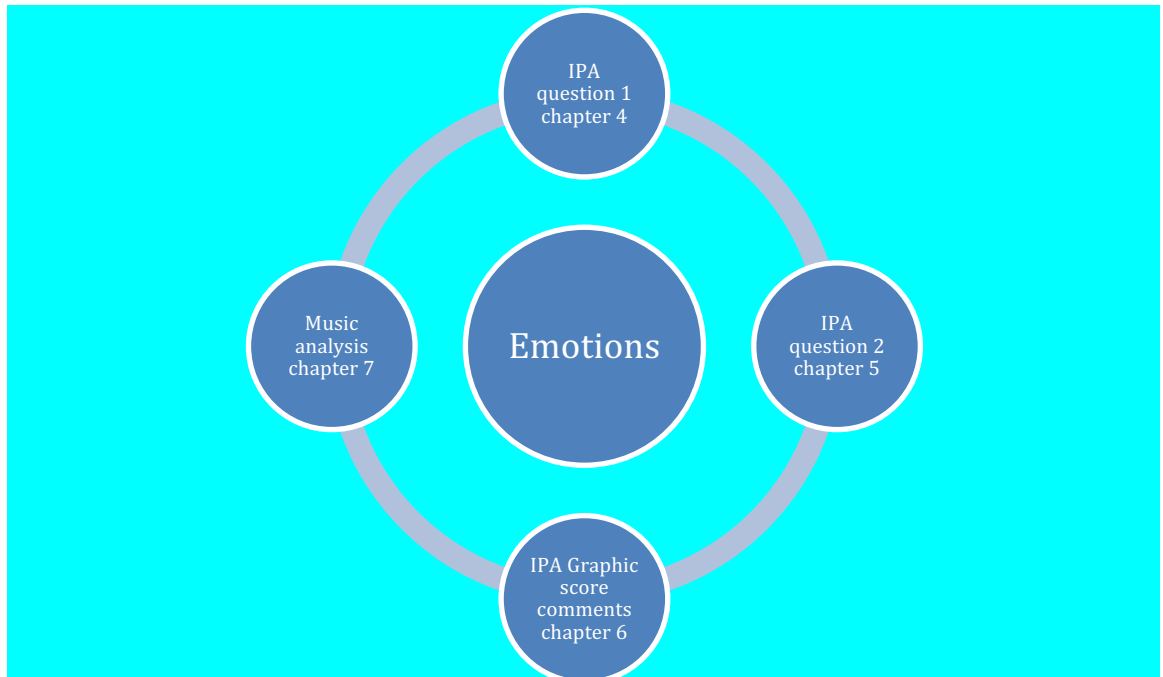
IPA Graphic Score Comments – Chapter 6 – Identity, instruments and rebellion (Section 6.1.1a)

**Music Analysis – Chapter 7 – Instruments (7.6.6) –
identity (Section 7.6.8)**

Figure 105: Identity codes – meta design. Codes which are completely new additions are highlighted in red, codes which repeat are shown in green.

The meta-structure is implicit within this study and with the addition of each chapter of analysis the theme is built up and increases in complexity and size. This meta construction process is demonstrated above in figure 104, with the codes that create the theme of identity, new codes are shown in red, repeating codes shown in green. The same process is illustrated in figures 106–108, in the themes of relationships, emotions, learning and flow. The same order and names of codes can also be found in the table of contents and within the structure of each chapter. In the above figure? It can be seen that all the new codes for identity were found in chapters 4 and 5, and codes were repeated in chapters 6 and 7. This demonstrates the usefulness of employing different types of analysis,

which can confirm codes or present them differing forms.



IPA question 1 chapter 4 Improvising helps release emotions – small groups, improvisation and anxiety – music therapy improvisation, learning and extremes of emotions – improvisation broadens emotional expression – endings in improvised music, sadness and loss (4.3 – 4.3.5)

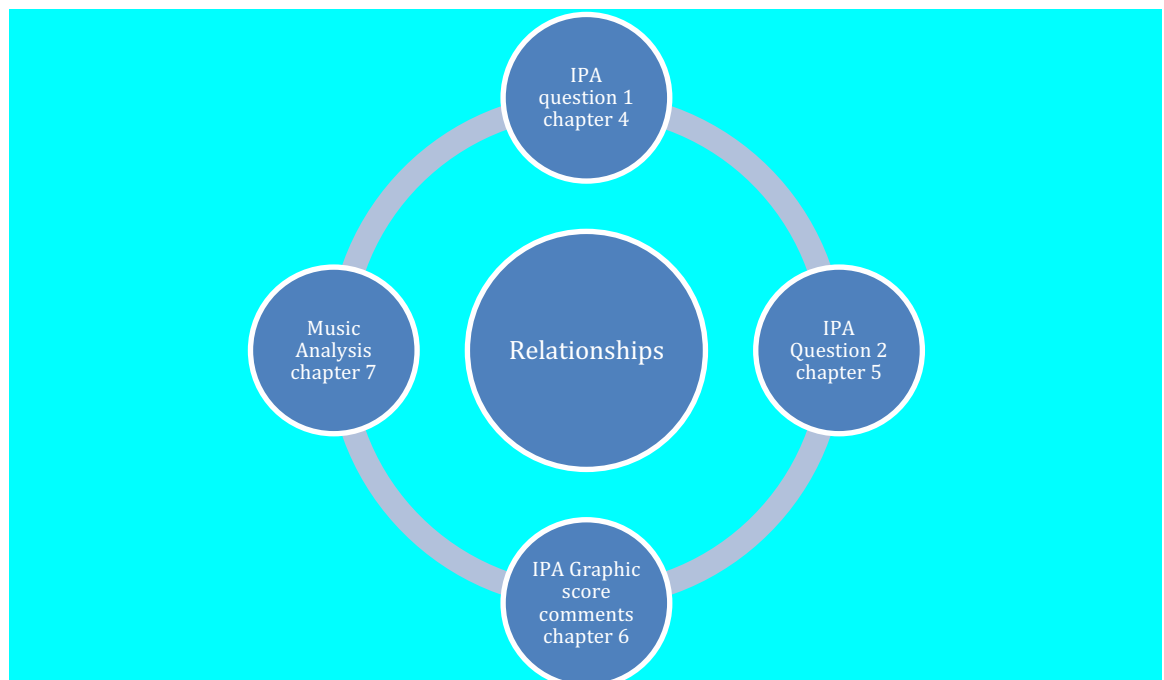
IPA question 2 chapter 5 Special experiences and emotions (5.2.2)

IPA Graphic score comments chapter 6 improvising helps release emotions (6.1.2a) – improvising helps contain emotions (6.1.2b) –role of humour (6.1.2c)

Music analysis chapter 7 emotions (7.6.7)

Figure 106: Emotion codes – meta design

Figure 106 illustrates that the analysis of the graphic score comments highlighted containing emotions and the role of humour.



IPA Question 1 chapter 4 Musical connection with friends and peers – music therapy experiential groups – loss of musical relationships

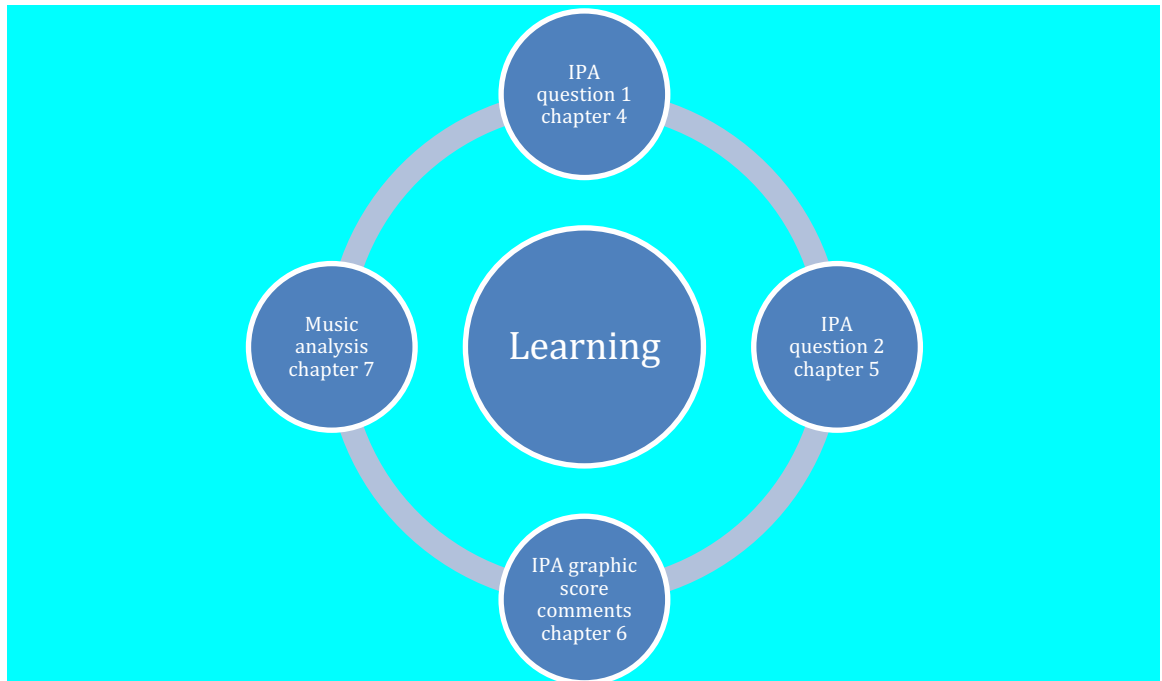
IPA Question 2 chapter 5 Special experiences and relationships – long-term significant experiences, flow, learning and relationships (5.3)

IPA Graphic score comments chapter 6 The musical research relationship (6.1.1b – 6.1.2d – 6.1.3b) – musical connections with friends and peers (6.3.1.b)

Music analysis chapter 7 The musical research relationship (7.6.1) – power dynamics (7.6.2) – transference and counter-transference (7.6.3) – experimenting with different ways of relating to self and others (7.6.4) – relational tentativeness (7.6.5)

Figure 107: Relationship codes – meta design

Within figure 107 it can be seen that the music analysis chapter developed four new codes related to relationships, and this was particularly useful for understanding the musical research relationship between participant and researcher.



IPA question 1 chapter 4 – Informal learning (4.4.1) – genres, styles and idioms (4.4.2) – shapes, patterns, stories and notation (4.4.3) – learning improvisation through theory, instrumental techniques or technical exercises (4.4.4) – memorisation (4.4.5) – embodied learning, tension and performance anxiety (4.4.6) – embodied learning, moving with dancers (4.4.6a) – music therapy improvisation and learning, challenging concepts of music and relearning skills (4.4.7) – music therapy improvisation, learning and transformation (4.4.7a) – training and working as a music therapist and loss of creativity (4.4.7b) – childhood play with sounds (4.4.8) – fostering adult improvisation skills (4.4.9) –

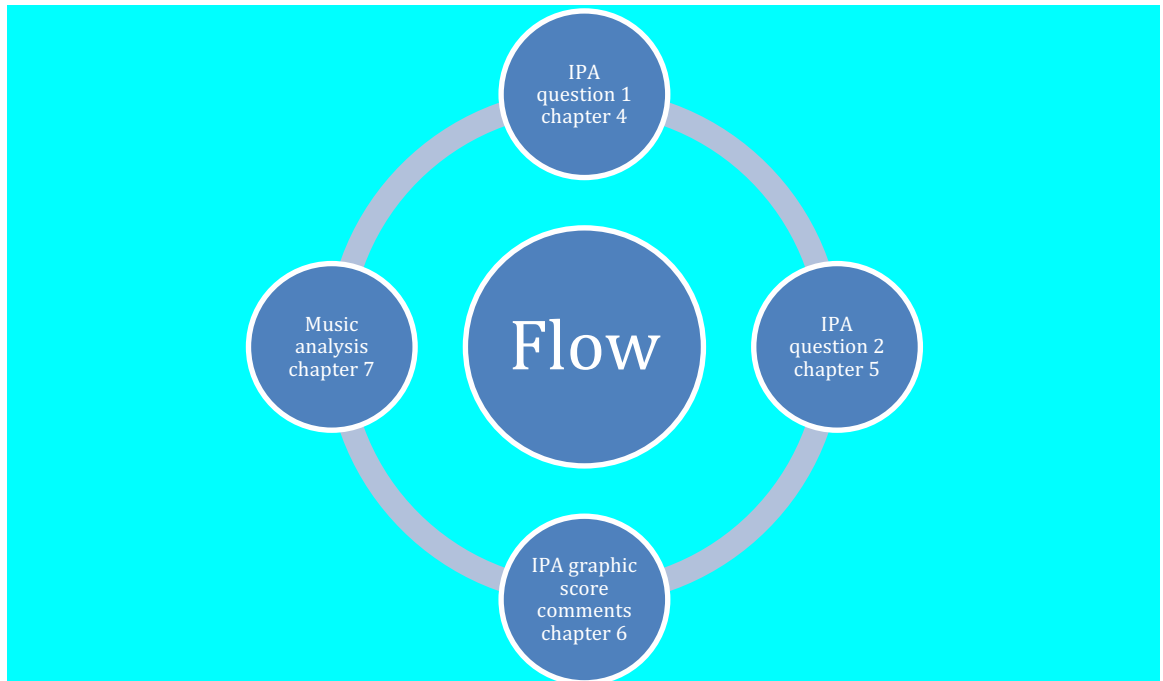
IPA question 2 chapter 5 – long-term significant experiences, flow, learning and relationships (5.3)

IPA graphic score comments chapter 6 – none shown

Music analysis chapter 7 – kinetic presentation and movements (7.6.9) – childlike play with sounds (7.6.10) – musical form (7.6.11) – silence and stillness (7.6.12)

Figure 108: Learning codes – meta design

It can be seen in figure 108 that the majority of codes related to learning were found in chapter 4, and three additional codes were added in the music analysis chapter, particularly in relation to physical ways of being such as movement and stillness. It is interesting to observe that no codes related to learning were found within the chapter on graphic scores, this maybe due to the fact the majority of participant comments on learning was found in chapter 4 in relation to the first research question.



IPA question 1 chapter 4– none shown

IPA question 2 chapter 5 – flow as spiritual or magical (5.1.1) – flow is difficult to talk about as spiritual or magical (5.1.2) – flow and group connection (5.1.3) – changed sense of time (5.1.4) – aspects of flow states can be induced by specific instruments (5.1.5) – long term significant experiences, flow, learning and relationships (5.3)

IPA graphic score comments chapter 6 – none shown

Music analysis chapter 7 – none shown

Figure 109: Flow codes – meta design

Within figure 108 it can be seen that the theme of flow was unique to research question 2, with no codes apparent in chapter 4, 6 and 7.

11.2 Final summary of SO theme of identity

The SO theme of identity was found in chapter 4 in the IPA of research question one (4.1 – 4.1.13, 4.9.11), chapter 5 IPA of special experiences (5.2.1), chapter 6 graphic score comments (6.1.1, 6.1.1a) and chapter 7 the music analysis (7.4.1b, 7.6.8, 7.7). The findings demonstrated that learning to improvise can elicit changes to identity (4.1.1–4.1.12), taking place through a range of devices such as public proclamations (4.1.2), supportive relationships (4.1.3), changes in relationship to instrument (4.1.4), development of instrumental voice (4.1.9, 4.1.10) and the realisation of choice (4.1.5) and rebellion (4.1.6) resulting in feelings of freedom (4.1.11) and development in confidence. There can also be an increase in confidence in use of spoken voice and

taking part in social interaction (4.1.12), and embracing or breaking away from culture, heritage and performances of gender (4.1.7). In addition, the data on special experiences (Chapter 5) highlighted that challenges in learning (where challenge was at optimal levels with skill) were often a precursor to new expressions of musical identity (5.2.1).

11.3 Final summary of SO theme of relationships

The SO theme of relationships was found in the IPA of research question one (4.2 – 4.2.4, 4.9.12), graphic score comments (6.3.1b, 6.3.2d, 6.3.3b, 6.4), and music analysis (7.6.1). The findings showed that learning to improvise can elicit increased intersubjectivity and deep relationships (9.2.2), an intense sadness at loss of those relationships (9.2.4) and use of silence and stillness for reflection (7.6.12). The graphic score IPA and music analysis emphasised the musical research

relationship (9.2.1), including the role of power dynamics (7.6.2, 7.4.2b), embodied and sensory transference (7.6.3) and use of music to explore different ways of relating (7.6.4).

11.4 Final summary of SO theme of emotions

The SO theme of emotions was found in the IPA analysis of research question one (4.3 – 4.3.6), graphic scores (6.1.2a – 6.1.2d) and music analysis (7.6.7) demonstrated that learning to improvise can increase emotional regulation (9.3.2) and expression (9.3.3). It also highlighted that endings in improvised music can elicit feelings of loss (9.3.5). In addition, within this theme was a dialogue on anxiety (9.3.4), which is commonly experienced when learning in small groups (9.3.4) and during challenge in special experience (9.5.2).

11.5 Final summary of SO theme of learning

This theme was found in the IPA analysis of research question one (4.4 – 4.4.7) began with an exposition of differing learning modes related to learning to improvise, such as learning through styles, genres and idioms (4.4.2) or memorisation (4.4.5). These modes were varied and reflected the different learning contexts and needs of students. Also within the theme of learning was improvisation as a habituated and embodied act (9.4.2), for example, practising technical exercises (9.4.1d) and responding to dancers (9.4.2).

Music therapy training in improvisation was found to often be challenging and elicit new ontologies of music as students dealt with relearning concepts (9.4.3), changing their relationship to music. In addition, music therapy students reported a *loosening of musical communication* (Curlew, Section 9.4.4) which suggested a special kind of adaptable and flexible musicality. In this section it was suggested that training and working

as a music therapist can reduce creativity (9.4.5), but this was a comment on the whole training and working life, rather than specifically learning in improvisation.

Childhood play with sounds (9.4.6) was found to be connected to adult improvisation with music, with participants reporting and observing its influence on adult career and musical choices. Finally, it was considered important to continually foster and develop improvisation skills as an adult (9.4.7 – 9.4.7e), which can be done through a variety of means, such as *on-the-job training* (9.4.7d), *practice of notated music or nurturing creative ideas* (9.4.1b – 9.4.7b) –Chaffinch.

11.6 Final summary of SO theme of flow and special experience

The findings on the SO theme of flow, incorporating special experience (5.1–5.4), suggest that there may be a common form in the nature of flow and special

experiences in learning to improvise. All but one of the special experiences took place in small groups with an increase in interpersonal connections; aspects of challenge (9.5.1), with anxiety (9.5.2), fear, panic and discomfort were commonly reported; participants described overcoming challenge through risk taking (9.5.3), resulting in possible flow (9.5.5), new insights and potential development in self-identity and feelings of liberation. Flow was reported by two of the participants, which suggests that whilst flow can be recalled as part of specific special experiences or remembered through long-term significant experiences (5.3), it may not always be present.

This suggests that that for some individuals, flow and special experiences can be an important aspect of learning to improvise, with possibilities for engendering changes to identity (5.2.1) and creating long-term motivation and confidence.

11.7 Summary of phenomenology of embodied habituated learning.

Chapter 10 proposed a phenomenology of learning focusing on habituated and embodied learning, this drew on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy phenomenology of perception (1964, 1981, 2012a). In this, learning was considered to be an embodied and habituated (10.2) act taking place within a 'perceptual field' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.71) using spatial and temporal perspectives (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.71). Habituation (10.2) was found to occur through the learning of new and reshaping of old skills. There were clear examples of habituation and reshaping in the study, such as learning new keyboard technical exercises (9.4.1d), responding musically to dancers (9.4.2), or the learning of new instruments (9.4.1g).

Music was understood as both an internal innate biological phenomenon and an outside external force, rooted in the body (Storr, 1992). Importantly, learning

could only take place through a grasping of signifiers, interpreted in this study as the elements of music. It was considered that improvised music always takes place within a hypertextual context, with the grasping of signifiers as central. This involved intentionality, and an awareness of situatedness of the whole body in space.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and theory of expression (1964, 1981, 2012a; Hess, 2008), it was considered that learning to improvise is always an act of expression (10.5). The findings strongly suggested that there are a variety of mechanisms which enable this learning, from memorisation skills (Section 9.4.1e) through to genres, styles and idioms (Section 9.4.1b). The act of expression involves a living interaction with the object, or 'leaning towards' Sections 10.4–10.6, (Merleau-Ponty, 2012a, p.80); there is a grasping of the elements of music, with focused 'intention' (2012, p.2) and a

reorganisation which can lead to possibilities for new insights and transformations. It was considered that clinical improvisation in music therapy heavily involves ‘leaning towards’ and an ‘enhanced intentionality’, as the therapist waits and calls the client into a therapeutic musical relationship (10.6).

11.8 Reconsideration of Key Terminology

In section 1.5 I considered that using the word improvisation in a general sense to include idiomatic and non-idiomatic music was the best word to employ in this thesis (Bailey, 1992, p.xi, p.83). At the end of the project, I still understand the use of the word improvisation to be helpful, however, it may have been even better to use the specific phrase, pan-idiomatic improvisation, to denote improvisation which draws on a range of, or is without, musical styles and idioms. Other further relevant key words were defined in booklet B in the glossary of terms.

I would also like to offer a broader definition and understanding of the term improvisation, one in which improvisation is not an act, a thing, a clinical intervention in music therapy, or a series of musical events, but as a phenomenological state of being. In drawing this conclusion, I have been influenced by the findings in this study, considering improvisation as an embodied, cognitive, emotional and relational state of being, involving the whole self of the individual. The implications for this idea are far reaching, since if improvisation is an individual state of being then it can also have an influential role to play in human development, society and culture. The performer Toop writes that improvisation is ‘a state of beginning to play’ (Toop, 2016, p.78), we begin to play as individuals and play in our societies and cultures, and both musical philosopher Nachmanovitch (1990, 2019), and educationalist van der Schyff (2019) imagine improvisation as a living phenomenon, essential to human and societal development and ‘reflecting the

adaptive and relational nature of human meaning and world meaning making' (van der Schyff, 2019, p.1). Furthermore, improvisation can be thought about as play, and central to human development and health (Winnicott, 1971). Therefore, it can be seen that this thesis contributes to the larger dialogue on the importance of improvisation as a state of being for human development.

11.9 Methodological and method evaluation

The use of phenomenology (3.1–3.3) within this study provided a good methodological basis within which to explore the lived experience of learning to improvise. The overall design of the project was balanced, providing an integration of words and music as data. Throughout the study the importance of the music data was maintained alongside the verbal, and the use of two differing types of phenomenological analysis, IPA and music analysis gave a solid basis. The music data provided an essential enriching of the themes already

found within the IPA analysis and in addition revealed further themes. In particular, the music uncovered the nature of the musical research relationship (7.6.1) and further data on the participants' learning in improvisation.

The use of reflexivity (3.7 and appendix G) through writing and other arts media provided a tangible means of making explicit researcher bias, attempts to bracket personal stories (3.13) and the co-creation of data between researcher and participant (see Chapter 1 and appendices).

An aspect of the design that did not work so well is the graphic scores. As discussed in chapter 6 and appendix I, the original intention was to use the scores as member checking and to generate further data.

However, it may be that the scores were in danger of 'overshadowing the participant's voice' (Finlay, 2002, p.8) or distracting from the musical data. It may have

been better to retain the scores for the researcher as reflexive tools. Alternatively, the participants could have been asked to create drawings in response to the music and add comments, in a further extension to the project.

11.10 Contributions

This study makes an excellent contribution to the literature on improvisation. The new knowledge is advantageous to, education, music therapy, performance, arts based research, and the philosophy of music. The study provides a vital perspective on student experience and is important for teaching pedagogy.

I consider this research to be part of the new area of improvisation studies (International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, 2019) including publications which focus on the nature and role of

improvisation in life and society, examples include, Fischlin's and Porter's (2020) 'Improvisation in the aftermath', which explores how improvisation can inform individual and collective responses to crisis and trauma, and 'The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Improvisation in the Arts' (Berinetto and Ruta, 2022).

11.10.1 Contributions to music education

The study underlines the importance for educators to have a consciousness of ontologies of music. As commented by Ruud (2022), music therapists, performers and educators must acknowledge many different ontologies of music, without which there can be a lack of awareness of different knowledge systems. In particular educators, in order to facilitate students learning from a wide and diverse musical and cultural background, must understand their own cultural and ontological situatedness in music. There can be a tendency to restrict students learning to narrow

definitions and experiences of music, or only draw on music in which the teacher has an existing knowledge base, whereas what is required is a broadening out and embracing of differing music knowledge systems.

Oluranti Adeogun (2021) discusses this in terms of decolonising university music education in Nigeria, understanding that the three knowledge systems of Islam, Euro–American classical music, and Nigerian Indigenous music, co–exist in one geographical space. Oluranti Adeogun comments that these three ways of understanding music can be embraced within one university curriculum.

This presents a challenge for educators, but can start to be achieved by adopting a ontogenic (Johansen, 2018) approach, where the musical content of the classes is led by students, and the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator. Both Rose (2017) in his study on the lived experience of professional improvising musicians, and Bailey (1992) in his seminal book on

improvising, comment that the most likely to be successful, inclusive, and even enjoyable teaching-learning programme is directed by students, and the role of the teacher is to notice, listen, guide, and help them move forwards. Wassrin (2018) in her study on how children learn to improvise, notices that even very young children, given autonomy in learning, still make surprisingly sophisticated musical choices and development. An ontogenic approach can mean that the teacher may feel out of their depth or uncomfortable, especially if the student is improvising in a music system unfamiliar to them. However, a good teaching practice incorporating an anti-oppressive view (Baines, 2021), with a levelling of power-dynamics, is about learning alongside and together with students. Hence no two improvisation classes may look the same. This could prove potentially problematic for education systems where the focus on pre-planning is emphasised, however it is possible to create frameworks in improvisation teaching which allow for

this ontogenic approach. Suggestions for different frameworks are found in chapter nine, in which I discuss the various ‘modes’ of learning (Section 9.4.1), from the use of visual prompts (Section 9.4.1c), to improvisation on existing musical ideas (Section 9.4.1b), or responding musically to dancers (Section 9.4.2).

A further important contribution of this study is on the nature of learning. Learning to improvise is not simply a matter of knowledge of new scales, improving a technical facility on an instrument, or even developing spontaneity. This study certainly demonstrates that the kind of learning that takes place is far-reaching, embodied and cognitive, and it is this that presents a challenge to much traditional music and music therapy education in the Western world. The interest in embodied cognition in music education is fast growing (Murphy McCaleb, 2014; Shapiro, 2014; van der Schyff, Schiavo and Elliot, 2022), and it is being increasingly recognised that for a

student to learn successfully, they must have an integrated awareness of all aspects of the self. In the study this was strongly demonstrated in the case of Swallow, who after years of playing the lap-harp in a specific folk tradition was challenged on a music therapy training to physically and cognitively change her whole approach to the instrument, having to un-learn and re-learn physical and cognitive schemas in order to gain a greater technical and expressive freedom (Section 7.6.6). It might be possible to even state that learning to improvise is one of the most challenging aspects of music education. This research shows that it demands of the learner whole aspects of the self, the process can literally change the musician's identity, as in the case of Dunnock who develops a new confidence and becomes what he terms the 'jazz guy' (Section 7.4.1b).

Undertaking a learning of improvisation can have real repercussions for an individual's relationships and

emotional life, deepening the capacity for relationships and expanding the ability to emotionally regulate. It is vitally important when planning and teaching an improvisation programme that teachers take this into consideration. This could potentially take the form of discussions after improvisations, tutorials or assessments involving reflective portfolios, where the students and tutors can examine these elements of the learning together. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this research, is that learning to improvise is always more than it seems. It is a journey into self, into relationships, emotions, and creativity. It was what propelled the research questions at the beginning of the project and continues to fascinate and hold my attention.

11.10.2 Contributions to music therapy

This study makes a direct contribution to the music therapy profession. It clearly demonstrates that in music therapy trainings learning to improvise can

involve a changed relationship to music (Section, 9.4.3). The student may be challenged by differing ontologies, for example, a focus on music as artistic product, to music as relational. Educators need to be aware that a student's understanding of music may be tested and underlines the need to create learning spaces where philosophical approaches, such as Langer's philosophy in a new key (1942), or differing ontologies (Sections 2.4, 2.5) can be explored. This suggests that a fundamental question in trainings is, 'what is your understanding of music', only then can students build on their knowledge and apply it in therapeutic settings.

The second major contribution this study makes is that training as a music therapist involves developing an 'enhanced musical intentionality' (Sections 9.4.4 ,10.6). The skills required to become a music therapist, involve the attuned development of a listening embodied presence. Nijs and Coussement (2012) describe this as, 'intentional direction towards an object' (p. 172). This

means that the trainee therapist must develop heightened embodied cognition to learn to intensely focus, listening with the mind and body. The development of improvisation skills is a key aspect of this, since musicians in many contexts employ cognitive embodied cognition to interact and interrelate with others (Murphy Mc Caleb, 2014; Rose, 2017).

11.10.3 Contributions to arts-based research

The study makes a contribution to design in arts-based research, music therapy, and performative social science research. The graphic score method (Section 6.1), has wider beneficial implications for music therapy clinical work, in that it may be utilised as a reflexive visual tool for therapists. Through thinking through drawing, music therapists may use aspects of this method to gain deeper insight into lived experience of clinical sessions. This adaption of the research methods has been shared in two paper presentations at the World Congress of Music Therapy (White, 2020),

see Appendix H. The employment of hypertextuality (Section 3.8), and arts based process, with the combination of qualitative interviews and music improvisations was unusual (Section 3.4.1). As was recently stated at the key note of the European Music Therapy Conference (McCormack, 2022), there is a pressing need for music therapists to explore arts based research which prioritises music as primary data (Ledger and MacCaffrey, 2015). In this study the use of phenomenological analysis of musical improvisations together with verbal interviews, created a sensory, embodied and reflexive deep understanding of the lived experience of the participants (see discussion Chapter 9). This demonstrated that music can be highly beneficial as data. This design provides a good example and template for future research within arts based research and music therapy. A visual explanation of the design is located in Section 1.4. It is suggested that for future studies, researchers could explore the possibilities of other music analysis systems alongside

verbal data, such as found in the microanalysis book by Wosch and Wigram (2002).

11.10.4 Contribution to philosophy of music and music improvisation

A further contribution of this study is through Chapter 10, with an imagined phenomenology of learning to improvise. This opens up a useful dialogue for scholars, performers, and music educators, specifically on the nature of embodied cognition in improvised music, and the usefulness of Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 1981, 2012a) philosophies of the lived experience of the world sense through the body. In this chapter I imagine musical improvisation as an embodied act of 'leaning towards the world' (Merleau Ponty 2012a, p.80), involving a creative process of habituation (Section, 10.2), grasping of signifiers (Section 10.3), expression, transformation and relationships (Sections 10.4, 10.5). Merleau Ponty considers that our experience of the world is always mediated through the body. In this chapter I explore

how improvised music connects to lived time, body, relations and space (Kanellopoulos, 2011a, 2011b), and how this lens may be useful for understanding not only the nature of improvisation, but the nature of music, and how we relate together in music. Chapter ten is intended to open up a dialogue, and I would encourage future researchers and thinkers to explore and contribute. As music therapists such as Stige, (2012), Ansdell (2014), Sutton (2018, 2019), and Ruud (2020) state, it is important to make connections and draw on wider texts in philosophy, humanities and the arts, which can expand music therapy literature and push existing boundaries of professional practice.

11.11 Limitations

This study is limited in that it is small, with a sample of only ten participants within the one context of postgraduate higher education. This is a typical number for a phenomenological study of this nature, but it

does make it difficult to generalise the findings.

Further research with a larger sample size and with differing groups of musicians and contexts may be useful in future studies.

The study is also limited in that it is based within a Western art music education paradigm, reflecting my social-cultural situatedness and white privilege as a researcher working within university systems in the UK. This has repercussions for thinking about improvisation as a specific area of study, and both music and improvisation can be perceived through many ontologies within varying social-cultural contexts (The University of Edinburgh, 2020). For example, the use of the concepts of the elements of music (timbre, melody etc.) reveals a Western art music education and situatedness. Furthermore, the study is influenced by my personal bias as a musician and music therapist, and I have strived to make this explicit as possible

through reflexive writing and materials contained in this thesis.

11.12 Suggestions for further studies

Throughout the thesis there were several points which suggested areas for future research studies. These are listed below in table 55.

Table 55: Further studies

Possible further studies in relation to this research
1. Relational language and improvised music
In the IPA findings Bullfinch used relational language when talking about improvisation, with use of phrases such as <i>locking in, offering back and connection</i> (Bullfinch) The phrases were sometimes similar to those employed in music therapy and music psychology (Wigram 2004, Wilson and MacDonald, 2012). In a future study it would be interesting to investigate the use of relational language in music improvisation; how it differs or is similar across

disciplines such as music therapists, psychologists, performers and musicologists, studying what the language might reveal about the musical identity of the musician.

2. Gender, culture and heritage and improvised music

In the study **Swallow and Chaffinch** used improvised music to break away from existing performances of gender and relation to culture and heritage (Section 4.1.7) and **Wren** used it to situate himself with musical tribes (Tarrant, *et al.*, 2002, p.134). A further study might investigate whether marginalised groups typically use improvisation as a means of breaking down societal barriers of gender norms or culture and heritage, and privileged groups use it to situate themselves within culture.

3. Is improvised music an increased condition of special experience and social flow?

A finding in the IPA was that special experiences often take place within small groups and engender deep relationships. It would be interesting to investigate if improvised music is more intensely relational than other forms of music making, and if it is thus an increased condition for special experience and flow.

4. A comparison between music therapy students' and music students' learning of improvisation.

The participants in this study were in two groups, music therapy students and music students. There was no comparison of learning between the two. Instead, the study aimed to examine a wide phenomenology of the lived experience of learning to improvise. Some of the findings indicated differences between the two professional disciplines, such as the different context of experiential groups or jam

sessions. It would be possible to reuse the data in the study to make a comparison or to begin a new project which investigates these differences. It is important to note this would require further consent and ethics approval.

5. An analysis of the relationship between the visual graphic scores and the improvised music.

The original function of the graphic scores was to elicit further data through member checking. In the study they became reflexive acts of drawing through thinking, illuminating further thoughts on the research data. However, there was no analysis of the relationship between the scores and the improvisations. It would be interesting, since there are a wide variety of scores and a relatively large number (ten), to analyse the relationship between the drawings and the sounds. This may be useful for research into areas such as music notation, or investigations into synaesthesia.

6. An investigation into the spiritual dialogue in special experiences.
The findings strongly suggested that musicians often use spiritual or magical dialogue to describe special experience. Future studies could examine the use of spiritual discourse in connection to music and special experiences.

11.13 Ending thoughts

A study on learning to improvise can seem an enigma; popular knowledge suggests that improvisation is always spontaneous and without planning or prelearnt skill and abilities. However, this thesis has demonstrated that learning to improvise is and can be nuanced and complex with expansive reach into an individual's life. As many music therapy and performance students will testify it can be an anxiety-filled and difficult process, with highs, lows and joys,

and the development of identity, emotions and relationships.

This project and thesis have been a huge endeavour; however, it has helped to illuminate the experiences students go through and are challenged by in music improvisation, and I sincerely hope this will be of practical and theoretical usefulness to music and music therapy students and educators when considering the teaching and learning of improvisation. So, to conclude with a reflective drawing (figure 110) and original poem:



Figure 110: Ending (reflexive drawing): 'The thesis endings' – each section of the image was drawn in synchronisation with the initial completion of chapters. Fibre Pens, Becky Lockett, 22 July 2020.

Poem: The improvisers

Intense concentration

Open your ears

Listen

Look

Watch

Feel

Consider

What sounds do you hold in your hands?

What sounds do you hold in your head?

Step out, eye look, lift up, your head, your voice

Find the note, the pitch

Join together

Meshed

In focused listening

What sounds are we making?

What sounds are we creating?

Will our course be changed?

They step into the circle

Follow

Listen again

The flow, flow, flow moment

The longed-for moment

Take us up there

Blend us together

Into an awareness

Of the human condition

Of our condition.

Becky Lockett, 2016